

**Working with Millennial Paralegals©**  
**By Chere B. Estrin**

**Working with Millennial Paralegals**

**By**  
**Chere B. Estrin, Ph.D.**

Are you in a situation where you are working side-by-side with colleagues who are of a very different generation than you? Do you sometimes ask yourself, “What’s *with* that person?” If so, you may be caught in the great divide – digital divide, that is. In the true spirit of diversity, we have been hit with a new generation that is so different, so unique that working with them has skewed our learning curve. And that’s just the beginning.

**Who Are Millennials?**

According to Claire Raines, a human resources consultant, Millennials are the hottest commodity on the job market since Rosie the Riveter. They’re sociable, optimistic, talented, well-educated, collaborative, open-minded, influential, and achievement-oriented. They’ve always felt sought after, needed, indispensable. They’re the Millennial Generation. Born between 1980 and 2000, they’re a generation nearly as large as the Baby Boomers, and they’re charged with potential. They’re sometimes called the Internet Generation, Echo Boomers, the Boomlet, Nexters, Generation Y, the Nintendo Generation, the Digital Generation, and, in Canada, the Sunshine Generation. However, several thousand sent suggestions about what they want to be called to Peter Jennings at abcnews.com, and “Millennials” was the clear winner.

Traditionally, the paralegal student is a career changer – someone with several years of experience in another field. The average age of the UCLA paralegal student is about 35. But somehow this field, like any other, has also attracted many of the Millennials. How will they change the workplace as we know it today?

**The times they are a-changin’**

Born from 1980 through 2000, Millennials are the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital media. “They’re the ‘Babies on Board’ of the early Reagan years, the ‘Have You Hugged Your Child Today’ sixth graders of the early Clinton years, and the teens of Columbine,” say Neil Howe and William Strauss in *Millennials Rising* (Vintage Books, 2000).

**Strong Messages**

If you are of the Baby Boomer or Generation X eras, you probably wonder what it is that separates the Millennials from your generation and just what is it that they want. Millennials were given messages that our parents hadn't even thought of. These messages influenced an entire generation. According to Ms. Raines, Millennials were taught to:

- **Be smart—you are special.** They've been catered to since they were tiny. Think Nickelodeon, Baby Gap, Apple Computer and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*.
- **Leave no one behind.** They were taught to be inclusive and tolerant of other races, religions, and sexual orientations. Baby Boomers grew up with Lucy and Ricky sleeping in twin beds. The word "pregnant" was never used. The mere thought of Will and Grace would have guaranteed rioting of otherwise normally peaceful people.
- **Connect 24/7.** They learned to be interdependent—on family, friends, and teachers. Millennials chat on line rather than talk on the phone. They don't remember not having a cell phone where they can be reached any time of the day or night.
- **Achieve now!** Some parents hired consultants to line up the right college; others got started choosing the right pre-school while the child was still in the womb.
- **Serve your community.** Fifty percent of high school students reported volunteering in their communities, many of their high schools requiring community service hours for graduation. On one Roper Survey, when Millennials were asked for the major cause of problems in the U.S., they answered *selfishness*.

### **Millennial Characteristics**

All of this translates into a generation of paralegals with a different work ethic than any other, certainly different from their Gen X colleagues. Here are the main components of their work ethic:

- **Confident.** Raised by Baby Boomers believing in the importance of self-esteem, they characteristically consider themselves ready to overcome challenges. Managers and co-workers who believe in "paying your dues" (those who don't think opinions are worth listening to unless they come from someone of "a certain age") find this can-do attitude unsettling.
- **Hopeful.** Optimistic and practical, they believe in the future and their role in it. They've read about businesses with day care, gyms, free lunches and companies that pay your way through school. They expect a workplace that is challenging, collaborative, creative, fun, and financially rewarding.
- **Goal and achievement-oriented.** Just a day after she won a totally unexpected Olympic gold medal, skater Sara Hughes was talking about her next goal—scoring a perfect 1600 on her SATs. Many Millennials arrive at their first day of work with personal goals on paper.

- **Civic-minded.** They have a high rate of volunteerism. They expect companies to contribute to their communities—and to operate in ways that create a peaceful and co-existing environment.
- **Inclusive.** Millennials are used to being organized in teams—and to making certain no one is left behind. They expect to earn a living in a workplace that is fair to all, where diversity is the norm—and they’ll use their collective power if they feel someone is treated unfairly.

## 7 Principles of Millennial Management

So how do you apply what you know about Millennials into your day-to-day life on the job? What do today’s young employees want? What kind of work environments attract, retain, and motivate Millennial coworkers? How do you co-exist?

Here are Millennials six most frequent requests:

1. **Leadership:** This generation has grown up with structure and supervision, with parents who were role models. Millennials are looking for leaders with honesty and integrity. It’s not that they don’t want to be leaders themselves; they’d just like some great role models first.
2. **Challenges:** Millennials want learning opportunities. They want to be assigned to projects they can learn from. And while they are not looking to stay at any one job for a lifetime, they are looking for growth, development, a career path.
3. **Let me work with friends.** Millennials say they want to work with people they *enjoy*. They like being friends with coworkers. Employers who provide for the social aspects of work will find those efforts well rewarded.
4. **Fun.** Humor, even a bit of silliness, will make your work environment more attractive. It’s not unusual to see toys on their desks or games on their computers.
5. **Respect:** “Treat our ideas respectfully,” they ask, “even though we have a lot less experience than you.”
6. **Flexibility:** This generation ever isn’t going to give up its activities just because of jobs. A rigid schedule is a sure-fire way to turn off a Millennial from your work environment.
7. **Not here for a lifetime:** This generation grew up in a period of downsizing, rightsizing; merging and purging. They do not expect to be with the firm for many, many years, let alone a lifetime.

*“A 60-something graduate recently reflected: ‘We wanted what they want. We just felt we couldn’t ask.’ Herein lies the truth: what young workers want isn’t so different from what everyone else wants. However, young workers are asking for it.”*

*--Karen Cates and Kimia Rahimi, “Mastering People Management,” Financial Times, November 19, 2001*

Working with Baby Boomers, Generation X or Millennials is a diversity issue. This is a challenge faced by many paralegals. The work ethic of older generations was different.

The oldest generation worked for work's sake and considered it an honor to have a job. Baby Boomers have worked hard because their self-image was based on their careers. Now, Gen X and Millennials have a different theory. Most are in the *no fear* category – not motivated by threats of punishment or firing.

The key is to get to know each other as individuals. Find out what is important to the other generation, why they're working and what they want to get out of their jobs. The new generation doesn't give respect to others based upon titles. They fully expect to earn every bit of respect given to them.

Celebrate this generation by creating a stimulating environment. When people are having fun and are stimulated, they tend to be more themselves and they perform better. Remember too, patience and respect for diversity goes a long, long way. It's the only way to coexist because in the end, no matter how hard you try, the one thing you have absolutely no control over is changing your age.

*Chere B. Estrin, Ph.D. is the CEO of Estrin Professional Careers, a Los Angeles based paralegal training and seminar company. Author of 8 books including The Paralegal Career Guide 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., and The Successful Paralegal's Job Search Guide, she is a co-founding member of The Legal Assistant Management Association. Chere has been interviewed by Newsweek, The Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, Latina, and more. She is a recent recipient of the Los Angeles Paralegal Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. For more information about Estrin Seminars, go to [www.CareercoachesInternational.com](http://www.CareercoachesInternational.com) Chere can be reached at [EstrinLegalEd@aol.com](mailto:EstrinLegalEd@aol.com).*