



CAREER DOCTOR

NALINI MOORE, MAHLAB
Nalini.Moore@mahlab.com.au

Dear Career Doctor

I am a senior associate at a mid-tier firm. As part of my role I am required to mentor and supervise a junior who is a typical Generation Y lawyer.

Basically, she is out for herself. She is impatient and wants everything her way and wants it now. She makes demands for particular work that I consider are unreasonable, she wants to go to client functions, she wastes time typing her own documents instead of dictating them, and she is rarely prepared to work late into the night (as I always do).

I am finding this stressful and as a result am not enjoying being at work. I am also scared that this lawyer's performance and general attitude will reflect badly on me. How can I work with this person and encourage her best performance?

Generation X-er (and proud of it)

Dear Generation X-er

The role of a senior associate is an important one. Not only are you responsible for your own work and career progression, but you now have the added responsibility of ensuring that your junior colleague has a suitable workload, is performing well and has the appropriate levels of guidance and supervision.

With this in mind, it is advisable to approach any hiccups and hurdles that you are experiencing with your junior colleague in a way that will cause you as little grief as possible and will achieve a positive result. I have set out below a few suggestions on how you can get the best out of your colleague and improve your own worklife.

They know what they want and they want it now

Generation Y is often also referred to (some would say, unfairly so) as "Generation Me" or "Generation Now". These alternative names have typically translated into a negative perception of Generation Y as selfish and impatient. Such a perception should not prevent you from working well with your Generation Y colleague.

As you rightly point out, a Generation Y lawyer typically knows what she wants. Being aware of what you want early in your career can certainly be advantageous. For example, your junior colleague may be readily able to identify her preferred area of practice and clients that she is keen to work with, which is a positive step to achieving career success. You can help her by encouraging this ambitious streak (within limits of course) and by discussing with her how these goals can be realistically attained. While your colleague's preference may be to have it all her way and have it all now, the reality is that achieving success often requires hard work, diligence and persistence. This is where your guiding hand plays a significant role, even if you do not agree with this attitude. Encouraging Generation Y lawyers to be decisive in their goal-setting and promoting the achievement of mini-goals rather than long-term goals are all likely to resonate well with lawyers who are focused on today and tomorrow rather than the years to come.



They are technologically savvy

Generation Y lawyers have grown up with the internet, email, mobile phones and digital cameras, not to mention PDAs and MP3 players. As a consequence, Generation Y lawyers are likely to employ technology in every aspect of their lives, including work.

As you have said, this may result in the reluctance to dictate and delegate administrative tasks to their support staff. What you need to determine is whether the non-delegation of these tasks is inefficient. If, as you suspect, it is a waste of valuable resources, and this lawyer's time would be better spent conducting research, drafting documents and undertaking other legal tasks, then you need to discuss this with her and redirect her towards taking advantage of her familiarity with technology and using it in a way that will ensure an efficient practice.

On the flip side, as a non-Generation Y lawyer you may be able to use this as an opportunity to learn a few things from your junior colleague. For example, allow her to show her web-based research skills and develop interactive training presentations (for both internal use and external clients).

They are a marketer's dream

Brand and reputation matter to Generation Y as much as stability matters to baby-boomers and career progression matters to Generation X. In practice, this means that Generation Y lawyers are likely to be natural-born marketers – acutely aware of how they want to be perceived and the best way of creating that perception. So the fact that your junior colleague is interested in the marketing side of the legal practice is not a bad thing at all.

On the contrary, the input of your Generation Y junior should be sought as often as possible when it comes to marketing to clients. Given that firms invest significantly in business development and marketing, often using both internal and external consultants, why not draw on the thoughts of your junior? You could sit down and brainstorm with her about rebranding, advertising, graduate recruitment and client functions, and then present your ideas together to your mutual partner.

They want flexibility and work/life balance

Some aspects of being a lawyer, like billable hours and extensive periods of discovery as an articulated clerk or junior lawyer, are rarely flexible, whether you are a Generation Y lawyer or not.

If your junior is able to work efficiently and effectively without having to work into the wee hours of the morning, then that is a great result. If, however, you believe that the work is not getting done within specific timeframes, you will need to talk to her about this.

These days lawyers rate flexibility and work/life balance as important as, if not greater than, increased salaries. So you need to be aware of this when having your discussion.

I hope these suggestions will help you to enjoy a good working relationship with your junior colleague and will make your work environment enjoyable again. Life's too short!

Career Doctor

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