

Legal roundtable participants discuss the partner track: Who's on it, who's not

We asked the *TBBJ's* legal roundtable participants what's going on in terms of the partner track and younger lawyers who are evolving.

- [David Beyer](#), Partner, Quarles & Brady
- Nathaniel Doliner, Shareholder, [Carlton Fields](#)
- [David Doney](#), Office Managingartner, [Akerman](#)
- [Truett Gardner](#), Partner, Gardner Brewer Martinez-Monfort
- [Alan Higbee](#), Managing Partner, [Shutts & Bowen](#)
- [Brad Kimbro](#), Executive Partner, [Holland & Knight](#)
- [Cynthia Mikos](#), Managing Partner, [Allen Dell PA](#)
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- [Phillip Russell](#), Shareholder, Ogletree Deakins
- [Hala Sandridge](#), Shareholder, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney
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- [Robert Sickles](#), Managing Partner, Broad and Cassel
- [Randy Wolfe](#), Office Managing Partner, [Foley & Lardner](#)

MUELLNER: What's going on in terms of the partner track and younger lawyers who are evolving?

KIMBRO: People still want to be made partner. Even the millennials want to. I think they do a better job, frankly, than maybe we did in the past in terms of balancing out work and life, but the people who are working now work very hard and I think want to succeed. They may have different views of what that means to be a partner and what the workload is going to be once they are, but I think people like to be recognized for working hard.

MUELLNER: You're talking about work ethic?

KIMBRO: I am. There are different perceptions of millennials. Maybe people will disagree. It seems like you've got people who are a little bit old school and want to work, and enjoy working.

OEHLER: I'll offer the counterpoint, to spice things up a little bit.

KIMBRO: This is client side.

OEHLER: When we interview a firm for work, when it's a transactional assignment or litigation assignment, we don't just look at that first tier, that top tier, that starting pitcher. We look at who that second chair is going to be, and sometimes even who that third chair is going to be.

Having been in a firm, I know that a lot of the work that gets done is that second and third attorney, and so your work product is going to be reflected by how good that attorney is going to be.

I have noticed a significant exodus of young associates. They're getting harder and harder to keep ... because the traditional partnership track does not work for a lot of millennials.

So the firm that's going to figure out the formula to have some alternative tracks that provide that better work/life balance, is going to have an enormous talent pool to pick from that the traditional firms are not.

DONEY: You have to be very careful about painting an entire generation with the same brush, because they each have individual career choices that they can make. They can go to a law firm; they can go to a big law firm; they can go to a small law firm; they can go to government; they can go in-house.

Even in a law firm as far as work/life balance, depending on your practice area, you may have a lot more leeway to manage that balance than you do in some other practice group.

So, there's a lot of different choices these people can make, and they do every day, and I think our challenge is intervening and trying to identify the people who are going to have the greatest chance of success within our firm and our culture and our system.

I think Brad is right. The people that come to firms like ours, they come there with the expectation that they want to work hard and do good work and make partner some day.

SANDRIDGE: One of the biggest changes, at least that I've seen, is the alternative work arrangements.

We see so many of those.



The part of this that really shocks me is that technology is not a part of this discussion. I think we still operate with this idea that people have to be in the office from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. to do their work and be a good attorney. I personally disagree with that. I mean, I have partners who will argue with me about this. But here we are all touting technology and what we can do for our clients, but we're not applying the same standard for our employees.

The key is if you have a relationship of trust with your employee, then you should feel comfortable that they can do their work from basically anywhere.

OEHLER: I tend to agree with you. When I was a young lawyer coming up, it was first in, last out. You were told as a first year lawyer, "That's your job. If somebody is here and they need a sandwich, go get a sandwich. Do whatever you need to do to make sure they're taken care of." I think some of that has fallen off, and it could be in large part due to technology.

But I also find in our youngest lawyers they define "success" differently than I did when I was young.

"Success" to me was meeting my hours goal and making sure I was on the right track and trying to move forward.

Now it's a completely different situation. A lot of young lawyers coming out of law school have been told from an early age, "Your first job will probably be your job for about four years." Industry standards say people move.

I just don't think it's the same mindset coming in that maybe it was 20 years ago.

HIGBEE: I'll say this: I'm the father of one of those millennial lawyers, and I can tell you that with my son's practice and watching him, things changed in 2008.

When the economy changed, people got very serious. When lawyers came out of law school and there were no legal jobs, people got stone-cold serious about the jobs that they're taking.

They may all work differently, but you should not assume for one second that it's not serious. Because they know there's a group behind them that would love to take their place, and they're being really, really conscientious.

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