

PUBLICATION

Baker's Dozen: Building Strong Intergenerational Teams

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In today's rapidly evolving legal landscape, every generation brings something invaluable to the table. For those just starting out, it's about embracing challenges, asking questions, and building a reputation rooted in integrity and curiosity. For more experienced attorneys, it's about recognizing the realities young lawyers face, offering guidance without judgment, and creating space for fresh perspectives. Together, intergenerational teams blend deep experience with innovative thinking, proving that the most impactful results come when knowledge meets new ideas.

We invited leaders from different generations to reflect on how their varied experiences shape stronger, more dynamic teams.

1. Theodora McCormick – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?



Don't be afraid to make mistakes! I think the legal profession attracts a lot of people who are perfectionists. That is a great quality, but it can also lead to finding a comfort zone and staying there. If you are terrified that you're going to look foolish or don't know how to do something, you aren't going to grab onto those challenging opportunities that lead to real growth and development. Don't be afraid to do something you've never done before, whether it's speaking at a conference, doing an oral argument, taking the lead role on a transaction, or trying a case. Everyone starts somewhere. Develop a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset. The first time you do something you aren't going to be excellent at it, but with practice and consistency you will be.

2. Bethany Hickey – Associate, Baker Donelson

What advice do you have for older generations of attorneys working with younger attorneys fresh out of law school?



This is simple survival bias. Junior ranks include employees who will eventually self-select out, whereas senior ranks necessarily include only those employees who "lasted." It is simply untrue that the newest members of the workforce don't have the same work ethic as those before them. Projecting this falsehood onto junior employees can be demoralizing.

There is, however, a meaningful difference between today's entry-level employees and those of generations past. The cost of living has outpaced wages; that's just a fact. Today's young workforce no longer has faith that hard work will lead to a life of financial stability, let alone one of comfort. If that is going to be the case, they may as well "work to live" rather than "live to work." I suspect that sympathizing with this unique challenge will cultivate loyalty and enthusiasm.

3. Sarah Timm – President, CEO, Parthenon Management Group

What do you see as challenges for intergenerational teams?



One of the biggest challenges I see working with intergenerational teams is setting appropriate expectations – aligning goals, communication styles, work ethics, and feedback preferences across age groups. Each generation (e.g., Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z) brings unique values shaped by their upbringing and social norms of their generations. When expectations aren't clearly defined or mutually understood, misalignment can lead to confusion, frustration, and reduced team performance.

4. Randall Lee – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What do you see as challenges for intergenerational teams?



Sometimes there can be misunderstandings in expectations within intergenerational teams. All team members need to listen to each other and try to understand different working styles. Whether new or older generation, we share in the same goal to produce the best product for our clients.

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

My advice for the newest generation of attorneys is to embrace new technology (including AI) in the practice of law and be in position to lead and teach the older generation. It seems inevitable that a successful legal practice depends on how technology will make us more efficient and productive. We may be at a new inflection point in technology that will fundamentally change the practice of law. Believe it or not, there are folks who may have started working when law firms were unsure whether email should be used for client communication! Perhaps we are at a similar stage in the evolution of technology.

5. Caldwell Collins – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What positives do you think intergenerational teams present?



Having multiple generations at the table creates a dynamic team environment where we benefit from different strengths. Younger lawyers contribute fresh perspectives, technological fluency, and a readiness to challenge outdated case management norms. More experienced colleagues bring deep institutional knowledge, hard-won courtroom intuition and business judgment, and high-level strategic insight. We get better when we add diversity of thought and lived experience to the mix.

6. Benjamin J. Sparks – Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, Ensign Services Inc.

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?



The legal world is incredibly small, particularly when you settle into your practice area and will be even smaller if you find yourself in a niche industry. At the end of the day, all you have is your reputation, and you should take care to act accordingly.

7. Terry Kitay – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What positives do you think intergenerational teams present?

Reminders to the older generation that times and expectations have changed for the better. There's also institutional knowledge and wisdom that the older team members can impart just by being part of the team, and I'm glad my younger team members appear to recognize that. In other words, there's still value in experience.



What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

Work hard, remember your professional and personal reputation is everything in the practice of law, and try not to lose a sense of humor. Know that everyone struggles, and struggling is just part of the learning curve. Anxiety is real, and everyone has it to some degree, even if not everyone admits it.

Try to find a mentor. I never participated in a formal "mentoring" process as a young attorney, but I can certainly point to two or three colleagues who, while they might not have known it, were mentoring me as a young lawyer. I regret not having the opportunity to more formally solidify those relationships as mentor-mentee.

8. Bahati Mutisya – Of Counsel, Baker Donelson

What positives do you think intergenerational teams present?

So many. The diversity in experiences of intergenerational teams is incredibly valuable because our clients will also be made up of intergenerational teams and industries. Having intergenerational teams allows us to be the most knowledgeable and relatable trusted advisors to our clients as possible.



What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

Ask lots of questions and take as many opportunities to observe more seasoned attorneys as possible. You can learn so much by just being in the room.

9. Christine Gilliam – Senior Associate Counsel, Signature HealthCARE

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

Respect the experience and wisdom of your elders, but do not be afraid to offer fresh ideas, Approach substantive work and processes with curiosity.



10. Philip Clark – General Counsel, American Health Partners

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

There might be a tendency in the newer generation to rely too heavily on technology – which has its advantages but cannot replace the discipline required to develop close attention to detail and the knowledge that comes from personally performing multiple reviews of contracts or pleadings.



The development of critical thinking skills may be delayed if you are using AI to review every contract or brief. I think the keys for success for young attorneys have not changed – building relationships of trust with partners and clients, being teachable, but most importantly, at the end of the day the lawyer has to be accountable for their work.

11. Bruce Doeg – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What advice do you have for the newest generation of attorneys?

There has never been a more exciting time to practice law. So much change. So many complex problems to solve. You have grown up with technology. Be curious. Be proactive. Be positive. You are the key to the future.



12. Katie Martin – VP Operations Legal Counsel, Trilogy Health Services

What positives do you think intergenerational teams present?

I think working with an intergenerational team at a senior living company offers the opportunity to introduce varying perspectives when it comes to how our industry and its caregivers are viewed by society, which is invaluable as we try to evolve and come up with better ways to manage our risks and defend our campuses.



13. Christy Tosh Crider – Shareholder, Baker Donelson

What positives do you think intergenerational teams present?

Research shows that diverse teams outperformed non-diverse teams. Diverse teams show significantly higher creativity because they bring richer information—especially when working collaboratively. Intergenerational teams are no exception because our perspectives are influenced by the eras in which we have lived. My immediate teams is made up of professionals spanning four decades. The richness of our divergent yet complimentary points of view makes our work product, and client service, infinitely better.

