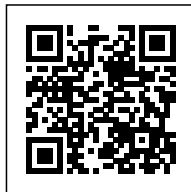


# GENERATION 3.0

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## **Senior partners are struggling to understand the new associates that are growing up in their law firms – what do young lawyers want and how can you keep them motivated?**

Retaining talented associates is one of the biggest challenges law firms currently face, as many senior partners will attest to. But while law firm leaders recognise the problem, solving it is proving more challenging. The task law firms' face is attempting to understand 'Generation 3.0'; the new wave of young associates.

The archetypal Generation 3.0 lawyer is under 40 years old, most of them are keen to become partner, though one in three does not have that ambition. The majority of them think they should not have to work more than 45 hours a week but around one in seven are prepared to work 51 hours per week or more.

Around one in four associates at law firms in Spain and Portugal have found that working at a law

firm has not met their expectations, while a similar proportion regret joining the firm for which they currently work. What may be of concern to a lot of managing partners is that the overwhelming majority of Generation 3.0 think their firm does not communicate clearly what is needed to make partner. In the same vein, most of this generation say their firm is not sufficiently transparent about its financial performance, targets and progress. One in three members of Generation 3.0 think they are not consulted enough on changes at their firm, with almost half saying they are not understood by partners.

#### **‘Being a woman sucks’: Sexism in law firms**

On the whole, associates who responded to the survey (52 per cent of which were women) thought their firm’s approach to the issue of diversity – including differences related to gender, sexual orientation and age – was fairly good, with two-thirds (66 per cent) rating their employers’ performance at seven out of 10 or more (with one being ‘poor’ and ten being excellent). However, there were indications that women lawyers are still unfairly treated in some firms. One respondent said associates working lives would be improved if there was “serious investment in the careers of young females”, while a female respondent remarked that life at her firm would be better if associates were “not used as paralegals”. Another participant put it more succinctly when she said: “Being a woman sucks.”

#### **Communication breakdown**

To mark the tenth anniversary of the publication, Iberian Lawyer conducted a comprehensive survey of more than 130 associates in Spain and Portugal to find out about their experiences. The aim was to find out the extent of the ‘disconnect’ between associates and partners – a phenomenon that is frequently cited by managing partners as one of the biggest future challenges they face. The survey also covered more than 130 partners in an effort to see if there were any major differences of opinion between current law firm leaders and Generation 3.0. In the first instalment of a two-part feature – which includes the results of a survey involving around 270 lawyers – Iberian Lawyer identifies some of the problems being created by the lack of communication between senior partners and young associates. Part two will explore what some of the solutions to these problems may be. Many managing partners have highlighted the fact that “work-life balance” is more important to the new generation of lawyers than it was to previous incarnations, and the survey bore this out. When associates were asked how many hours they thought it was acceptable to work each week, 55 per cent said no more than 45 hours

(with a further 32 per cent saying between 46 and 50 hours). One respondent remarked: “Senior lawyers are extremely demanding with regard to the time each associate spends at the firm – it is very common to hear something like ‘considering you are not married and have no children, you are supposed to work every day of the year.’” Another participant said the working lives of associates could be improved with a “greater awareness of the value associates bring to the firm and the importance of a personally gratifying work-life balance”.

#### **‘Too much time-wasting’**

In contrast, the majority of partners surveyed (56 per cent) said it was acceptable for associates to work 46 hours or more per week (with 21 per cent saying associates should work 51 hours per week at least).

One partner said his firm had the rules and “practical conditions” for associates to be fully motivated and be able to learn and develop with the help of senior lawyers and that it was “really up to junior lawyers to make the most of the opportunities they are given by the firm”. Another partner, who appeared to have little sympathy for the complaints of associates, said they should change the amount of time they spent eating lunch and the time they spent in discussions on “topics far away from their duties”.

However, some partners were more conciliatory and said associates working lives could be improved with: more freedom to define strategies for clients, more feedback, more “personalised coaching” including in business development skills, more information about the firm’s financial targets and progress, and by “partners insisting that the key to a long and fruitful career is to have a balanced life between professional and personal time”.

The majority of Generation 3.0 believe that the training offered by their firm is fairly decent, with 52 per cent giving it a score of seven out of ten (with one being ‘poor’ and ten being excellent).

**61%**

The proportion of partners who thought that associates were less committed to their career than they were in the past.

However, there were suggestions that training was sub-standard, to say the least, at some firms. One associate respondent said that what had surprised them most since starting work at their firm was the “lack of any ability to teach new graduates”, with another highlighting the “lack of training” offered by their employers. Other associates said their working lives could be improved with “more professional training”, and by being given “more time to attend courses”.

### **Lack of social skills**

Poor communication was a problem highlighted by the overwhelming majority of associates. A hefty 83 per cent said their firm did not “communicate clearly what is needed to make partner”. Complaints made by associates included partners’ “lack of social and human skills” and the lack of a “well-defined career plan”. Another associate remarked that he was surprised by the “lack of transparency with regard to concerns such as career progression and partnership opportunities”. They added that, prior to joining the firm, they were not prepared for the “extreme relevance of age regarding career progression – lawyers have to be in the same category for a period of time (one or two years) in order to become seniors, regardless of their ability or skills concerning leadership, strategy and technical issues”.

In contrast, and perhaps unsurprisingly, almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of partners who responded to the survey said they thought their firm did clearly communicate to associates what was needed to make partner. However, some partners did acknowledge that the experience of associates would be improved with “increased communication” and “clear expectations”, or by “just asking them what they really want to do”. One partner said associates working lives would be enhanced if “senior lawyers would took more care of them”.

For around three-quarters of associates, the experience of working for a law firm has been in line with their expectations and they are happy that they opted to join the firm that currently employs them. However, around one in four associates appear to be regretting their career choice – 25 per cent said they were not doing the type of work they expected to do before they joined their firm, with a similar proportion saying that, if they began their career again with the knowledge they have now, they would not join the same firm. As discussed in the Madrid Annual Report (on page 26), managing partners say they need to make a greater effort to understand young lawyers, otherwise it is difficult to manage their expectations. This fundamental misunderstanding is highlighted by the fact that while 72 per cent of partners think the senior partners at their firm “understand the firm’s associates”, only just over half of associates (55 per cent) hold the same view. Part two of this report (which will appear in the next issue of Iberian Lawyer) will explore more of the workplace issues that may be having a negative impact on associates motivation and possible strategies for addressing them. IL

#### **Is the legal profession more or less attractive to young people than it was in the past?**

When asked whether they thought the legal profession was more or less attractive to young people than it was in the past, perhaps worryingly for partners involved in succession planning at their firms, a majority of partners thought a career in the law was losing its allure. The full findings were as follows:

<b>More attractive</b>	<b>15 per cent</b>
<b>Less attractive</b>	<b>52 per cent</b>
<b>About the same</b>	<b>33 per cent</b>