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3 Things Baby Boomers Can't Stand About Young Lawyers

By **Carmen Germaine**

Law360, New York (December 15, 2015, 4:27 PM ET) -- They may no longer use typists or send telegrams and some have even begun — perhaps reluctantly — to check out this social media thing, but that doesn't mean that baby boomer attorneys are uniformly pleased with the young associates crowding into their offices.

The generation born in the two decades after World War II waded through the social upheavals of the last 50 years, not to mention stagflation, and brought major changes to the legal profession.

But now some baby boomers are reaching the end of their careers only to find a crop of younger lawyers happy to take advantage of the foundations they laid while spurning the hard work and elbow grease they thought were essential to a successful career in law. What does "work-life balance" even mean, anyway?

Here, Law360 looks at three things baby boomers hate about younger lawyers.

They Don't Take You to Lunch

Some baby boomers began practicing in the '60s, a time when most law firms still had an old boys' club feel. Most boomers agree that the changes since then, many of which they played a key role in implementing, have been for the better, but there are a few things they lament — including that many junior attorneys no longer seem to value the input of their seniors.

"They don't come and ask if you have time for lunch," said Jim Virtel, senior counsel at Armstrong Teasdale LLP, who practiced for 45 years. "I've never had one of them come to me."

Virtel explained that, as a young lawyer, he frequently asked senior attorneys to lunch, eager to pick their brains for insight on the legal profession and learn everything he could from more experienced partners.

"I don't see that kind of interaction, which kind of befuddles me," he said, lamenting that younger attorneys can seem more focused on what they're getting out of their firm than what they're putting into their own careers.

Michael Rynowecer, founder and president of BTI Consulting Group Inc., said that the newest generation of associates often feel less interested in seeking advice from senior partners because they no longer expect to spend their careers with one firm.

"They're much closer to viewing what they're doing as temporary as opposed to going and

learning everything they can from those that would be willing to teach them," Rynowecer said.

But neglecting to build relationships with potential mentors can hurt young lawyers in the long-term, Rynowecer said, explaining that some associates don't realize that much of a partner's experience goes beyond the nuts and bolts of the law to things like what clients want and expect or how to relate to other partners.

"If you don't seek those things out, you may not ever learn them," Rynowecer said.

Of course, what young lawyers might not realize is that many baby boomers expect them to do the seeking, just as they had to when they were associates.

"Some boomers have the mentality, 'Well, I had to figure it out, you figure it out,'" said Ken Young of the legal search and consulting firm Young Mayden LLC. "They weren't handled with kid gloves, so it's not in their nature to do that."

Young said that boomers are often not as good at giving feedback or mentoring young lawyers as they could be, leaving associates craving feedback in the lurch.

But as long as tenderfoot lawyers are looking to soak up everything they can about the legal industry, they'll continue to be well-served to seek out the advice of their more seasoned peers — and stay on their good side — with a friendly lunch offer.

They Take Sundays Off

As more and more millennials work their way up their firms' ladders, it's become clear that the younger generation has, by and large, turned away from the 80-hour workweeks that defined the profession. And while many attorneys agree that the change is likely for the best, it can still rub boomers the wrong way to see their junior counterparts enjoying their Saturdays and Sundays when they took weekend work as a given.

Young recalled his own days of law firm practice in the late '70s and early '80s at a national labor law firm.

"If you didn't go back to the office every night after dinner, you felt guilty," he said. "Saturday was a coat and tie day. Sunday you were there but you didn't have to wear a coat and tie."

Virtel also said that attorneys in decades past were expected in the office on Saturdays and to be available, if not working, on Sunday as well.

"Nobody had to ask me to come to the office on Saturday, I was there," he said.

The new emphasis on what many people term "work-life balance," then, can seem a little odd, or even unfair, to boomers who gave much of their lives to the firm. To them a free weekend can signal a lack of dedication in a young attorney.

But then, older attorneys cut their teeth under a generation that in some cases was even less forgiving about taking time off.

Shortly before the birth of his second child in 1982, Young recounted, he "timidly" asked his supervising partner if he could take a day off for his wife's scheduled cesarean section.

The partner glanced up from a brief he was reviewing, looking at Young as though the then-young lawyer was crazy, and said, "We weren't even in town when our kids were born," according to Young.

"So times have changed," Young said.

They're Not Nice to Staff

Perhaps the biggest beef boomers have with the newest bunch of attorneys is what Virtel called a lack of empathy, especially when dealing with people they think of as less essential to their careers.

Young attorneys, Virtel explained, might grasp that they need to be friendly to clients, but are sometimes nasty to people who are often just as important — the courtroom clerk and the courtroom bailiff, for example — a sight that makes baby boomers' blood boil.

"I better never ever hear that you've not been polite to courtroom personnel because that just can't be," Virtel said.

Virtel offered that the gap in social skills between younger and older attorneys could be because of differences in how each generation spent their leisure time.

"I don't know if you can assign it to the fact that they're all game geeks," he said, recalling that when he was younger, "We played cards, we talked to people. We weren't texting people."

Rynowecer agreed that young lawyers' lack of respect can be a major peeve for baby boomers and added that part of the gap in social skills, at least as it's perceived, comes from associates' ease with social media. Younger attorneys can be more inclined to send a Facebook message or text message than even an email, let alone pick up the phone, he said.

Beyond putting young lawyers at odds with senior partners, Rynowecer said, that proclivity for social media could wind up alienating another important baby boomer constituency — clients.

Younger attorneys need to keep up their communication game in order to be able to relate with clients, Rynowecer cautioned, and may need to use communication tools, like phone calls or lunch meetings, that boomers associate with a greater level of contact.

And in keeping with boomers' emphasis on respect, he said, millennial attorneys would do well not to forget clients' staff when building relationships.

"If you don't treat your client staff with respect, you'll sink," Rynowecer said. "Many baby boomer partners know that your client staff can be a very important ally — I think they're not as attuned to that."

Young cautioned that not all younger attorneys lack the empathy and relatability that boomers view as essential, saying those were skills a firm would have to uncover in the interview process.

"You need to really spend time with people to get a feel for what kind of team player that person's going to be," he said.

And he added that promising young lawyers will continue to be promising young lawyers, even if they don't fit the baby boomer mold.

"Good lawyers will always be in demand," Young said, and that hasn't changed with changing technology. Whether it's helping companies compete effectively without violating the law or setting up a trust to avoid estate taxes, he said, there will always be things

computers won't be able to do.

All the same, as long as boomers are in the workforce, young lawyers will do well to learn whatever lessons they can from their more experienced counterparts, or risk their wrath — or at least their well-meaning counsel.

As Virtel recalled, "If somebody said to an associate, 'Mr. Virtel wants to see you' ... that would be viewed as a mixed blessing."

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