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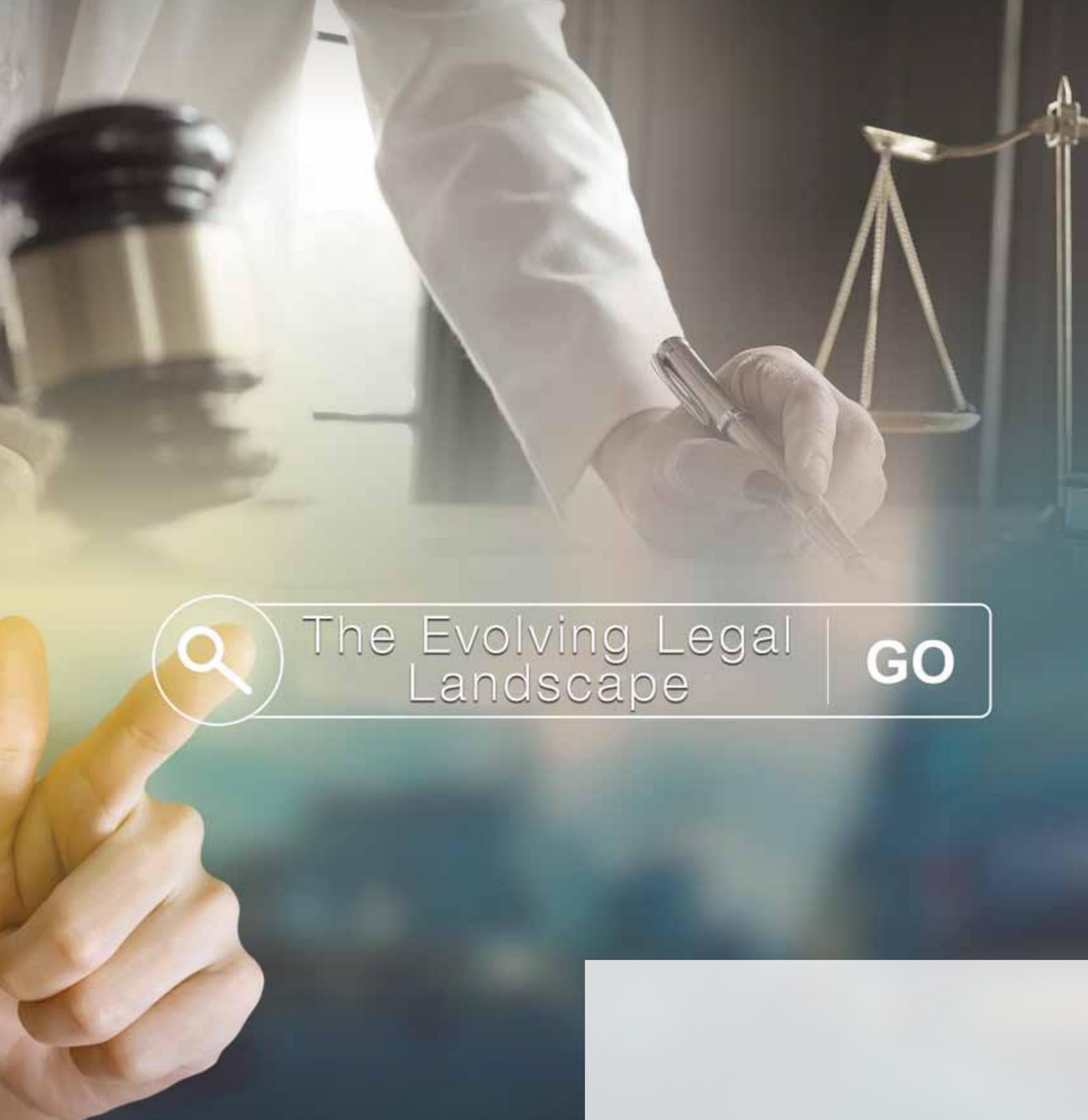
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The Evolving Legal  
Landscape

**GO**

## Generational Perspectives on Adapting to the Evolving Legal Landscape

While the legal landscape is always evolving, the bench and bar have been confronted with a new type of reality for over two years: working remotely. In arguably one of the most people-driven professions, those in law have adapted to how they collaborate and connect with clients, colleagues, and mentors. We invited three attorneys who represent different generations to share some insight into workplace integration, building mentorship networks, and fostering company culture in a post-pandemic world.

### A UNICORN WITH FINE PRINT: A GEN X POINT OF VIEW

By JENNIFER DAVIDOW



Jennifer Davidow

“Are you looking to get back into private practice?” my friend and former colleague Carly Milner messaged me in March 2021. “Because we’re looking for someone like you.” “Someone like me” meant an experienced writer to handle appeals and a complex motion practice.

I was heading into my seventh year as a central staff attorney at the Fourteenth Court of Appeals at the time, and no, I wasn’t looking to get back into private practice. That’s what I’d done for the first fifteen years of my career, and I was happy at the court. But I was looking to continue working from home full time, and that option appeared to be coming to an end for my position at the court. And Carly said they were looking for

someone like me. If that isn’t an ego boost, what is?

“They” were the boutique litigators at Fogler, Brar, O’Neil & Gray. Their work impressed me when I was at the court. Plus, I’d have a friend at the firm on day one. But there was a “but.” Isn’t there always?

“I’d love to talk with them,” I told Carly. “But I want to work from home exclusively. If they’re willing to entertain that idea, let’s set up a time to meet. If not, no hard feelings, but I’ll stay where I am.” Well, we Zoomed a time or two, hammered out some details, and yada yada yada, I’m still pinching myself at landing this unicorn job I wasn’t looking for.

The devil’s in the “yadas,” though. Given my long career and Carly’s seal of approval, I was in the luxurious position of not needing to convince Fogler, Brar, O’Neil, and Gray of my abilities as *my employers*. Instead, I needed to convince each of them—Murray, Jas, Robin, and Michelle—as *fellow colleagues* that I’d be a team player from my clubhouse ten miles west of theirs. Would I be willing to come to the office when they needed me? Of course. Could I handle the logistics of working on my own? Yeah, because if there’s one thing government work teaches you, it’s how to do everything yourself. It helped that this was a new position. They’d never had someone devoted solely to writing. We could experiment as the contours of the job drew themselves.

What helped most of all, though, was the timing. The legal world had been working from home for a year because of COVID-19. Everyone knew it could be done. In the end, it felt serendipitous. We took a leap together, and I couldn’t be happier.

Still reading? That was the glossy part of the brochure. Let me show you the fine print.

Every relationship takes work. At least half the work requires being in the same room together, and that’s what we don’t have. I don’t run into them in the breakroom. We don’t eat lunch together. I know their kids’ names, but I don’t know their kids. We’re working on it, but it takes effort and commitment.

It’s tough professionally, too. For two decades, I wandered the halls when I was stymied on a tricky argument, plopping myself onto my colleagues’ guest chairs to get their take. Lunches with coworkers often morphed into brainstorming sessions about our dockets. I can’t tell you how many cases I’ve talked through with friends over Doozo dumplings. I can still do that, but it’s harder.

And that’s the only reservation I would have for a younger lawyer deciding whether to work from home. If most of her colleagues will work in the brick-and-mortar office, I would encourage her to join them in their

clubhouse. Starting out as a lawyer is hard enough. I wouldn't add the challenges distance creates.

Where I have it easy, though, is the support I get from my firm—the lawyers, our paralegals, and our administrative staff. They set me up with a home office, complete with three monitors and a webcam and a fancy hole puncher. (Thank you, Michelle.) They send me anything I need, from reference books to printer ink. When I decided to work at the office for a couple of weeks for a change of scenery, everyone welcomed me and cleared out a conference room for me. We ate lunch together.

Working from home isn't for everyone. A hybrid arrangement may be better for many lawyers, especially those new to the profession. For me, though, working from home exclusively is what I've always wanted. I'm proud to be part of a firm that was willing to give it a shot. 🏠

*Jennifer Davidow is senior counsel at Fogler, Brar, O'Neil & Gray LLP.*

## NAVIGATING THE NEW LEGAL LANDSCAPE AS A MILLENNIAL

By **AKILAH F. CRAIG**



**Akilah F. Craig**

As a first-generation American who left home and moved to the United States for college years ago, I'd long become familiar with connecting with friends and family abroad through various video conferencing platforms. So when my firm, like almost every other one, announced in March 2020 that we would be working from home for the foreseeable future and my calendar became filled with Teams meetings and Zoom happy hours, CLEs and networking events went virtual, and court appearances and depositions began to be conducted remotely, I felt uniquely qualified to handle this new way of practicing law. In fact, I welcomed the benefits and efficiencies I knew would arise.

For example, I immediately noticed the flexibility remote work provided. I could calmly begin my workday without worrying about running late due to a stopped train or traffic delays. If I needed to clear my head or mull over a complicated legal question, I could do a home workout or take a walk around my neighborhood, rather than staring aimlessly at my screen or ambling around the office distracting others.

At the same time, the Black Lives Matter movement had erupted onto the world stage in a way I'd never seen before. For the first time in my career, I found myself engaging with my colleagues about the "Black experience" in the workplace. Yet a culture of treating discussions about race as too political for professional settings often made these interactions uncomfortable for both me and my coworkers, many of whom were just now becoming aware of the systemic issues that continue to contribute to the underrepresentation of Black women, and racial minorities

in general, in the legal profession. Working remotely meant that I did not need to pretend to be okay or hide in my office with each report of police brutality or targeted mass shootings on the news, and I could instead process these events from the privacy of home. I also began to organically develop deep connections with my Black colleagues who were also navigating these issues from their homes across the country. People whom I would not have otherwise interacted with, except at the annual firm holiday party, became a video call away to check in and provide support.

However, I also noticed the disappearing barriers between my home and work life. I've never had a nine-to-five type legal job, but there was a noticeable uptick in non-emergency emails, calls, and meetings with partners and clients well into the night and on weekends. And regardless of how well-intentioned the desire to keep firm and office culture going without in-person interactions, situations that pre-pandemic would have been handled via email or a request for availability to schedule a call now were handled through unplanned video conferences. It seemed that some of the flexibility remote work provided became eroded by external expectations of constant availability, along with my own drive to prove my value to the firm, given that only a few years prior I had witnessed the devastating effect the 2008 recession had on my friends' legal careers.

Like most millennials, I have had to adapt to rapid technological advances in the means and methods by which we communicate, unprecedented economic uncertainty, and ever-increasing social awareness for most of my adult life. As such, I believe all of that has prepared me for being plunged into a remote work environment, and now adapting to a hybrid in-office/remote workplace. Choosing to work remotely gives me the flexibility to work from anywhere as needed, while going to the office allows me to keep my home work-free (deadlines permitting). My experiences during the pandemic made me more adept at knowing when it's best for me to be in the office on a particular day, and when working from home is more advantageous. It also helped me develop a skillset to cultivate meaningful relationships with clients whom I've never met in person. My preference between remote and in-office work is situationally dependent; however, having the flexibility to choose what works best for me and my internal and external clients is more important to me, and I presume most millennials, than the return to any one-size-fits-all model. 🏠

*Akilah F. Craig is an employment attorney with Locke Lord LLP who defends employers in, and before, federal and state courts and administrative agencies. She also counsels clients on a wide range of employment matters, regularly authors articles, and presents at CLEs on employment-related topics.*

## BRIDGING THE REMOTE WORKPLACE GAP: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GEN Z

By **XPERANZA UVIEDO**

When I began my first-year associate position, workplaces were transitioning out of fully remote work and deciding how their em-



**Xperanza Uviedo**

employees could safely return to the office. Although Texas had eased its COVID-19 restrictions and vaccines were available to those who wanted them, spreading COVID-19 in the workplace was still a significant concern. Like most law firms, mine allowed employees to work remotely when the pandemic began. However, during this transition period, the firm had to determine whether to allow employees to work from home permanently.

Ultimately, my firm adopted a hybrid policy that required all employees to work in the office on Wednesdays and at least one additional day of their choice. Starting as a new attorney remotely and transitioning into a hybrid workplace has given me insight on how a law firm can support a new attorney's integration into the remote workplace by intentionally creating social opportunities during the onboarding process and providing a structured virtual mentorship program.

### **Onboarding**

Onboarding a new attorney in a hybrid or remote workplace can be difficult. As a new attorney, I was unfamiliar with most other attorneys in the firm. Although I had opportunities to engage with my colleagues through collaborative work, I had few opportunities to interact with my remote colleagues who were not

assigned to my cases. Even through virtual communication, it was difficult for me to understand the personality types of the other attorneys without designated social opportunities. I imagine these difficulties are amplified in firms that have a mixture of hybrid and fully remote employees because chance interactions are even less likely. To facilitate the new attorney's integration into the firm, the firm should create social opportunities in the initial weeks of onboarding. The social opportunities can include in-person social activities that all employees are required to attend or one-on-one virtual meetings with other members of the firm. The activities should provide the new attorney with a strong foundation to develop continued professional relationships.

### **Virtual Mentorships**

Virtual mentorships can be a great tool to promote an attorney's integration into the remote workplace. Although remote work has benefits, I sometimes felt disengaged from the workplace and my colleagues if I worked remotely for an entire week. Luckily, I had colleagues who made efforts to have casual conversations before discussing our tasks. Although they were not officially mentors, they helped me stay connected and engaged in the workplace.

Without the casual conversations common to in-person workplaces, mentors can provide a sense of belonging and inclusion to new attorneys in the remote workplace. Achieving effective



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