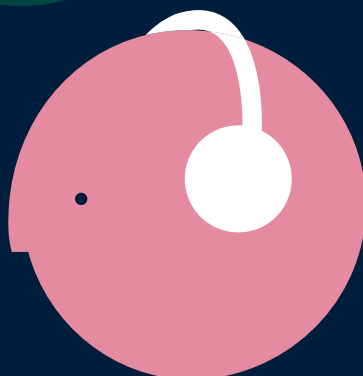


Generation Z in the Legal Workplace

Who they are, what they bring and why it matters

By Jordan Furlong



Foreword

At Lawyers On Demand (LOD) we love to observe the stride of new generations across the shifting ground of our profession. Any long-time readers of our material may remember our report championing the rise of the millennial lawyer back in our own earlier days. As LOD prepares to enter its twentieth year, it's now time to focus this current report's hopes and dreams on Generation Z.

In a future which seems precariously hard to predict, demographics gives us at least one sure thing - Gen Z will be rising in the workplace. Indeed, they are already here. Well, unless you have no under 30s in your team at all (in which case this report should be even more enlightening). This is a generation not fazed by accelerating technology, unpredictable geopolitics, or the pervading sense of a wobbly permacrisis - they are our future and the rest of us have much to learn from them. Though they may not yet realise it, Gen Z look set to become a hugely consequential demographic for our whole profession.

That's where this report comes in. Our guide is Jordan Furlong, a legal analyst and advisor who we have long admired at LOD and author of some of our most downloaded material. Here, he has delved deep into discussions with Gen Z legal professionals to set their cohort in context, to show why they deeply matter to legal teams, and to offer us five strategies to prepare for, accept and make the most of what we all have coming.

Whatever generation you consider yourself to be part of, we hope you find something enlightening and maybe even mind-opening in what you read in our report. As ever, we get better through ongoing dialogue (especially of the intergenerational sort) and we're keen to have feedback, so do feel free to drop me a message and I'll try to respond, at least within my own old-school Gen X timescales.

Simon Harper
Founder, LOD
simon.harper@lodlaw.com

Introduction

The ground is shifting under every professional workplace. Technology is accelerating faster than institutional habits can adapt, geopolitics has become deeply unstable, and trust in once-reliable systems has become extremely fragile. People today are recalibrating their values and priorities as a practical response to the stress and uncertainty of our times. Work is rapidly evolving from the old straightforward exchange of effort for reward into a way for people to grapple with identity and control.

The legal sector is not insulated from any of this. Law was built to stabilise society, which might explain why legal workplaces prize stability and continuity: hierarchical structures, slow-changing cultures, credential-driven status, and business models that still treat time as the primary unit of value. That architecture held up for decades only because the underlying conditions stayed reasonably consistent. That's not the case anymore.

Artificial intelligence is leading this transformation. Even at this early stage in its development, AI is reshaping how knowledge and insight are processed, communicated, and acted upon, changing what clients expect and what they're willing to pay for. The result is a profession being pulled toward a need for greater speed, scale, and efficiency with one hand while gripping desperately on to its trusted traditions with the other.

Into the midst of this battle comes Generation Z.

Gen Z is not a group of wide-eyed apprentices, grateful to be hired and eager to get started. This is a cohort shaped early by hard experience and conditioned for extreme pragmatism, with little time for aspiration or trust in old institutions. Fiercely protective of their individuality and priorities, they will not confuse endurance with virtue, and they will not pay their dues or anyone else's. Arriving as they have at this extraordinary moment of upheaval and transformation, Gen Z could become an unexpectedly consequential demographic for the future of the legal profession.

In this report, we will explore what the arrival of Generation Z means for legal workplaces, both law firms and legal departments. We will explore the meaning of "generations," profile the characteristics of this new cohort, describe the fast-changing legal workplaces they will enter, and outline five different ways in which your own workplace can prepare for them, accept them, and get the most from them.

It will be through Generation Z that the most successful legal workplaces will be transformed. Will your workplace be among them?



About Generations

The study of generations is a highly inexact science, starting with the term itself. Many people think of “generations” in a biological sense, as the average gap in age between parents and their children in a population (for humans, a biological generation is about 25 to 30 years). But others think of “generations” in a cultural sense, as demographic cohorts whose members shared key formative experiences during childhood and early adulthood¹. In this report, we’ll borrow from both understandings.

The two most famous cohorts in popular imagination are the “Greatest Generation” (born 1901-27), many of whom experienced the Great Depression in their youth and then defeated the Axis Powers in young adulthood; and the Baby Boom Generation (1946-64²), members of the massive post-War demographic surge who enjoyed unprecedented peace and prosperity in their early years.

From there, however, the picture gets a little blurry. Generation X was the title of a 1991 novel by author Douglas Coupland about the difficulty of finding value and identity in a corporate world. In the book, “Generation X” actually referred to people born from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, which today is considered “Late Boomer.”³ But the book’s enormous cultural impact and adoption by readers younger than Coupland helped lead to today’s understanding of “Gen X” as the cohort born from 1965 to 1980⁴.

At that point, an industry began to develop around naming and describing successive 15-year generational cohorts. The group following Gen X was variously called “Generation Y” and the “Echo Generation”⁵ before finally settling on its current name of “Millennials,” born from 1981 to 1996. Mostly (but not entirely) the children of the Boomers, the Millennials were massively hyped before their arrival as a cohort that would help define the new century economically and culturally — expectations that haunt many of them today.

This brief history helps explain why “Generation Z” (covering those born between 1997 and 2012) is best viewed as a placeholder name. The same applies to the cohort that follows it (born 2013-2027), often called the “Alpha Generation” — apparently, we’re just starting the alphabet over again.

But this is also a reminder that, while it can be useful to study birth cohorts as we do in this report, we should not read too much into them. Demography is not destiny, and analysis should not be confused with astrology.

¹This line of thinking owes a large debt to Karl Mannheim’s classic 1972 essay, “The Problem of Generations”: <https://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/classes/201/articles/27MannheimGenerations.pdf>

²Two important points about the Baby Boom: First, although it’s widely considered a post-WWII phenomenon, birth rates in a number of countries first began spiking up from their Depression-era lows in the early 1940s, before skyrocketing in the late 1940s and 1950s. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/baby_boomer.asp. Secondly, the Boom began and ended in different years in different countries: Canada, Great Britain, and many Western European nations all use different start and end dates than the United States. A few European countries even experienced a “second Boom” in the 1960s: https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/03_06_Europeanbabyboomers.pdf.

³See: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/douglas-coupland>

⁴Throughout the rest of this report, we will refer to the generational cohort definitions employed by Pew Research, which has become the generally accepted standard: <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/generations-age/generations/>.

⁵Popularized in *Boom, Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift*, a 1997 book by David K. Foot and Daniel Stoffman.

Population scientists will tell you that the Boomers were the only true demographic cohort, and that there is little real science to support any subsequent generational analysis. And how a generation is first described is not always how history views it: Many Boomers, now often seen as status quo wealth hoarders, were hippies and anti-war protestors in their 20s. Gen Xers, many of whom have had to work harder than Boomers for less reward, are still considered “slackers” by some (including themselves).

All of which is to say: Be wary of over-relying on generational labels when conducting serious analysis. These cohorts are very blunt instruments that can't fully measure complex social realities. Generational study is a useful lens through which to see these people, but it's far from the only one.

With that caveat in place, let's turn our attention to the cohort known today as Generation Z — one whose members are just starting to enter the legal profession.

“Many people in Generation Z place a high value on intentionality — not just in career choices, but in how work fits into a broader life. There is a strong desire to understand *why* we are doing something, not just *what* we are doing.”



About Generation Z

Here in 2026, Gen Zers range in age from 14 (those born in 2012) to 29 (those born in 1997). There are nearly two-and-a-half billion of them worldwide, accounting for at least a quarter of the global population⁶. In the United States and Europe, where populations are older, Gen Z accounts for more than 69 million Americans (about 20%) and roughly 135 million Europeans (close to 18%).⁷ They are racially and ethnically more diverse than any prior generation, at least in the US, where just over half identify as non-Hispanic white.⁸

Boomers, Xers, and even Millennials might not fully appreciate how different the world appears to Generation Z. This cohort did not experience, and does not recall any details of, the 20th century. They have no memory of the Twin Towers standing; 9/11 is to them what Pearl Harbor is to Boomers. Smartphones, social media, and on-demand information are ordinary realities of life.⁹ The oldest Gen Zers are still younger than PlayStation, Febreze, and the Frappuccino. The youngest ones came along after Uber, Instagram, and the Tesla Model S.

Just as Millennials are mostly the children of Baby Boomers, many members of Generation Z are children of Generation Xers¹⁰. And just as many Millennials inherited their parents' faith in institutions and focus on career success¹¹, many Zers picked up their parents' hard-earned skepticism that the rules of the game will ever work to their advantage. And if Gen Z didn't absorb that message at home, the world was happy to deliver it through experience.

The first major event to affect most members of Generation Z was the Great Financial Crisis of 2007-08, which wiped out huge swaths of home equity and retirement savings for countless households, leaving many families underwater on their mortgages while grappling with layoffs and wage freezes. Gen Z children would have learned from both the news and their parents that while big banks and their bosses were bailed out after the GFC, ordinary people were not.

Political upheaval in the mid-2010s provided the backdrop to many Gen Zers' first impressions of geopolitics. Talk of "Grexit" (the potential eviction of Greece from the Eurozone¹²), coupled with waves of refugees streaming north from wars in the Middle East, helped lead to Britain's shattering Brexit vote in 2016 – the same year the United States elected Donald Trump to the Presidency for the first time. The ramifications of both these events are still very much with us today.

Probably the most impactful development in the lives of Generation Z so far has been COVID-19¹³. During the height of the pandemic, from mid-2020 to mid-2022, virtually every member of Generation Z was somewhere in the education system, from Grade 3 to graduate programmes. For hundreds of millions of these youngsters, their most important intellectual and social development years were interrupted by remote learning and social isolation. If we're looking for a shorthand reference for the Gen Z experience, we could do worse than: "They were in school when COVID hit."

⁶See: <https://earthweb.com/gen-z-statistics/>

⁷See: The 2023 United States Census and Worldometer: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/europe-population/>

⁸See: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>

⁹See: "Gen Z, Social Media, and Mental Health," Shelby Crosier, Emory | Rollins School of Public Health, May 22, 2024: <https://sph.emory.edu/news/gen-z-social-media-mental-health>

¹⁰See: "A Year-by-Year Guide to the Different Generations," Sarah Cottrell, Parents, Sept. 26, 2025: <https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/style/generation-names-and-years-a-cheat-sheet-for-parents/>

¹¹See: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/grexit.asp>

¹²See: "Generation Covid: how is the pandemic affecting the young?" Cathy Farmer, Economics Observatory, May 25, 2021: <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/generation-covid-how-is-the-pandemic-affecting-the-young>

¹³See: "True Gen': Generation Z and its implications for companies," Tracy Francis and Fernanda Hoefel, McKinsey & Co., Nov. 12, 2018: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies>

“We are acutely aware of how fragile stability can be, having grown up amid economic crises, a global pandemic, and rapidly shifting job markets.”

And if all that disruption weren't enough, Generation Z was also the youngest cohort to experience the arrival of Generative AI – which they have embraced like no other group. In 2025, 64% of Americans aged 13-17 reported using a frontier-level AI chatbot like ChatGPT, 30% of them daily¹⁴. And yes, they are using it for homework.

All this upheaval so early in their lives could help explain why Generation Z is also the world's most stressed-out demographic cohort¹⁵. Gen Zers report much higher rates of anxiety and depression than older generations, with some estimates as high as four times Boomers' rate and twice the rate of Gen X. ADHD and autism diagnoses have also risen sharply in children, teenagers, and young adults this century. More than a third of surveyed Gen Zers have already received professional help for their mental health¹⁶. (They also self-diagnose their mental and neurological conditions, although not to the extent popularly imagined.¹⁷)

As you prepare to welcome the members of Generation Z into your legal workplace, therefore, keep in mind that most of them will have experienced the following phenomena and might exhibit the following tendencies:

Sudden, destructive societal changes in their early years, brought about by catastrophic events that deeply damaged society's faith in public infrastructure and persuaded them that they will never achieve some dreams (like home ownership).

Perhaps as a consequence, a deep generation-wide commitment to family, friends, happiness, and wellness – more inclined to exercise, less inclined to drink heavily, more interested in community, more accepting of diversity in every form.

Early diagnoses of mental and emotional challenges and conditions – and consequently, early exposure to cognitive and pharmaceutical therapy, such that their neurological and emotional status often forms a core part of their identity.

Involuntary immersion in new technologies that made remote interactions more frequent and social isolation more normalised, while also reducing their reliance on and inclination to use older means of learning and communicating

Despite strong interest in socio-political issues like climate change, racism, and gender identity, a distinct lack of faith in traditional political organisations and formal institutions as a realistic means of delivering progress on these issues.

¹⁴See: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/25/34-of-us-adults-have-used-chatgpt-about-double-the-share-in-2023/>

¹⁵See: <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/world-mental-health-day.html>

¹⁶See: <https://www.pacificoaks.edu/voices/blog/gen-z-view-on-mental-health>. It should be noted, however, that these robust numbers also reflect a greater societal recognition of – and more access to professional assistance for – mental and emotional difficulties than was previously the case.

¹⁷See: “Remapping Recovery: A research report about Gen Z's modern mental health journey,” Made of Millions: <https://www.madeofmillions.com/articles/remapping-recovery>

You'll find Generation Z similar to their Millennial predecessors in many respects. But whereas Millennials were raised by their Boomer parents to follow their dreams and pursue their passions¹⁸, many Gen Zers are markedly more pragmatic, transactional, and even jaded in their outlook and expectations.

In particular, they are far less likely than Millennials to identify work as the primary means by which they express their values and leave their mark on the world¹⁹. Make no mistake, they will work hard. But they'll also erect strict boundaries around their non-work lives and personal space. They will prefer distance over proximity, and not just in terms of coming into the office. If their workplace conflicts with their values or damages their wellness, they will bolt.

Gen Z will not subscribe to "loyalty" or "paying your dues" to the same extent that previous generations did; they won't stick around for ten years to see if the prize is worth the effort. They will fail to understand why you wouldn't use technology to do

something more efficiently and effectively. They will expect you to acknowledge their differences, especially their neurodivergencies, and to lean into these differences rather than work around them. They will not care much about status symbols, although they will care greatly about how much they get paid.

You will find them to be conscientious workers who take pride in doing something well. They will be highly practical, solutions-oriented, and creative. They won't define "hard work" in terms of piling up billable hours, and that could present real problems for some law firm employers. They will define it in terms of doing the job efficiently, smartly, and productively — and as we'll see in the next section, that's going to be a particularly valuable asset in the coming legal workplace.

In all events, Generation Z is coming to the legal profession, whether the profession is ready for them or not. The next question for us to address is what they'll find when they arrive.

"There's a blend of ambition and anxiety — a desire to perform well and progress quickly, paired with an acute awareness of how competitive and demanding the [legal] field can be."

¹⁸See: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238073/millennials-work-live.aspx>

¹⁹See: 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, Deloitte: <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html>



The Future Legal Workplace

The first squadrons of Generation Z lawyers, those born in or after 1997, have already landed in legal workplaces today. Assuming an average professional-entry age of 25, Gen Zers will continue to stream into the legal sector every year from now until 2037. By the time the full cohort has arrived, the demographics of the legal profession will look very different.

The Baby Boomers, who remade legal culture according to their own values and interests during the 1970s and 1980s,²⁰ are all but retired in 2037 (the very youngest ones are 72). Gen Xers, aged 56-71, are now law firm managing partners and corporate CLOs, collectively constituting about 35% of the profession. The Millennials, 40-55, rival their immediate seniors, coming in at about the same 35%, while Generation Z – the core of the young legal profession – is about a quarter of all lawyers. (The very first “Generation Alphas” will arrive next year.)

It’s reasonable to assume that Gen X lawyers will have introduced and integrated Gen X values within legal organisations at this stage, bringing a strong ethic of pragmatism and productivity while eschewing big visions and mission statements. Millennials might well be pushing hard against what they perceive as their elders’ cynical and uninspiring leadership. But the demographic profile of their lawyers is likely to be the least jarring aspect of the legal workplace in 2037.

Law Firms

Even today, artificial intelligence is in the first stages of revolutionising the way legal work is done. Whether it’s lawyers using specialised Generative AI systems grounded in reliable legal data and reinforced with controls like

retrieval-augmented generation, or whether it’s laypeople doing their best to understand and address their own legal problems using ChatGPT, Claude, and other frontier-model chatbots, AI is already becoming an important part of the conversation around the generation of legal outcomes²¹.

By 2037, however, we will have moved far beyond conversation. AI will be fully integrated into law firm operations, as ubiquitous and unremarkable as Internet access is today. Law firms will be built on top of extraordinarily capable AI-powered legal operations platforms. AI will routinely conduct almost all legal work production, from matter intake and parameter-setting to filing and continuous monitoring.

Law firms here in 2026 are, as they have been for the last century, lawyer-centric entities in all respects: Everything of value and importance, above all the delivery of legal services, flows through the lawyer. But by 2037, law firm productivity will be AI-centric: Machines will be performing virtually every task or partial task involved in providing clients with legal services, often without any human oversight at all.

Lawyers in 2037, long since displaced from their traditional roles as daily task performers (and hourly billers of their task performance), instead dedicate themselves to those legal activities for which people are better suited than machines: building human relationships, expressing human empathy, and exercising human judgment. AI-native “legal product” functionality is reinforced by high-value, client-centric lawyers who provide clients with personalised advocacy in critical litigation, expert guidance with commercial strategies, and trusted counsel in times of trouble.

²⁰See: Tournament of Lawyers: The Transformation of the Big Law Firm, Marc Galanter and Thomas Palay, University of Chicago Press, 1991: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/T/bo3642788.html>

²¹See generally: Task Force on Law and Artificial Intelligence: Addressing the Legal Challenges of AI, The American Bar Association: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/centers_commissions/center-for-innovation/artificial-intelligence/impact-of-ai-on-the-legal-profession/

Law firms running on such powerful productivity engines can't turn much of a profit by selling most of their services by the lawyer-billed hour. Instead, a combination of base retainer fees, success indicators, and sliding-scale elements like risk and timeliness determine much pricing (although the highest-impact lawyers still charge a steep hourly rate for their direct attention to a critical matter). Many of the deepest, longest-term client-firm relationships have reached a flat-fee state where everything but the truly novel and unexpected is priced into the arrangement.

These firms are also about more than just lawyers. For one thing, affiliated professionals like workflow analysts, brand managers, technology strategists, data wranglers, client-care experts, behavioural psychologists, and a host of other experts are equally important partners in the legal business, all collaborating towards the optimal service of the firm's clients. There are also fewer full-time lawyers. Since machines do almost all the previously billable associate work, each year a smaller cadre of juniors is carefully chosen and intensively

trained and mentored to become high-performing legal professionals, faster and more effectively than their predecessors did a generation ago.

The most important daily concerns for law firms are the client outcome, the client experience, and the client relationship – because these are fundamentally what really concern clients. But law firms and lawyers are still bound by ethical rules and moral obligations, and all the client interests in the world don't override them.

These businesses probably will still be described, in 2037, as "law firms," and some of the leading names in the market today will still be around. But waves of consolidation and dissolution have reduced the number of firms, thanks in part to the impact of non-lawyer ownership (including but not limited to private equity investments and buyouts). The displacement of lawyers from legal task performance will have forced lawyers to re- envision and reconfigure their professional purpose and identity – a task that's much easier since the Damoclean sword of billable-hour targets was lifted from above their heads.

“Many of us grew up globally connected, exposed to different cultures and viewpoints, and accustomed to constant change. That tends to translate into less loyalty to institutions and more loyalty to ourselves.”

Law Departments

On the other side of the relationship, the typical 2037 corporate law department looks much less like the “miniature law firm” of today. It has evolved into a tightly operated legal production, strategy, and risk-management function, one that’s no longer siloed from the other parts of the businesses but is integrated into all facets of it.

As with law firms, corporate legal departments have fewer lawyers carrying out legal tasks. Partly this is because AI has also significantly improved legal workflow inside companies, but partly it’s because “legal operations” has expanded beyond its origins as the efficiency shop and has suffused the entire legal function with smart process management, workflow design, and systems thinking. Experienced counsel spends their days making judgment calls, managing internal stakeholders, and scanning the horizon for both threats to and opportunities for the company.

Legal’s core asset in 2037 is a sophisticated operating system integrated with other key functions like procurement, compliance, privacy, and e-security. AI workflows handle most routine drafting and revising, from generating and redlining standard agreements to tracking obligations and checking renewals. “Living playbooks,” continuously improved through the commercial experiences of the company’s legal professionals, dictate tactics and procedures.

The most noticeable change in the corporate legal function is how Legal has taken on the role of “strategic conductor,” overseeing the company’s strategic positioning and preparedness. Legal professionals are embedded inside other business units, so that potential legal and risk issues are flagged early in the policymaking and procurement processes, making Legal an

always-on issues detector throughout the company. In addition, driven by the chaos and upheaval of the late 2020s, Legal now maintains a permanent strategic team to monitor geopolitical and industry developments, providing the company with a 24/7 “Situation Room” that can identify threats (and opportunities) before anyone else.

Outside counsel still exists, of course, but there’s wide variance in how they’re used. Smaller companies might employ AI-native “legal product” providers whose services and solutions are virtually off-the-shelf. High-end specialist firms, especially around litigation and conflict resolution, are available for high-stakes disputes of all kinds. And as suggested above, there are some truly integrated and symbiotic company-law firm relationships where outside counsel is a strategic partner in all respects.

This is just one set of potential futures for law firms and law departments, of course; there are many others, several of them much less upbeat and positive. In law firms, AI could become so powerful and ubiquitous that people and businesses rely on it even for high-value, ostensibly “human” legal needs, effectively consigning the legal profession to the history books. Or pressure from outside capital could crush ethical rules and protections, turning lawyers into mercenary skills or glorified rubber-stampers.

But if the legal services industry does manage to plot a better course towards the future, and become the kind of high-value services business that both professionals and clients would find fulfilling, it will be in large part because the leaders of these entities successfully integrated Generation Z into their workplaces, making this coming demographic cohort the critical change agents of the legal world.

Here is how they might go about doing that.



Generation Z and the Future of Law

These are times of great uncertainty and upheaval. Gen Z lawyers are entering the legal profession filled with ambition but burdened by anxiety, hopeful of securing meaningful and sustaining work but distrustful of self-serving organisations that want to exploit workers rather than enhance them. Legal workplaces are approaching a transformative moment in the legal sector's history, and they desperately need both vision for the future as well as willing hands to start building it.

It's appropriate that each of these two groups could actually be the primary solution to each other's challenges. An opportunity is now unfolding for legal workplaces to make Gen Z lawyers an essential element of their strategies for navigating the coming transformation and emerging stronger on the other side. This section of the report will describe how they might pursue that goal.

But one caveat at the outset: No strategy or tactic for integrating Gen Z lawyers into your legal workplace will succeed if it's a declaration, an imposition, or a one-way street. This cohort of lawyers will insist on being taken seriously as colleagues and collaborators, rather than as mere docket-fillers or warm bodies. They have their own perspectives and their own priorities, and they will not tuck them away just because their employers don't think they're important. Keep that in mind as we explore the following five avenues in particular.



“We are alert, self-aware, and cautiously hopeful.”

Technology

Legal workplaces are going to need a lot of help transitioning from their old ways of work to becoming AI-integrated legal solution environments. AI is not just a bolt-on technology; it will reconfigure how legal work is performed and how legal businesses make money. Fortunately for these workplaces, this AI-native generation entering the profession can help facilitate that transition. Digitally fluent and AI-friendly, Generation Z lawyers will be essential members of any legal workplace that hopes to understand and implement this technology. Give them access, autonomy, and responsibility to advise on and guide your organisation's integration of artificial intelligence. They understand this area better than most.

But be careful not to confuse “digitally native” with “technologically savvy.” A common mistake made by legal organisations is to assume their youngest lawyers are the tech experts and can solve any problem or untangle any tech challenge. Many of them answer to that description, but many others will be just as clueless about the nuts and bolts of AI as Boomers are. Gen Z lawyers might not know or care much about how AI works; but they know what it can do, and they've had extensive experience doing it. They are the members of your legal workforce most likely to glimpse and grasp AI's potential and the least likely to reflexively discount its applicability. That brings us to:

“Digitally fluent and AI-friendly, Generation Z lawyers will be essential members of any legal workplace that hopes to understand and implement this technology.”

Innovation

Like all newly called lawyers, Gen Zers arrive in the profession never having experienced a traditional legal work environment. But they're also the first generation for whom that will be an asset, rather than a liability. Veteran lawyers' over-reliance on and habitual attachment to the old ways of lawyering has held back their law firms and law departments for too long. Even the youngest Millennials have absorbed enough of the old culture and adapted sufficiently to the traditional infrastructure in their brief tenure to make it difficult for them to break free of the old mentality. Just one year in an hourly billing environment can be enough to set bad professional habits for life.

Generation Z, by contrast, will arrive with a clean slate, unburdened by any assumption that the billable-hour model makes sense or that employing technology is an inferior way to solve legal problems. Strive to keep that slate clean for as long as you can. Do not present them with the volume-based model of lawyer productivity as if it was handed down on two stone tablets. Help Gen Z lawyers learn about the old ways of working, but encourage them to envision and build the new systems. (They can manage this balance better than you can — they've been multi-platforming most of their lives.) If you do this well, Gen Z lawyers won't have to go through the “unlearning” process that is going to slow down so many older lawyers in the transition process to come.

Flexibility

Generation Z lawyers, like their Millennial predecessors, are destined to lead peripatetic legal careers, moving from one workplace and one type of role to another on a regular basis. But unlike many of their immediate predecessors, they also come with high levels of adaptability and pragmatism that will enable them to better embrace unconventional opportunities and more flexible approaches. That should actually suit their future employers just fine, because tomorrow's legal workplaces won't consist of full-time fully-staffed offices or neatly hierarchical org charts. They'll more closely resemble a haze of orbiting satellites around central hubs, or tethered collections of small teams hopping easily from one node on the

web to another. Many Gen Z lawyers will find that appealing.

So start planning now for flexible ways in which you can keep these lawyers within your orbiting "sphere of value contribution." If they seem bored or restless in their current role, or if they've openly expressed a desire to do something different, offer them fresh options. Roaming lawyers, client-embedded professionals, quasi-legal strategists, industry ambassadors — there is no shortage of potential ways in which legally trained professionals can help your firm or company in the future. Create these roles now, so that they're ready for Generation Z lawyers to fill them when they're ready.

"I think an ambition is wellness. The goal is to have a well-rounded life, to be healthy, for work to not be everything"

Values

The last members of Generation Z will join the legal profession in 2037 — a year that is not as far away as you might think. (A similar number of years into the past takes us only to 2015!) But by that time, the Boomer generation will have just about vacated the corner offices and executive suites they've occupied in the legal sector since the late 1980s. Over the course of the past few decades, Boomers have remade legal enterprises in their own image and after their own values: hard work, ambitious individualism, and relentless growth. Younger lawyers have naturally assumed these were the normal values of legal business; but that's not the case at all. As new generations ascend the ownership and leadership ladders in the coming years, new values will eclipse the old

ones. Millennial lawyers eventually will dictate legal organisation cultures; but they will be bracketed by older Gen Xers and their own Gen Z descendants, creating tension.

Gen Z will be an odd mix of their two predecessor cohorts. Similar to their Millennial forebears, Gen Z lawyers will "work to live," not the other way around. Don't expect them to respond well to billable-hour bonus structures or pressure them to work late.

“We tend to centre less on status for its own sake and more on freedom and sustainability.”

They will also share (if not exceed) Millennials’ commitment to diversity and responsible ecology. But Generation Z will more closely resemble their Gen X parents in their highly pragmatic and transactional view of their jobs: “I work for you, you pay me for the work, and we stay in our separate lanes.” They will have little interest in leadership, even less in helping solve your imminent succession crises.

This is not a generation of visionary builders; they will work hard and be responsible, but they will take nothing for granted, and most of them will view your organisation with a certain detachment – unless you can prove to them that you are a secure, reliable, and transparent employer. Which leads us to our final entry:

Community

Legal workplaces can gain a tremendous Gen Z recruiting and retention advantage over their competitors if they signal early and prove consistently that they want to hire and support the whole lawyer – not just the productivity-generating source of legal labour. It’s essential that you take this generation seriously and integrate them fully as valued and respected human colleagues.

They have agency, they want autonomy, and they value identity. If you treat them as faceless cogs or billing automatons, you’ll experience constant turnover in your junior ranks and you’ll be unable to form a nucleus of future partners and leaders. If you try to sell them on loyalty and long-term commitments, they will give you their patented thousand-mile stare.

But if you accept them and value them for who they are, they’ll walk through walls for you. This generation grew up more isolated from their peers than any before them; but they still have the same craving for human company as anyone else, and many of them will be drawn to a workplace that offers them stability, security, and sincerity. Behind their shields of skepticism, many members of Generation Z deeply desire a sense of community and acceptance. They want to contribute value as lawyers and they’re ambitious for themselves, but what many of them would really like is somewhere they can call home. If a legal workplace can show it’s serious about meeting these needs, this group of lawyers will respond.

“I think as a generation, we put more time into our friendships and communities, and encourage more open conversations about mental health.”



5

A New Legal World

The world is changing almost faster than we can process it – technologically, culturally, demographically, and geopolitically. In order to maintain a competitive advantage in your markets, or just to keep from falling far behind, your organisation’s leaders have to be quicker than most to recognize what’s happening, accept the reality of change, and let go of the habits and assumptions of the past. Nostalgia for the old days, an attachment to old ways, and a fondness for how things used to be – these attitudes will breed organisational complacency at the worst possible time. You can’t afford to be shackled to the past when the present is experiencing such upheaval.

Fortunately, your workplace is now starting to fill up with exactly the kind of pragmatic, no-nonsense, here-and-now lawyers you’ll need to make a clean break with tradition. Generation Z knows little and cares less about how you’ve always done things. There’s no point trying to impress them with how your old ways led to great success – and increasingly, there’ll be no need, because the architects and champions of the old ways will leave even faster than the new generation arrives.

The timing really could not be better. Legal workplaces need people with fresh perspectives and emergent skills – people who are comfortable with technology at a foundational level, who can focus on the job to be done in the most efficient ways available, and who are shaping the future of professional services simply by how they go about their work. Legal organisations have always found it difficult to change their old ways; well, here comes a generation whose members consider the old ways neither good nor bad, but simply irrelevant. They won’t need to untangle themselves from the old infrastructure.

Just as importantly, the future of legal services is going to be human-centric. AI is going to transform our understanding of how legal work gets done and introduce concepts like digital workflow and commoditised know-how that many legal organisations will find utterly foreign. But through this transformation of tasks and processes, AI will also enable the human side of lawyers to come to the fore. It will be those lawyers with the ability to create and maintain strong relationships of advice and advocacy who will earn the trust and loyalty that will mark lawyer-client relationships in future. And both tomorrow’s lawyers and tomorrow’s clients will belong to Generation Z

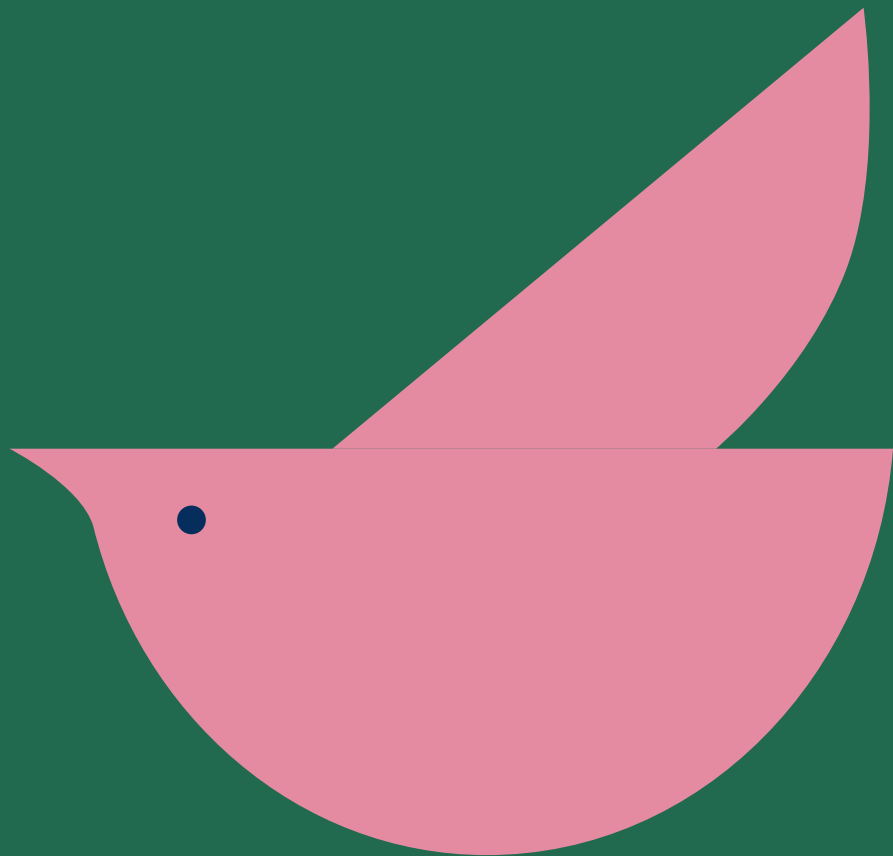
It will, therefore, be those legal workplaces that embrace members of Gen Z – not simply tolerate them or humour them, but actively seek out their active participation – that will end up transforming the legal industry. Gen Z lawyers are going to change the legal sector and the legal professions, but only if today’s legal leaders have the courage and vision to allow them to do so.

How can your workplace welcome Gen Z lawyers? Yes, you’ll need to recalibrate your expectations around face time and billable hours, and you’ll have to work harder to identify the future leaders and organisation builders among them, because those folks are likely to be thinner on the ground with this cohort than with previous ones.

But above all, it’s imperative that when you look at these young people, you don’t just see law school transcripts or billable-hour potential or useful cogs for the great legal machine. You see and recognise the person, the individual, for who they are and what they bring. And you accept them – idiosyncrasies and all. They’re different from you, they’re different from each other, and they like it that way. If you can offer them that recognition and acceptance, you’ll be well ahead of your rivals.

Generation Z lawyers are looking for a home. They probably won't stay there long, certainly not for their whole careers, and they're not going to get too worked up about the house rules or the mission statement. But if they find that space has been made for them, and space has been given to them, then they are very likely to reciprocate with intense commitment and extraordinary service.

That's the opportunity that awaits, you, and them. Will you grasp it?



Jordan Furlong is a strategic consultant, adviser, and legal market analyst who studies the impact of the changing legal world on law firms and legal organisations. He advises legal leaders on business model innovation, professional development, and the impact of Generative AI, among many other topics. Based in Ottawa, Canada, Jordan has addressed thousands of lawyers and legal professionals at dozens of conferences and retreats, in person and online, in North and South America, Europe, and Australia

Simon Harper founded LOD in 2007 to provide different and better ways for lawyers and clients to work together and since then has overseen its growth to many thousands of lawyers over 10 global locations. He's been recognised by the Financial Times for "sending shockwaves through the legal industry" and by American Lawyer Magazine as a top 50 innovator of the last 50 years. Before LOD, Simon was an equity partner at BCLP specialising in media and technology law.

