



What Millennial Attorneys Want

Gensler



INTRODUCTION

Breaking with tradition, savvy law firms are designing their workplaces to meet and exceed the expectations of next-gen talent.

In recent years, leading law firms have adopted progressive workplace design strategies, like universal office size and open plan seating, that many of their clients already employ. Prompted by new business pressures and the expectations of millennial attorneys, these firms are reimagining the role of the physical work environment. This has placed the traditionally conservative legal profession on the cusp of radical change and has generated a slew of related questions. Can new work processes, supported by progressive space types, help law firms address changing market realities? Can law firms successfully adopt forward-thinking ideas about supporting knowledge work? Can firms take a more active role in shaping their cultures to accommodate the preferences of new legal talent?

These questions motivated Gensler's Consulting and Professional Services practices to identify the workplace expectations millennial attorneys have brought to the legal profession. We also sought to understand how millennial attorneys react when placed in non-traditional legal work environments. Because millennials are the largest generational cohort in the workforce today, and an increasingly influential group within the legal profession, understanding their expectations offers a good starting point for analyzing the current state of the legal workplace and determining what the future holds for firms that want to stay ahead of the curve.

To develop an informed understanding of the future of legal workplace design, we conducted anonymous surveys and facilitated in-person focus groups with millennial attorneys from 10 Am Law Top 100 firms, analyzed pre- and post-occupancy data from law firms that moved from traditional to more progressive environments, and hosted a panel discussion with millennial attorneys at the 2018 Association of Legal Administrators Annual Conference.



AM LAW TOP 10 FIRM, WASHINGTON, DC

What we learned is that millennial attorneys have similar expectations to millennial workers in other industries with one big exception: while many law firms remain hesitant to deviate from traditional design concepts, those that have chosen to do so report that the advantages modern design strategies provide far outweigh the drawbacks.

A changing world

The American legal profession has been buffeted by turbulent external factors in recent years, many of which are forcing firms to reevaluate their business practices and how they deliver core services. Those factors include:

- 1. Increased fee pressure and alternative fee models:** Clients increasingly feel emboldened to ask law firms to deliver services with smaller teams and in shorter amounts of time. These requests often result in lower total billable hours and smaller overall fees. Certain clients want to scrap the billable hour fee model in favor of alternative fee models in which the client pays an agreed-upon lump sum for services rendered.
- 2. More technologically-enabled, agile work practices:** Clients are also asking firms to work in more agile manners and utilize technologies the legal profession has traditionally been slow to adopt. Rather than meet in person, clients want attorneys to brief them via video conference; rather than rely on paper documents, clients wish to exchange information through secure digital means.

These changes represent significant evolutions for the legal profession. As a result, more firms are considering new approaches to workplace design in an effort to align their cultures and business practices with the changing realities of the legal market and the expectations of the next generation of legal talent.

FINDING ONE

Associates expect private offices



Since their entry into the workforce, millennials have been associated with the proliferation of open plan work environments in which individual employees work alongside one another in communal spaces. Millennials in most industries embrace this paradigm; members of this generation don't actively crave the large private offices previous generations inhabited. For this reason and others, more and more industries have begun shifting toward a mix of open plan and enclosed work settings.

We were surprised to learn from our surveys, in-person focus groups, and interviews that millennial attorneys say they want the privacy of an individual office and view a large private office as a rightfully earned reward for making Partner. The Associates and law students we spoke with told us they expected to receive a private office upon joining a firm; they regard private offices as important markers of prestige and critical tools for supporting the concentrative work they are required to do. Respondents also expressed strong reservations about working in open plan environments, worrying that noise and other distractions would hinder their productivity.

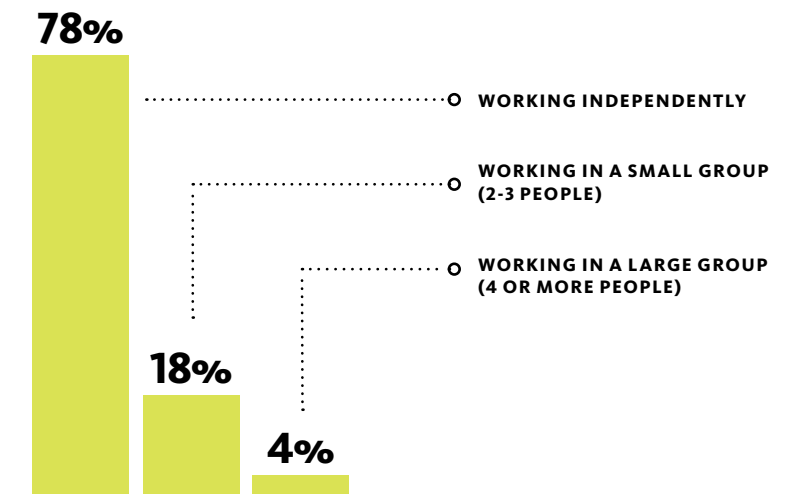
While initially surprising, the desire for private offices and associated trepidation over working in open plan environments is understandable. Attorneys often do more individual, focus work than employees in other industries, and the concentrative nature of legal work means interruptions and distractions can hinder performance. So while millennial attorneys harbor a different set of expectations than their peers in other industries, the reasons underpinning these expectations are legitimate.

“The trade-off for losing the goal of a large Partner office for the ability to work more agilely, more remotely, from anywhere in the office is worth it.”

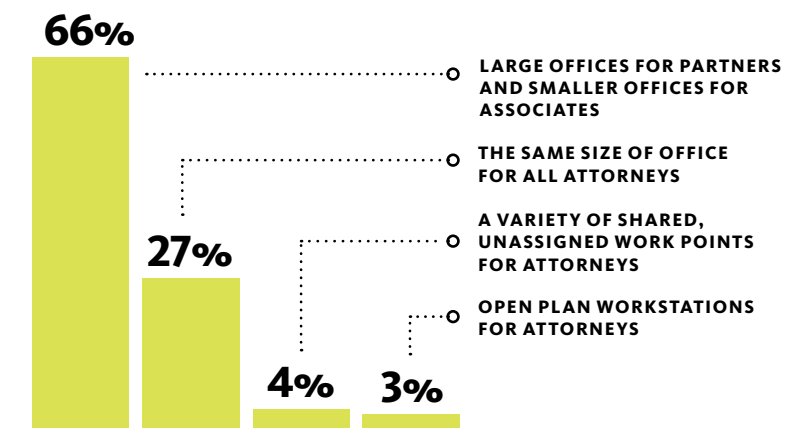
- ATTORNEY, HOGAN LOVELLS, DC

MILLENNIAL ATTORNEYS SPEND MOST OF THEIR TIME FOCUSING AND VALUE THE REWARD OF A PRIVATE OFFICE.

How I spend my time on a typical workday:



I prefer to work in an office that has:



FINDING TWO

Open plan can work for attorneys



“A huge thing that we heard prior to moving to the pilot floor were comments like: ‘It’s going to be too loud;’ ‘I’m worried I’m not going to be able to get a focus room when I need it;’ and ‘People will camp out in focus rooms all day.’ That did not happen at all. We hear today that it’s too quiet on the floor.”

– ATTORNEY, AM LAW TOP 10 FIRM, NY

MILLENNIAL ATTORNEYS COME INTO THE OFFICE TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS.

I come into the office to...



While our initial research indicates that millennial attorneys want the privacy afforded by individual offices, the results of the pre- and post-occupancy survey we conducted at a pilot workspace for an Am Law Top 10 Firm in New York (Law Firm A), which took Associates out of private offices and placed them in open plan seating, painted a very different picture.

These Associates told us the experience of working in an open plan environment changed their perceptions. Many of the users expressed approval of the open plan layout, which supports knowledge work by providing a variety of shared spaces for individual focus work and collaboration. They told us the new space offers the following advantages:

- Better connectivity to their colleagues and greater access to Partners
- A sense of being supported by a team of colleagues even while doing individual work
- An increase in collaboration and knowledge sharing
- The ability to focus in an open environment
- A wider variety of work spaces to support their work
- A sense of pride over the “hip” feel of the new workspace

Ongoing Challenges

Survey respondents did indicate that interruptions and background noise still occasionally pose a challenge, and sometimes require them to spend more time than normal on certain tasks.

But respondents also told us they felt more energized and better connected to the firm and were more aware of the value of their work.

Law Firm A’s COO and Director of Administration sit in the pilot space. One Associate told us, “A lot of the things that people thought were going to be an issue, just weren’t.”

Privacy Concerns

One of the reasons law firms have traditionally rejected open plan environments is the fear that such work arrangements will compromise the ability of attorneys to maintain client confidentiality.

But 72% of the Associates we surveyed at Law Firm A’s pilot space told us that it was easy to find an appropriate place to work on confidential material, and 81% said they had no problem finding private spaces to discuss sensitive information. The results of the survey also made it clear that Associates were making good use of the shared focus rooms, spaces where an individual attorney can have a confidential conversation or work on sensitive material in private.

FINDING THREE

Non-traditional layouts can invigorate firm culture



If convincing millennial attorneys to give up private offices represents a challenge for the legal profession—even though our post-occupancy data from Law Firm A indicates Associates thrive when placed in open plan environments—then it’s fair to assume that asking Partners to occupy the same size office as Associates presents an equally significant challenge.

Yet that’s exactly what the Hogan Lovells DC office did when it redesigned its workspace to provide one universal office size for all attorneys along with complementary Hive spaces—communal areas with tech-enabled conference rooms, informal meeting areas, café work spaces, and tech help bars.

The attorneys we spoke with at Hogan Lovells as part of a post-occupancy survey, expressed few qualms over the universal size of their new offices. They told us that both Associates and Partners were pleased with the ergonomic furniture and sit-stand desks included in each office and that everyone was taking advantage of the Hive spaces. By switching to a universal office layout, Hogan Lovells was able to put one-third more attorneys on the perimeter of the space, where they have direct access to daylight.

Overall, the attorneys reported being more collaborative, more social, and generally happier than they had been in their previous office.

One respondent told us, “There’s many more organic conversations, whereas before it was much more formal.”

“*New recruits want to go towards cool, hip work spaces. Our work may never be that hip, but the new design of our office helps.*”

– ATTORNEY, AM LAW TOP 10 FIRM, NY

ADVANTAGES OF THE NEW WORKPLACE INCLUDE:

- A greater sense of community
- A more egalitarian and vibrant work culture
- A sense of buzz and activity
- Increased agility in terms of work flow



HOGAN LOVELLS, WASHINGTON, DC

“*When recruits come through, we always point out how the egalitarian nature of the firm is represented in the one-size office design.*”

– ATTORNEY, HOGAN LOVELLS, DC

FINDING FOUR

*Greater choice,
greater
productivity*



According to Gensler's 2016 Workplace Survey, which surveyed 4,000 workers across 11 industries, the most creative and highest performing employees are those who have choice in where and how to work. Workers today crave choice and flexibility, and our firm's workplace research indicates that providing these attributes incites higher levels of creativity and performance.

It therefore comes as no surprise that millennial attorneys report wanting greater choice in terms of the workspaces available to them. Two-thirds of the millennial attorneys we spoke with told us that having access to more and different kinds of work spaces makes a significant difference in how they work, and more than half said they would work in a smaller office if they could have a greater variety of work spaces at their disposal.

We also asked millennial attorneys if they would prefer additional work spaces that are silent and formal (like conference rooms) or additional work spaces that are informal and buzzy (like coffee shops)—72% of respondents told us they would prefer buzzy spaces.

Benefits of Flexibility

Law Firm A's New York pilot office and Hogan Lovells' DC office both offer more flexibility than traditional legal workplaces and therefore provided our research team the opportunity to determine if the experiences of millennial attorneys placed in these flexible workspaces align with the findings of our firm's Workplace Survey. The post-occupancy surveys we conducted at both offices indicate they do.

At Hogan Lovells, where Hive spaces offer flexibility in where to work, and the universal office size provides seating flexibility, respondents told us they relish the agility of their new workspace. There was broad consensus that the new layout had helped create a "more vibrant, stronger work culture," and occupants told us there were higher levels of interaction happening throughout the space.

At Law Firm A, where a variety of work spaces complement the open plan seating while simultaneously supporting privacy and socialization, respondents told us they feel energized by the number of spaces available to them. They reported using their individual workstations less frequently, and one Associate stressed that Partners use the choice work spaces as well.

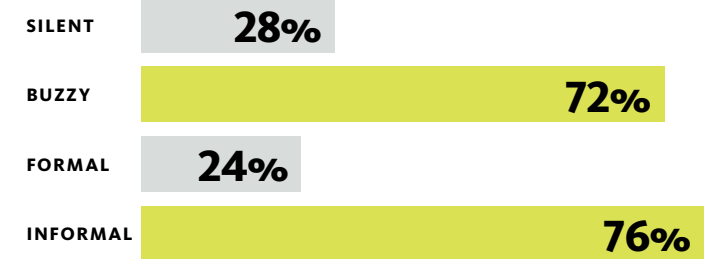
The results of these post-occupancy surveys confirm that choice in where and how to work can foster greater levels of productivity and create a more stimulating work environment.

“*People are staying around the office later than they used to. There's more in-person conversations, more efficient conversations than before.*”

– ATTORNEY, HOGAN LOVELLS, DC

BUZZY AND INFORMAL SHARED WORK SPACES ARE PREFERRED BY MILLENNIAL ATTORNEYS.

My ideal shared space is...



FINDING FIVE

Flexible work arrangements but not full-time remoteness



“*If Associates are getting their work done, the Partners don't care where they do it.*”

– ATTORNEY, AM LAW TOP 10 FIRM, NY

GREATER MOBILITY DOESN'T MEAN 100% REMOTE.

I would like to work remotely...

DAYS A WEEK

5+ **5%**

3-4 **7%**

1-2 **83%**

0 **5%**

Remote work is a concept that has gained considerable traction in recent years as technological advancements have made it easier for employees to work productively from remote locations while maintaining close contact with colleagues and clients.

Unlike many industries, the legal profession has mostly refrained from embracing the remote work trend. One of the reasons law firms oppose remote work arrangements derives from the legal profession's reliance on apprenticeship. Partners are expected to mentor Associates on a regular basis, and many Partners believe they can only do so if Associates are physically present in the office for the duration of the workweek.

The constraints of the traditional approach to legal apprenticeship are at odds with the desire of millennial attorneys for part-time remote work: 83% of the millennial attorneys we surveyed stressed that they have no desire to work remotely full-time but very much want the option of balancing days at the office with working remotely one or two days per week.

Associates who participated in our online surveys, focus groups, and interviews told us they believe coming into the office is critical to their success because it catalyzes the sort of collaboration and knowledge sharing high-quality work requires. In a nod to apprenticeship, they also said being present in the office gives them more opportunities to receive mentorship from Partners and gain valuable exposure within the firm.

The results of our research also confirm that while some Partners are beginning to champion the benefits of remote work, others remain hesitant to embrace it. Partners are split between those who believe presenteeism at the office is indispensable and those who have concluded that remote work arrangements do not necessarily result in fewer billable hours nor reduced opportunities to learn.

The latter group also advocates flexible work arrangements because they help create a more inclusive workplace by enabling women and men to remain actively engaged in their careers as life demands change, (e.g. while raising young families, supporting an elder, or focusing on personal health). This is important to recognize as our firm's workplace research indicates that in addition to salary, millennials in all industries are most likely to change employers in order to have more flexible work arrangements.

FINDING SIX

Open environments can support apprenticeship



While Partners remain split with regards to the feasibility of remote work, many of the Partners we spoke with on both sides of this divide told us that increased fee pressures and other client commitments have significantly reduced the amount of time they have available to mentor Associates. They told us that the lack of time currently dedicated to mentorship threatens to erode their firm's apprenticeship culture.

The results of the post-occupancy surveys we conducted at both Law Firm A's pilot space in New York and Hogan Lovells DC office point toward a new model for apprenticeship. Attorneys at both firms expressed that their new spaces were facilitating greater levels of collaboration among Associates, between Partners and Associates, and that these interactions not only support apprenticeship but create environments where collaboration and knowledge sharing happen more organically. They shared that attorneys of all experience levels have become more comfortable asking for help and sharing best practices.

The attorneys we spoke with as part of the post-occupancy survey at Hogan Lovells said the dynamic nature of their new office layout had led to an uptick in overall collaboration. The attorneys at Law Firm A also cited an increase in collaboration, and told us the collegial nature of the new work environment was building rapport and supporting firm culture.

These findings suggest that the collaborative work and knowledge sharing that tend to happen naturally in open plan seating and universal office layouts can supplement the learning and development traditionally dispensed through apprenticeship.

“
If you can see others, it's a lot easier to ask them for help.”

– ATTORNEY, AM LAW TOP 10 FIRM, NY

“
When I'm giving feedback to a junior Associate, I like to use the social spaces. It feels less hierarchical and more like teammates working together.”

– ATTORNEY, HOGAN LOVELLS, DC



PAUL HASTINGS, NEW YORK, NY



CONCLUSION



HOGAN LOVELLS, WASHINGTON, DC

Law firms can design the culture they want.

Can the legal profession thrive if its paradigm for workplace design fails to incorporate the forward-thinking ideas about knowledge work that other industries already embrace? That was one of the questions we set out to answer with our research efforts.

What we learned is that the firms who have adopted cutting-edge workplace strategies—from open plan seating for Associates to universal offices—have been very pleased with the results. The transition from traditional legal work settings to more progressive space types is not without challenges, but our research indicates that Associates and Partners are willing to embrace change once they understand its advantages and how these advantages can support their work.

Law firms rarely want to be the first to do something new. The first question attorneys tend to ask when discussing new business practices or workplace strategies is “Who has already done this?” The profession’s reliance on precedent extends beyond the courtroom. But in recent years, firms have been forced to respond to changing business realities, like alternative fee models and new technologies. They have adapted to these changes, even as their workplaces continue to reflect tradition and precedent.

Now is the time for law firms to consider evolving their physical workplaces in concert with the changing realities of the legal market. Progressive space types can facilitate and support the other changes firms are already making. Furthermore, physical space is a key driver of organizational culture. The look and feel of a workplace influences how people use it and interact within it. Workplace design can shape behavior and transform organizational culture.

As law firms prepare for the future, they should feel empowered to determine what sort of cultures they want for themselves—whether it’s a more egalitarian environment or a more collaborative vibe—and then conceptualize the types of spaces that can support these changes. It doesn’t boil down to a question of open plan versus private offices, and there’s no universal design solution for the legal profession as a whole. Individual firms should occupy spaces that align with and reinforce their cultures.

The most profound implication of our research is that millennial attorneys, as well as the more seasoned attorneys who oversee them, are willing to embrace changes in workplace design, even when these changes contradict previously held beliefs about what a legal workplace should look and feel like. Individual attorneys are not beholden to precedent as the profession generally has been, and law firms today have the power to manifest their ambitions and cultures through the design of their workplaces.



METHODOLOGY

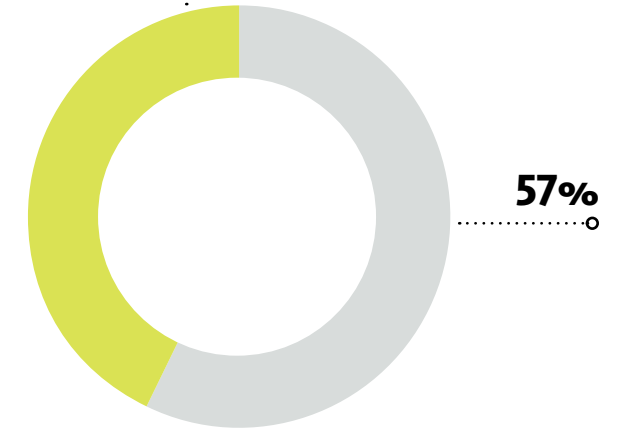
To conduct this research project, Gensler completed the following:

1. We partnered with 10 Am Law Top 100 firms in the U.S. through anonymous online surveys, in-person focus groups, and interviews. We asked over 180 fall, summer, and full-time Associates, as well as a handful of current law school students—all of whom are part of the millennial generation—about how they work today, how they want to work in the future, and how their work environment supports or inhibits their success.
2. We conducted pre- and post-occupancy surveys of a pilot work space at an Am Law Top 10 Law Firm's New York office (Law Firm A), which places Associates in open plan seating supported by a balance of shared focus and collaboration spaces, to get a sense of how millennial attorneys felt about open plan work environments once they had spent time in one. Survey questions examined the ways in which Associates work, the spaces they tend to use, and the effectiveness of those spaces. We also conducted pre- and post-occupancy surveys at Hogan Lovells Washington, DC office, which Gensler redesigned with one office size for all attorneys and Hive spaces—tech-enabled formal and informal meeting areas, café lounges, and help bars. Questions focused on workplace productivity and the level of comfort with the new layout.
3. We presented the preliminary findings of our research at the 2018 Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) conference in Washington, DC. We facilitated a panel discussion with two current millennial Associates, one from Law Firm A, NY and one from Hogan Lovells, DC. We asked our panelists questions about their new workplaces and invited audience members to do the same. Responses were compared to pre- and post-occupancy workplace data.

Note: "Am Law Top 10 Law Firm" ranking by gross revenue, 2018.

U.S. LAWYER POPULATION

43%



MILLENNIAL LAWYERS
NON-MILLENNIAL LAWYERS

ALM Intelligence analysis based on 400 top US firms, 2018.

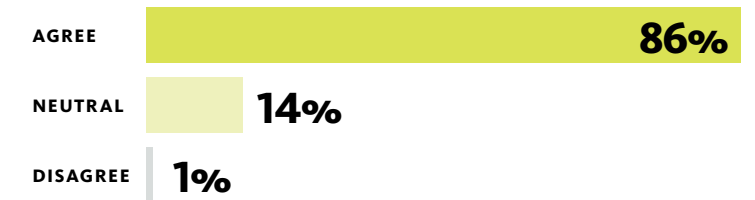


ADDITIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Increased flexibility to work remotely is desired by most millennial attorneys.

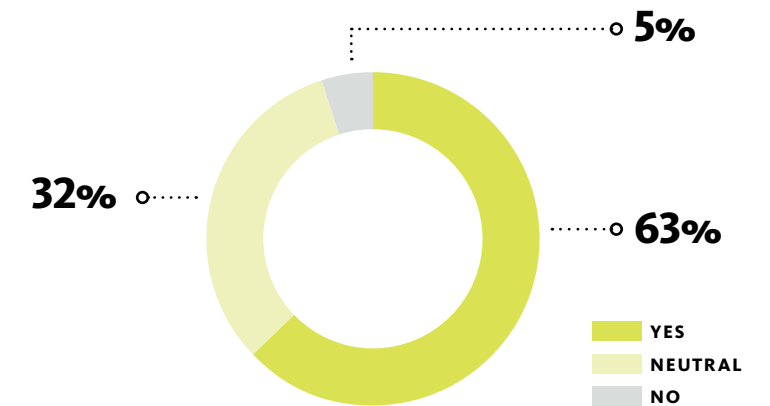
FLEXIBILITY IS VALUED

Having flexibility of when and where I work is important to me.



INCREASED FLEXIBILITY VS. OFFICE SIZE

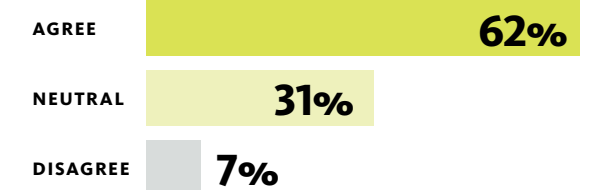
I would work in a smaller office for increased flexibility:



Providing a variety of shared work settings offers attorneys greater choice and supports productivity.

WORK SPACE CHOICE AND VARIETY ARE VALUED

Having a choice of different kinds of work spaces would facilitate my work process.



WORK SPACE CHOICE AND VARIETY VS. OFFICE SIZE

I would work in a smaller office in order to have a greater variety of shared work spaces.



AUTHORS

Kerri Henderson is a Regional Leader of Management Advisory practice and a Design Strategist at Gensler. She specializes in legal and management advisory workplace design. She works with firm leaders to identify key business drivers and leverage organizational aspirations to create unique workplaces.

Kevin Craft is a Communications Manager with Gensler's Organization & Talent Development studio. He devises and executes communications strategies in support of the firm's human capital initiatives, and investigates the ways space affects employee happiness and productivity.

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IMAGE CREDITS

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