

Chapter 4

The Generation Game

So, you want to be a Bad Ass Partner? Buckle up, because it's not just about billing hours and nailing your legal arguments. It's also about mastering one thing most associates completely overlook: *understanding the people who lead you*.

Law firms are generational jungles.

Partners aren't just older; they're wired differently. Their values, ambitions, and fears were shaped decades before you walked into your first contracts class.

Understanding the differences in generations isn't some fluffy HR exercise. It's Mindset Mastery 101. It's how you figure out what drives the people writing your reviews, deciding your bonus, and voting you into the partnership. If you can bridge the gap - you can stop feeling like an alien and start building influence.

Meet the Generations in Your Firm

Most law firms today are made up of three very different generations: Boomers, Gen X, and now some Millennial partners are running the show. Here's what drives them - and why they sometimes drive you crazy.

Baby Boomers (Born 1946–1964)

- **What Made Them:** Post-WWII optimism, economic growth, hard hustle.
- **Core Values:** Loyalty, hierarchy, paying your dues.
- **Why They Lead Like This:** They fought for every inch in a crowded field. They value work ethic and face time because that's what worked for them.

Bad Ass Hack:

Show commitment. Be responsive. Demonstrate you can grind when it counts - but also bring fresh ideas without sounding like you're calling them dinosaurs.

Generation X (Born 1965–1980)

- **What Made Them:** Economic recessions, corporate layoffs, and the rise of tech.
- **Core Values:** Independence, efficiency, no-BS attitude.
- **Why They Lead Like This:** They hate micromanagement because they lived through it. They value autonomy and results.

Bad Ass Hack:

Be self-sufficient. Handle your business without constant handholding. Respect their need for balance - they started that trend.

Millennial Partners (Born 1981–1996)

- **What Made Them:** Internet boom, 9/11, Great Recession.
- **Core Values:** Collaboration, purpose, tech-forward solutions.
- **Why They Lead Like This:** They want impact and culture, not just hours. They're about efficiency and leveraging tech to work smarter.

Bad Ass Hack:

Speak their language. Show you're adaptable, team-oriented, and value innovation - but don't come off entitled.

Why This Matters for Your Mindset

When you understand their context, you stop taking it personally. That's a mindset shift that will save your sanity *and* position you for success.

Bridging this gap also helps you earn trust.

Partners promote associates who make their lives easier - who understand how they operate without constant friction. When you learn to flex your style to meet theirs, you become indispensable.

The Payoff: Generational intelligence is a weapon. Use it.

- Learn what shaped your partners.
- Adapt without losing yourself.
- Stop complaining about “old-school thinking” and start strategizing how to work with it.

You don't have to agree with their way; you just have to understand it. Because the faster you master this, the faster you go from associate to Bad Ass Partner in the making.

Quick-Reference Guide: Generational Traits & How to Win

Generation	Core Values	What They Expect	How to Win with Them
Baby Boomers	Loyalty, hierarchy, hard work	Long hours, face time, paying dues	Show commitment, be responsive, respect experience
Gen X	Independence, efficiency	Results without hand-holding	Take initiative, deliver without drama
Millennial	Collaboration, innovation	Teamwork, tech use, purpose-driven work	Embrace new tools, communicate openly, be adaptable

Exercise (use the chart above to fill out section)

Name of First Line Manager:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	

Practice Chair:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	

Other Influential Partners:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	

Other Influential Partners:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	

Other Influential Partners:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	

Other Influential Partners:	
Generation:	
What are their core values:	
What do they expect:	
How to Win With Them	
Any Specific Actions:	