

Cog or Valued Professional?

Grooming the Next Generation of Attorneys for Business Development



By Carolyn Davis Sklar

Equipping the next generation of attorneys – Generation X and Generation Y – is a relatively new and, at times, daunting challenge. To meet this challenge, forward-thinking firms are addressing two critical components: an infrastructure for learning and an investment in people.

Without a connection to a systemic learning infrastructure, it is impossible to succeed in grooming the next generation of attorneys for business development; your business development learning initiatives will have minimal impact and will remain unsustainable.

Investment in people is an ascending firm priority. Generation X and Y attorneys are distinct from previous generations. They won't be motivated to pursue business development for a firm that is not investing in them. They don't want to be a cog; rather, they want to be a part of the firm's valued human capital.

To address these issues, firms must answer the following questions:
Is your business development initiative integrated into a firm-wide framework?
Does your initiative account for generational differences?

When your initiatives are part of a broader talent strategy, integrated into the firm's business strategy, you pave the way for enhanced attorney engagement and increased profitability.



Is your Business Development Initiative Integrated into a Firm-wide Framework?

Driven by Firm Leadership

For any learning initiative to succeed, it is essential that firm leadership supports and drives it. This leadership must come from either the managing partner or other management-level partner, who is both selected for and rewarded for taking on this responsibility. This person should understand the value of attorney development and possess a vision for embedding attorney development into the firm culture. Done correctly, your initiative will have a better chance of gaining traction and realizing results.

Integrated into a Broader Talent Management Strategy

The ad hoc business development training of the past has offered some value, but it suffers from serious weaknesses. First, while a great deal of money is spent on these initiatives, internal firm support systems are often lacking. Second, firms tend to follow each other by retaining popular speakers, consultants or sales coaches without analyzing the specific client development competencies they want their attorneys to develop. Third, without alignment to specific learning competencies, a smorgasbord of business development language and tactics emerges. No one is on the same page and firm profitability potential is impeded.

By way of contrast, there is a human capital and economic benefit to applying a systemic approach to business development. When your initiatives are part of a broader talent strategy, integrated into the firm's business strategy, you pave the way for enhanced attorney engagement and increased profitability. Next-generation attorneys value a learning

pipeline, and the firm benefits from efforts being aligned with business goals.

For these reasons, the most forward-thinking firms are integrating business development learning into a broader talent management strategy that is linked to firm business goals. (For an insightful resource, see Terri Mottershead's *The Art and Science of Strategic Talent Management in Law Firms*.)

Structured for Impact and Sustainability

Many firm marketing professionals tasked with grooming next-generation attorneys for business development are being set up to fail. Without the necessary internal firm structures, processes and resources—such as a firm-wide learning and development pipeline, or professional development goals defined and supported by practice group leaders—it is impossible for business development initiatives to gain traction, make a sustainable impact and achieve a strong ROI.

Does your Business Development Initiative Account for the Characteristics of the Next Generation?

Increasingly, four distinct generations exist in the workplace, each one with different worldviews, attitudes, communication styles, approaches to work, community involvement and family values. These differences have implications for how your firm's attorneys go about getting work done and how they view business development.

Who are the Next Generations?

While there is a large volume of resources available on this topic, the table below is a snapshot of the four generations:

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Snapshot of the Four Generations at Work				
Generation	Traditionalist or Silent	Baby Boomer	Gen X (Latchkey, Sandwich)	Gen Y or Millennial (Helicopter)
% at work	5%	38%	32%	25%
Current Age Range*	Ages 66-83	Ages 47-65	Ages 32-46	Ages 16-31
(Birth Years)	(1928-1945)	(1946-1964)	(1965-1979)	(1980-1995)
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong work ethic • Conventional • Sacrificial, thrifty • Conformity • Tech challenged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by their work • Self-sacrificing work ethic, coined "workaholics" • Competitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent • Tech-savvy • Entrepreneurial • Efficient • Skeptical, pessimistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Most supervised generation in U.S. history" • Innovative • Open to change, fluid • Highly tech-savvy • Multitasking, always on, connected, texting
Approach to Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and want to know chain of command • Slow to change their work habits • Loyalty to organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure work by time clock and face time at the office • "We've always done it this way" • "You have to figure it out on your own just like I had to do" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-life balance; less inclined than boomers to compete on corporate ladder if family cost is too high • Efficiency, get things done in less time • More likely to change jobs than previous generations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative • Expect clear direction, supervision, coaching, mentoring • Expect regular, real-time communication and positive feedback • Work-life balance, emphasis on life • Highly likely to change jobs

* Note: Birth ranges may vary slightly depending upon the source.

How Do you Groom the Next Generation for Business Development?

Given the characteristics of Gen X and Gen Y, how does a firm best prepare these attorneys for business development?

1. Invest in them professionally.

A law firm CFO told me, “We don’t spend money on anything that doesn’t guarantee an immediate ROI.” The problem is that Gen X and Gen Y are not motivated to generate business for a firm that is not investing in their professional development. Their professional growth and advancement is important to them, and they will go elsewhere if a firm does not support it—resulting in a significant loss on your investment. When a next generation attorney perceives that a firm—or practice group leader in particular—is helping them to grow professionally, their commitment and loyalty to the firm strengthens.

- ▶ **Define career path options.** It is impossible for next-generation attorneys to be motivated to do business development if they cannot envision their path to advancement within the firm. The next generations do not embrace the corporate ladder model; they are more attracted to a corporate lattice model and will increasingly expect to be offered other career options within your firm.
- ▶ **Offer experiential learning.** Applied, hands-on business development learning experiences can be highly motivating and advance an attorney’s skills significantly faster than sitting through a seminar. Be intentional about involving the next generations in client interaction and business development opportunities.
- ▶ **Develop high-potentials.** Identify a diverse group of high-potentials—the firm’s future stars—and develop them as a cohort. Provide in-depth client interface and business development opportunities that offer excellent learning and visibility.

A firm’s future viability is dependent on the next generation’s ability to lead.

2. Provide them with clear guidance and direction.

- ▶ **Define business development learning.** What does your firm’s business development learning pipeline look like? What specific competencies and client development mindsets do you want your attorneys to develop? How will you measure and reward their success?
- ▶ **Drill down, be specific.** The traditional mantra, “Go out and get business” has no motivating effect on the next generation; it only increases their cynicism. Gen Y, in particular, expects to have explicit guidance and direction on how to go about doing this.

Use a strategic combination of internal professionals and external coaches to guide next-generation attorneys on specific “how to’s” for relationship development and business generation. External coaches can be a valuable partner in attorney

development and can often prove exceedingly helpful in identifying and addressing roadblocks inhibiting an attorney’s progress—roadblocks they may feel uncomfortable expressing with internal professionals who may be perceived as part of the firm’s political “system.”

3. Mentor and coach them.

Not every partner in your firm is ideal for mentoring and coaching young attorneys on business development. Identify attorneys, firm marketers and other firm professionals who are interested in and committed to mentoring. Train and equip them with the competencies they need to be effective mentors.

- ▶ **Mentor generational preference.** Firms typically pair Gen X senior associates and junior partners with Gen Y attorneys, yet Gen X and Y do not always see eye to eye. Both generations prefer to be mentored and coached by boomers and traditionalists. Gen X won’t seek mentoring. Gen Y will expect it.
- ▶ **Avoid smoke and mirrors.** Gen X and Y are already cynical, as they have seen their parents subjected to corporate reductions and layoffs. What next-generation attorneys are looking for in their firm’s leaders is transparency and genuineness.
- ▶ **Provide feedback.** The next generations expect access to supervisors and authority figures for regular communication and positive feedback on all aspects of their work including their business development learning.

4. Prepare them to lead.

A firm’s future viability is dependent on the next generation’s ability to lead.

- ▶ **Instill leadership competencies.** Effective development of law firm leaders is often lacking in firms. Equipping next-generation attorneys with core leadership competencies early on will strengthen the firm and motivate talented individuals to remain with the firm.
- ▶ **Prepare for leadership diversity.** In an increasingly global economy, it is vital to have a diverse population of attorneys in the emerging leadership pipeline.
- ▶ **Transfer knowledge and connections.** A common complaint from the next generations is that boomers are not sharing their knowledge, client connections and positions of leadership. As a result, the next generation is not prepared to lead. If left unaddressed, this looming crisis will impact the law firm’s viability and sustainability as boomers retire.
- ▶ **Recognize and leverage generational differences.** Recognize that the leadership style of next-generation attorneys and how they manage the business of law will look different from their boomer predecessors. Forward-thinking firms are leveraging these generational differences for competitive advantage. Including younger attorneys now will equip the firm with the necessary innovation and fresh perspective to remain competitive in today’s rapidly changing global economy. ■

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