



GENERATION Z: WINNING THE RACE FOR EMERGING TALENT

By Meghan Koransky

In 1963, the late Leon C. Megginson, a professor in the business school at Louisiana State University, paraphrased Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory stating,

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change.”

This principle is especially relevant for firms competing for emerging talent. Born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z attorneys are now filling associate ranks, bringing with them new expectations for how legal work should be performed. Their preferences are reshaping an industry that is time-honored, and tradition bound.

In the race for emerging talent, agility and adaptability now outweigh firm size and ranking. Below are strategies leaders can adopt to align with post-millennial preferences while positioning firms for sustained success.

Build Flexible Career Paths + Collaborative Teams.

Gen Z attorneys prefer less linear career paths with room to move between positions in government, private practice, general counsel, academia, and other sectors. Alternative career paths, non-partnership track positions, secondments, and sabbaticals offer flexibility, which helps to engage and retain emerging talent.

Chain-of-command management is post-millennials' least-preferred organizational hierarchy because it constrains their ability to participate and collaborate. Establishing cross-generational teams creates space for innovation while facilitating the transfer of institutional knowledge.

Modernize Technology + Performance Metrics.

As digital natives, Gen Z attorneys are easily frustrated with outdated technology and systems. Leveraging junior attorney insights can help to improve employee productivity and engagement as well as client service. Leaders should involve newer attorneys in vetting tools to effectively utilize AI, automate workflow, and provide comprehensive practice management support.

As AI capabilities grow, the logic of relying on hours to measure performance and attorney contributions is increasingly unsustainable. Hybrid models that combine billable targets with outcome-based performance metrics align with industry trends, while meeting client demand for predictable fees and value.

Demonstrate a Genuine Commitment to Flexibility, Inclusion, + Impact.

Post-millennial attorneys are pushing back against cultures that reward long hours and constant availability, making flexible work arrangements a standard expectation. As the most diverse generation yet, Gen Z expects firms to show a real commitment to diversity through meaningful action and measurable results—embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion into daily operations, not just surface-level initiatives. Doing so supports stronger team performance and client outcomes.

Gen Z is also deeply purpose-driven, seeking work that aligns with their values, such as sustainability, social justice, and ethics. Leaders should clearly connect day-to-day assignments to the firm's broader mission and highlight pro bono efforts and initiatives with societal impact.

Cultivate Continuous Learning + Development Opportunities.

Gen Z attorneys seek clear developmental roadmaps with incremental goals, learning-enabled technology, and early access to client development. Firms should formalize attorney benchmark standards, strengthen transparency around promotion criteria, and build visible career paths. Technology can further accelerate growth by automating routine tasks, allowing attorneys to engage in substantive work sooner.

Post-millennials value mentors who function as collaborators and coaches, offering meaningful professional guidance and personal support. They respond to authentic leaders who openly share mistakes—not just successes. Proactive mentoring, with regular check-ins, helps newer attorneys feel supported while addressing concerns early. It also strengthens creative problem solving, succession planning, and overall firm performance.