

## Your ABA

### Millennial lawyers: Developing a meaningful career

Written By Kiyoka Rhodes

As the number of millennials entering the legal profession increases, they are reshaping the cultural norms of the workplace. However, the demographic group born between 1982 and 2000 also faces challenging realities. The webinar, "[Millennial Lawyers: Improve Your Professionalism and Jumpstart Your Career](#)," presented by the ABA Law Practice Division and the Center for Professional Development, serves as a guide for young lawyers on ways to achieve a satisfying and successful career.

Martha Knudson, general counsel at Apartment Management Consultant, LLC, and assistant instructor in the Masters of Applied Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania, moderates the webinar. She is joined by Cory Muscara, founder of Long Island Center for Mindfulness in New York, and Joshua Steinfeldt, founder of Joshua Steinfeldt Coaching and Consulting in Berkeley, Calif.

Knudson conducts a short poll, asking the online attendees why they became a lawyer. Fully 80 percent of the participants got into law because they wanted to help people solve problems. However, 40 percent chose the profession to become wealthy, and 25 percent chose the profession out of uncertainty or because they were pressured by family and friends to become a lawyer.

Research shows that "millennials want careers with meaning, purpose and an opportunity to impact positive change," Knudson says.

While those attributes motivate millennials, Generation X (those born between 1965-81) finds importance in work-life integration and feelings of purpose through personal and professional growth. Baby boomers (born between 1946-64) are more concerned with their legacy and what they will leave behind for others.

Knudson shares her own personal experience from the early stages of her career, when she was caught up in the rush of achieving rather than being mindful about her decision, and by her 10th year practicing law, she was dissatisfied.

The panelists advise millennials to think about what they value in the law and what matters to them personally; saying this exercise can be the foundation for a satisfying career in law that increases well-being, work engagement and physical health.

Muscara discusses a process called "life design" where one intentionally prepares a meaningful blueprint for his or her life in alignment with one's values. He offers key points in the life design process:

- Self-awareness is the first step to living and working in alignment with your values.
- Recognize when your life and values are out of alignment.

- Learn what is most important for your well-being.
- Have a heightened self-awareness, synonymous with mindfulness.

“You can choose how you want to live your life....you can do so in a way that’s in alignment with what’s most important to you,” Muscara advises. He conducts a meditation session during the webinar, emphasizing the importance of putting values into practice. Muscara invites participants to close their eyes, settle in and make physical adjustments in their mind and body to be more comfortable. Applying the meditation process to the legal profession, Muscara explains how being one with yourself and knowing who you are can help you be grounded in your values.

Steinfeldt discusses what should be done once self-awareness is inhabited and how to get in touch with one’s values. “Our values are important because they guide our decisions, our actions, our behaviors,” Steinfeldt says. “Values are a pathway to the meaning and purpose in our lives.”

When one is under stress, attention and focus is limited. Steinfeldt goes into depth reflecting on values, thinking about what reflecting does psychologically and how it can broaden your perspective. He provides a **worksheet** where one can select from a list of values and write about why this value is important to the individual. Steinfeldt offers four tips for values integration:

- Get in touch with your values. What are they?
- Understand and appreciate how your actions are already in alignment with what is important to you.
- Develop a plan for integration.
- Practice, change can take time.

“What we focus on grows,” Knudson says. “If we intentionally focus within our careers on what energizes, motivates and inspires us about the practice of law, this focus can become a national guide to developing a fulfilling career.”

Online: <https://www.americanbar.org/publications/youraba/2016/april-2016/millennial-lawyers--developing-a-meaningful-career.html>

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