



## Lowenstein Sandler's Women's Initiative Network Podcast: Real Talk

**Episode 30:  
Introducing Gen Z: Understanding the New Generation of Lawyers and How Their Perspective Could Shift Workplace Norms**

[Rachel Moseson Dikovics](#), [Amanda K. Cipriano](#), [Claire Dronzek](#), [Lauren Russell](#)

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**Amanda Cipriano:** Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler Podcast Series: The Women's Initiative Network, Real Talk. I'm Amanda Cipriano, an associate attorney and member of the Women's Initiative Network at Lowenstein Sandler. Before we begin, please take a moment to subscribe to our podcast series at [lowenstein.com/podcasts](https://lowenstein.com/podcasts), or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.

**Rachel Dikovics:** My name is Rachel Dikovics and I'm an associate in Lowenstein's White Collar Criminal Defense Practice Group.

**Claire Dronzek:** My name's Claire Dronzek and I'm a third-year associate in our ECVC practice group.

**Lauren Russell:** My name is Lauren Russell and I'm a first-year associate in the corporate program.

**Amanda Cipriano:** On today's episode of "Real Talk," we're talking about the most mysterious and interesting people in the workplace today: Gen Z. This generation grew up with the internet for most of their lives and that unfettered access to information and digital technology will play a pivotal role in how the legal profession is shaped for years to come.

**Rachel Dikovics:** Gen Z workers have brought a fresh perspective on work-life balance to their workplaces. According to a May 2023 survey released by legal recruiting firm, Major, Lindsey & Africa, the three top priorities for Gen Z attorneys are work-life balance, organizational values and mentorship and training opportunities. On today's episode, we're looking at how Gen Z's values and outlook on work may actually benefit women in the long run, and we'll offer advice on how law firms can attract and retain Gen Z talent. Amanda and I are millennials. That may be surprising, especially as to Amanda. So we've invited two of our junior attorneys, Claire and Lauren to join us today.

**Amanda Cipriano:** To start up our conversation, I wanted to share that the survey found that 62% of participants would willingly give up part of their compensation for more time off and that 60% want a more flexible schedule. What is your reaction to these figures and what do you think that means for big law?

**Rachel Dikovics:** So I'm happy to start from kind of the law firm perspective. I'm not really surprised to hear that. I think that Gen Z as Amanda really alluded to in her introduction, had a major value shift as compared to previous generations and especially generations further out than Millennials, and I'm not surprised that Gen Z respondents would be willing to give up compensation for more time off. I think that entering the workforce during and immediately after the COVID epidemic really shaped how people view work and what work should entail and also priorities.

I think it was a time when a lot of people reset their personal priorities in terms of what matters to them and maybe not feeling like work is the end all be all in their lives anymore in a way that I think people did more often before COVID. And yeah, I actually, I think it's kind of a fresh perspective and I'm interested to see how law firms will adjust to that value shift over time because the way law firms function today, especially large law firms, and this is a lot of what we're going to talk about today, is people are expected to be on call nearly 24/7. And for this generation of attorneys, I think that is going to be a lot harder to accept than for previous generations.

**Claire Dronzek:** I definitely agree with everything Rachel said and those thoughts on the effects on big law, especially with regard to the survey results for a more flexible schedule. I think after COVID, Gen Z was able to prove that they really can work from anywhere at times that are convenient for them, and they were really taught how to make it work by virtue of the pandemic and either virtual school or internships. It was a different world, so they never really had five days in an office, and so it's no surprise that they would want a more flexible schedule, maybe hybrid working in an office a few days a week, but otherwise working from home or remote.

And in terms of compensation for more time off, I think that Gen Z is ... People that are in Gen Z now are in really pivotal times in their lives, whether it be family, figuring out what they're going to do personally in terms of where they'll end up after law school or whatever professional school, they might be in. And I think that more time off for these big life events has become important for people, especially like Rachel said, after the pandemic when everything changed, and your priorities shifted.

**Amanda Cipriano:** And if firms are going to stick with flexible schedules, how does this benefit the women already at the firm?

**Rachel Dikovics:** I think it benefits women in a lot of ways, and this is something that we've talked about on previous episodes of podcasts, and I'm sure we'll talk about more on future episodes of the podcast, but I think that women in particular, wherever they are in their personal lives, typically have more to do outside of work than their male colleagues in terms of home responsibilities, whether they're single or married or have kids or don't, responsibilities with their other family members, women just have a very different experience outside of the traditional workday than most men do, in my experience, at least.

For me, I look back on pre-COVID times and wonder why we ever went to the office five days a week and why that was just the accepted thing that we did. And I think about now in the interim, I've had my first child and I can't

imagine being away from her from eight to seven, five days a week. I basically wouldn't see her. And I think that's what people used to deal with, and I think that for women in particular, the decision to come back to work after having children is difficult regardless of how you do it.

But being able to work from home at least part of the time for me at least, has been a huge benefit and has made that decision much more doable for me. Age group seniority, marital status, status of having kids or not, more time with your pets. I mean, to me there's a ton of benefits to a flexible schedule and I don't think that women especially would be willing to go back to five days a week in the office.

One other thing that I'd add is flexible schedules are different than reduced schedules to some extent. I think one of the things that, and Lauren and Claire can speak to this more, but I think one of the ideas that really resonates with Gen Z is that they're not necessarily looking to do less work. They're just maybe not looking to be doing it from nine to five with no breaks or in the life of a junior attorney from nine to nine with no breaks. They're looking to do it at times that work for them and allow them to do other things during the day as well.

**Amanda Cipriano:** Another point that the survey found was that only 23% of Gen Z survey participants seek to pursue law firm partnership as a long-term career goal. Claire and Lauren, what do you think about those responses? Do they resonate with you and your peers?

**Claire Dronzek:** I quite frankly was not really surprised at that survey result just because I think in the past few years, people out of college or professional school bounce around to jobs like it's nothing. And I think that generations before us typically, like my parents at least, they always say, "I was in the same job for 20 years. I was in the same job for 15 years." And it's kind of our generation thing, switching around to jobs and moving around to try to find out what you want to do. So I think presenting this survey question to Gen Z this early on in their career might be a little daunting and could be an explanation for that type of response.

**Lauren Russell:** I want to agree with what Claire said. I think I've only been an attorney for seven weeks, so most of my peers have only been working for that long. So it's really hard to think 10 years out about where you see yourself.

**Rachel Dikovics:** You're doing great so far, Lauren.

**Lauren Russell:** Thank you. But it's hard to figure out where you want to see yourself 10, 15, 20 years out when every day I'm learning how to do something completely new. So I think it is a very early on in our career question and it can be daunting. I think to Rachel's point, COVID really presented a value shift in my generation where my college was affected by COVID, my law school experience was affected by COVID, and I think my generation might find it hard to answer a question for 10 years out when you know the world can be turned on its axis in a moment.

**Rachel Dikovics:** Yeah, that's such a good point. I hadn't really thought about that, but I think in a very different but kind of a similar generational impact, I think Millennials were kind of impacted by 9/11 as being sort of this pivotal event in our childhoods, young adulthoods, etc. I think for Gen Z, COVID may be that pivotal event where everything changed and I think it's a really good point that you don't look at the world as being stable and continuing to exist the way it exists today necessarily a week from now or a month from now, or certainly 10 years from now. I think that's a great point, and these big traditional employers to figure out how to engage this new generation and keep them involved and interested in pursuing a long-term path with the same employer.

I think that one of the reasons that you probably see a pretty low percentage of these survey participants interested in partnership is first of all because they're very junior. And I think that what partnership means becomes different the more senior you get and the more time you spend working with partners directly and understanding what that role actually entails. And I think there's also a problem of if the people that you see doing a particular job are not necessarily showing the kind of work-life balance that you want to achieve long-term that may not encourage people to want to do that job. So if you're getting emails at 2 and 4 AM from partners that you're working with, maybe you look at that and think, I don't want that job. And I think the longer you're exposed to legal work, the more you see that the way people work is very individual. I actually think that most people, the more time they spend working in a law firm, I feel like you either, it goes one of two ways.

Either you work at a law firm for a short period of time and you go do something else or you go to another firm, but often I think you go do something else if it's not for you. Or you're going to work at a law firm for much of your career. And it doesn't take most people more than a couple of years, I think to figure out whether a large law firm is a fit for them. But once you do figure that out and you get over the very challenging initial first year I'd say is probably the hardest, I think you can have a better perspective of what a long-term path at your employer might look like. And as you get to a different point in your life, there are different motivators. The partnership is also a particular financial prospect and that can become more of a motivating factor the older you get. So yeah, I'm not surprised to see that, but I think if you were to survey the same people again in three or four years, the answer might be different.

**Claire Dronzek:** I also am curious if the low survey results is a product of certain people that do work fully remote and have very little engagement with the higher ups that their employers. I know some law firms around the country are more receptive to fully remote, and it's curious whether these young associates just don't know what partnership means or how they would achieve it, and that would be kind of a reasoning for the response there.

**Amanda Cipriano:** I think Claire makes a good point and I think it's important for firms to kind of highlight those career paths. I know that Lowenstein has a program where you can hear from partners and hear about their stories or even some of the WIN events we do where we hear about people and the different paths they took to get here, some of those stories on this podcast. I feel like it really opens your eyes to see it's not exactly a linear path, but without hearing

about those stories and career paths, I think I would've thought that you start as a first-year associate, and you make your way to partner and there's no in between. So I think it's important like Claire said, to see where you can get.

And now another factor in the Gen Z outlook on work is that Gen Z and Millennials have an increased awareness of global social issues due largely to the fact that they had internet access from a young age. With the addition of social media, these generations can see lifetime conflicts and how situations affect people all over the world. As a result, the survey also found that Gen Z attorneys placed significant weight on the moral values of their prospective employers. What can law firms do to allow employees to pursue those interests and values?

**Lauren Russell:** So as someone who just started working and is very fresh off also the recruiting process, I think allowing attorneys to pursue those values within the firm structure is really important. Part of why I chose Lowenstein was because of the robust pro bono emphasis, the center for public interest because of the mentorship programs and educational opportunities. And I think for me that was something I knew when I was looking at a firm that I wanted somewhere that really valued that. So keeping those at the forefront is I think especially attractive to Gen Z, speaking from my experience and a lot of my classmates coming right out of law school.

**Rachel Dikovics:** I think that's a great point. Our pro bono program is actually one of the reasons that I chose Lowenstein as well. It really stood out to me among other large New Jersey firms in that way. And my law school Rutgers really emphasized public service and I think anybody who went there probably would say the same. And to me, our firm in particular seemed like the best of both worlds in terms of doing prestigious private sector work while also having an opportunity to make an impact through pro bono work. And that continues to be a big part of my practice today and continues to be a big part of most of my colleagues' practices. Attorneys will be familiar with the concept of Madden hours and people getting Madden hours are few and far between at our firm and I think that's really a huge positive.

Lauren also mentioned mentorship programs. We have some formal and informal mentorship programs that I think make a big difference. I think forming mentor relationships is the number one most important thing to career development and career enhancement if you can find somebody in your practice group or outside of your practice group as well. But I think it's important to find someone in your group who will mentor you. It makes such a big difference to have somebody who's invested in your career and in giving you opportunities and just being in your corner. I think without that, people have a lot of trouble fully engaging and I think what Claire mentioned before is probably true that a lot of these survey participants maybe are fully remote. And as much as I love remote work, I do think it's important to spend time in person as well.

And for me, when the pandemic happened, I'd already been working at the firm for a few years, so I kind of already had those relationships, but I think to come in not knowing anybody and then to be fully remote and not spend time with people in person would make it very hard to feel integrated in the firm

and to feel like you had genuine relationships. So I think getting to know people, whether it's through a formal mentorship program or just organically is hugely important to retaining young employees.

**Amanda Cipriano:** How does an awareness of social issues positively impact women in a firm setting?

**Lauren Russell:** I think an awareness of these social issues really helps push traditional male-dominated fields forward. We have organizations like WIN that really help create networks to help support and nurture women in our firm. And as a young woman who's just starting out my career, I have felt very supported because we're acknowledging the history of the legal field and moving forward through this type of awareness.

**Rachel Dikovics:** I think it's also really helpful through programs like WIN just to acknowledge, like I mentioned earlier, that women and men in the law do not necessarily have the same experiences quite a lot of the time, we do not have the same experiences. Whether that has to do with how other people treat us, what's happening in our lives outside of work, whether or not you're respected in a particular interaction professionally, there's just a lot of things that women deal with in the practice of law or any other kind of traditionally male field that I think require particularized support.

And having WIN for me has been one of the best aspects of being at Lowenstein. And I think that most people who are really involved in WIN would say the same. It's what you make it to the extent you can be involved or not, but the more involved you are, at least in my experience, the more supportive mentorship relationships you'll form, the more other women you'll know at the firm. I mean, I feel like I know most of the women at the firm as a result of being involved in WIN, and I think that law firms really should prioritize programs like that because they're a huge, huge retention booster. Gen Z also values mental health, self-care, overall wellness. How can these values impact women and what can we learn from this generation valuing those priorities?

**Amanda Cipriano:** Well, I think the value of those priorities are already present in a lot of what we talk about. I mean, we talk about burnout, mental load, setting boundaries, and I think all of these ideas come from the Gen Z emphasis on this, and I think they're just helping firms to be more empathetic places and places where we can feel comfortable telling our colleagues when something's going on and when we can't meet a deadline or if we need a day off for something other than being sick. I think that having an emphasis and recognizing especially burnout for junior associates, I think the fact that that is kind of taking precedent even at more senior levels of the firm can only benefit women. I think, like Rachel said earlier, women have the job of the household a lot and a lot of that goes unnoticed by senior male attorneys who may have never had to think about having a grocery list or grocery shopping for a household, coming home to dinner.

I think that the more that we talk about these issues and how it can affect everybody, women and men alike is just really important. And I think that that's one of the greatest contributions Gen Z is bringing to work in all

sectors. So we touched a little earlier about the retention of Gen Z lawyers and another issue with this future retention may be that Gen Z feel like if we don't like the job, we won't do it and we'll let you know it. How do we address that and how do we keep Gen Z at our firms?

**Rachel Dikovics:**

I think that women who are mid-level and above should, and men too, but just talking about women particularly here, need to understand what the priorities of Gen Z associates may be. But at the same time, I think that new attorneys, especially in large law firms in particular, should recognize that they're paid a lot of money very early in their career. And the reason that they're paid that much is because they're expected to be available. What they lack in experience, they can contribute in availability and work hours. And I think that's just something that is good to understand and it's not forever. That's what your top value is.

I mean, most junior attorneys don't come into law firms with any huge subject matter expertise or any subject matter expertise really, if you're coming right out of law school, I mean you're just starting and that's completely fair. But what you can do is follow instructions and be responsive and be available. And junior associates are tasked with wait nights, weekend work, tedious tasks, and that's kind of the way it is for the first couple of years because other people have kind of done their time and that's just part of starting at a large law firm. That's just early legal work.

So I think that it's important for mid-levels and partners to express appreciation for the work that juniors are doing. I mean, that's just good management. I think that Gen Z may be more likely to have a really negative reaction to things that previous generations maybe just would take as a "Well, I need to have a thicker skin. It's me. I should respond differently." I like this about Gen Z. I think that they're a little bit more of it's not me actually, you're not behaving correctly. And I think that we need to make sure people feel valued while also setting clear expectations for what new attorneys should be expecting to do. And I'm really interested in hearing from Lauren and Claire about what they want to see from mid-levels and partners in terms of communicating the hierarchy of a law firm, but recognizing that hierarchy is maybe less important to Gen Z than it was to previous generations.

**Claire Dronzek:**

Yeah, I can speak to this and just as you said that mid-levels and partners have a big responsibility here it is on Gen Z too, to have that upwards respect and realize that these people have been doing it for a long time and they know what works. But I think from partners and mid-levels, it's important to just kind of reiterate to the juniors how team-oriented this job really is. It's a big team on a deal. It's a big team on a case, and we all ultimately are part of one team. So helping juniors understand why these tedious tasks matter, how they're contributing to the larger goal here, what you're doing day in and day out is super important. I think that it's easy for juniors to kind of get lost in pushing paper and doing certain tasks, but if you understand why a deadline is important, why you're doing what you're doing, and also if you're given the opportunity to ask these questions after you finish an assignment, it's really important and helps retain talent and helps Gen Z understand this is why junior associates are really important here.

**Lauren Russell:** I think as someone who has just started and is learning to acclimate not only to working in a law firm but just working generally because I am K-JD, I think you understand or you think you understand the expectations of law firm life before you get into it, but I think a big part of it is helping with the transition from student to attorney. I think for me, a big part of it is what you said, Rachel, feeling valued. Even if you're not doing the most groundbreaking work, knowing it is helping your team is huge.

I think for me, the mentorship program we have in place has really helped with this experience and transition and not feeling kind of lost in all of it. Shout out to Claire who is my peer-to-peer mentor and has answered every dumb question I have texted her over the last almost two months. I don't necessarily think all of Gen Z's perspective is if I don't like it, I'll leave. I think I'm really thankful for this job and I know all of my other Gen Z peers in our class are as well and are ready to work hard. But I think it is also you want to go someplace where you feel valued, where you feel your work is valuable to the team, and I think it's a matter of communicating that especially early on.

**Rachel Dikovics:** And for what it's worth, I think that for mid-levels and partners, it makes sense to give that kind of positive feedback to people because people are way more motivated to do a good job for you and to respond at an off hour for you and to spend extra time on something for you or cover something for you if you've been nice to them and if you've told them their work matters, explained why their work matters and given them feedback that can actually help them and giving them feedback in a kind and respectful way.

I know we talk a lot on here about praise, publicly criticize privately, keeping those best practices for feedback in mind. I know for me personally, people who I have a really good relationship with, I don't say no to work for them ever, and part of that is because I feel loyalty to that person and I think for mid-levels and partners who are giving out work, inspiring people to feel that kind of loyalty toward you is going to yield better results for you as well. So it doesn't just make sense. It's not coddling people. I think it actually is just more effective in the long run.

**Claire Dronzek:** And I think in addition to feedback, also just opportunity for juniors, I think some of the best relationships I have are with people who took an interest in me in my first and second year and just said they would reach out to me and say, "I think this would be a good opportunity for you to work on this deal or work on this client." And that kind of made me say, okay, they really value me here, they want me to succeed by getting this experience. So same thing, that sense of loyalty just grows when you do get opportunity and true honest feedback in real time is super important.

**Amanda Cipriano:** And I know sometimes mid-levels or Millennials now are referred to as some kind of sandwich generation because at the end of the day, if the junior associates aren't doing your work, you're kind of stuck with it. So I think that it benefits all parties to just work in positive way and work with the idea that this is a team and that you being kind and providing that feedback and sometimes helpful criticism is only going to help you in the future when you may be stuck doing something that a junior attorney didn't want to do for you. So with all this in mind, how can we be more inspirational in the workplace?



**Claire Dronzek:** I think that women have the opportunity to be inspirational to people inside and outside of their departments at big law firms, especially a lot of Gen Zers kind of say, "How do I get to be the partner who also has kids, who also seems to make it all work and has this amazing work-life balance?" I think that women leaders and firms can act as mentors to people, whether they're giving them work or not. Some of the best relationships I've made with women at the firm have been through WIN meetings and just kind of spur of the moment conversations and a connection was made from there. So just taking the time to talk to juniors, make time in your schedule for a coffee break, which is usually important for a lot of us during the day, is a really great opportunity to make connections and make Gen Z attorneys feel inspired in the workplace.

**Rachel Dikovics:** I think it's important for mid-levels and partners and anybody who's potentially in these roles that may be kind of aspirational to brand new attorneys to be honest about what it took to get there, what concessions they've had to make either at work or at home to make that work. Just kind of what goes into what's presented to the outside world as to having it all. So talking about things like taking leaves and how did that affect you? Did it affect your career? What was it like to come back? Those were things that were relevant to me very recently and I wanted to hear from my more senior colleagues that they were fine coming back from their leaves, and I did hear that. It was really helpful. And I think it's important to just be real with people and I think that's one of the things that WIN does so well at Lowenstein.

I mean, our podcast is literally called "Real Talk," that's kind of the point, but I think it's so critical to be honest and not to gatekeep about how you made things work and what was hard. I think admitting when things are hard is actually extremely helpful because things are not always going to be easy. I mean, Amanda gets to hear me complain all the time of whatever is stressing me out that week, and I think that's actually a good thing. I mean, presenting to junior people as having this just perfect, nothing ever goes wrong, you never have any gaps anywhere, you never ever drop the ball at home or at work. It's not realistic. I think it's important for people to understand what reality is so that when they're dealing with something that's challenging, they know that that happens and they're going to get through it, and nobody expects them to be 100% perfect 100% of the time, even though it may feel like that's what you have to achieve. That's not possible, and I think it's important for people to be honest about that.

**Amanda Cipriano:** I think that especially in kind of a volatile market, it's also important for women to take interest in juniors who might not have a full plate and tell them how they can be of value to the firm, whether it's through what Lowenstein has called eligible firm hours, writing articles that will be worthwhile to their career and recognized as true effort day in and day out, even when billables might not be as high as normal. I think it's really, really helpful for Gen Zers to know other ways they can contribute to the workplace other than billable hours.

**Lauren Russell:** I want to take it down a step further. For me, as I've been starting out, what's been really valuable is just having conversations with mainly women attorneys across the firm about kind of the unspoken expectations. Just learning how to be a good junior has been really valuable. So I know I'm on

this podcast right now with three women I look up to in the firm and knowing the steps you've taken to be happier at work, to be happier with your work product, to make good relationships. None of this is really obvious when you start out and I think learning the steps you've taken, not as someone who is a partner or who's been doing this for 30 years, but someone who is still in the grand scheme of things pretty new to it has been really valuable and inspirational to me. I think we all went to the same law school, so we've all kind of taken very similar steps to get here. I think that's made a huge difference for me. Not just big picture, but small picture day to day.

**Amanda Cipriano:** I know I asked the question, but I resonate with what all of you said. I think kind of being in the middle now, I knew Rachel since I was a 1L in law school, and I've been able to see her career growth and like she said, her honesty about things going on in her life and things going on at work and how even though it may seem like everything's going well and you're doing great and people like you, sometimes you don't always feel that way. And I think that it's up to us as we get more senior to reach out to junior associates and make sure that they feel heard and make sure that they feel like there's a place where they can mess up and talk about it and be honest about those things.

I think that it's really on everyone to just keep giving back to the generations before us that stuck their neck out for us or told us how it was because I think it just creates more honesty and creates a place where you feel like you can celebrate your successes and recognize when some things are not going to go in your way.

**Rachel Dikovics:** I totally agree with you, Amanda. I think that if we get one thing out of this episode, it's that paying it forward is really important, and to our newest generation of attorneys, feeling appreciated and being valued by their employer is really a top priority. So thanks again, Claire and Lauren for joining us as guests. I definitely would love to have you guys back again. This was a really fun conversation. Thanks everybody for listening to another episode of the Women's Initiative Network "Real Talk." We hope you enjoyed it and we'll see you next time.

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