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I am fortunate to be a lawyer, proud to be this year's chair of the Young Lawyers Section of the Connecticut Bar Association, and grateful to those who have preceded me and those who have helped me to this position. With that introduction, I will address a serious concern regarding the future of our bar.

Young lawyers...

- "are not interested in bar service."
- "are too focused on work-life balance."
- "won't put in the hours."
- "aren't loyal to their jobs."
- "are unprofessional."

Three of those statements are precise quotes, the others are my best recollection of statements that I have heard expressed by more senior lawyers at bar association events, sometimes by lawyers for whom I have respect and admiration. I do not single out any particular organization for that con-

The Kids These Days

By David A. McGrath

tent. I have attended events and meetings of at least six different bar associations, including too many sections thereof to count. Whether you find yourself nodding along in agreement, rolling your eyes, or getting angry as you read those statements, those sentiments are common enough among senior lawyers. There is a divide in our profession.

What is indisputably true, is that all of today's more senior lawyers will eventually leave the profession. When those lawyers have moved on, the only folks left standing to replace them will be the young lawyers of today and tomorrow. Accordingly, if we value bar associations as a form of civic engagement, we must bring young lawyers into the fold and demonstrate that value to them. In contemplating how to do so, it is worth exploring the differences in the formative experiences of today's young lawyers as compared with those of many yesteryears. In the interest of brevity, I will rely exclusively upon gross generalities in three particular areas: loans, jobs, and family.

Student loans are critical to the experience of young lawyers. Once upon a time, it was possible to earn enough with summer or part-time employment to pay the next year's law school tuition. The median annual cost for law school at a public institution in 1985, including tuition and fees, was \$1,792.¹ While not everyone today leaves law school with hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loan debt, it is more the norm than the exception after seven years of schooling at today's costs. In 2012, the

average student loan debt for those who attended a public school, not including undergraduate loans, was \$84,600. That number had nearly doubled in the short time between 2001 and 2012.² It is hard to understate the effect that a mortgage worth of loans, not secured by a house to live in, has upon the lens through which young lawyers view the profession. That amount of debt forces a cost-benefit analysis and frequent second guessing of the degree and profession that did not exist in the prior generation of lawyers.

We must couple today's reality of student loans with the job market that many young lawyers have experienced. For every young lawyer of the last decade who walked straight from graduation to employment, several other perfectly qualified graduates languished in uncertainty and frustration for weeks, months, or years—or gave up on the profession entirely. A recent CNBC article reflects this stark reality, stating, "Only 23% of law school grads say their education was worth the cost...Going to law school and becoming a lawyer used to be seen as a golden ticket to career and financial success but today, few lawyers believe this to actually be the case."³

On top of this, it is worth considering the financial and familial societal changes over the last few decades. In 1960, 72 percent of married couples with children under 18 had only one household member employed outside the home. In 2012 that number had dropped to 37 percent.⁴ It is an unequivocally positive fact that we have come a long

way—and still have a long way to go—in terms of gender equality and employment opportunity. However, the reality today is that both parents frequently work. Thus, young lawyers with children must choose between seeking greater work-life balance and neglecting the next generation.

In sum, young lawyers with unprecedented financial burdens are entering a profession with much less security and stability while balancing much larger responsibilities outside the office. Inasmuch as there may be a grain of truth to any portion of the quotes at the top of this article, it appears more likely to result from environmental forces than from some deficiency of the kids these days.

There is no easy solution to continuing the vitality of our bar associations and the crucial civic engagement that comes with them. My own partial and limited prescription is as follows: When young lawyers choose to add public service to their responsibilities and turn up to offer their time to our bar associations, we must value their contribution, invite their input, and not disparage them by blaming the ills of our profession upon them. Wherever possible, employers must zealously encourage bar and public service among young lawyers and fund their dues and events. Hand-in-hand with encouraging such involvement, private employers must credit young lawyers for their work in bar associations as much as they do with the billable hour, and public employers must allow the time outside the office to make it to meetings and events. Young lawyers must not be faced with the choice between meeting their billable hour requirements and engaging with the bar or public service. It is unrealistic to expect young lawyers to self-fund or use their vacation time in order to be involved in bar service. It is also unrealistic to expect, in today's environment, that young lawyers have the ability to simply do it all if only they would work harder.

There are areas where the legal profession has vastly improved over the past several decades. These improvements are in no small part thanks to the work of our bar associations on such issues as gender

equality and diversity and inclusion, among numerous others. If we want our bar associations to continue that good work, continue to work to develop professionalism and collegiality, continue to work to improve access to justice, continue to work to improve the image of the profession as a worthy endeavor, and so many more areas where the bar associations provide tremendous value, we must succeed in involving our young lawyers. I for one want to continue to be part of a noble profession, not just a business, and believe the work of our bar associations are critical to that mission.

For my own part, I am tremendously indebted to my mentors, who provided me all the opportunities that allowed and encouraged involvement in bar service and public service. I have succeeded in this profession to the extent that I have, in large part because of those who encouraged me. In turn, I have also been greatly assisted by my involvement with the Connecticut Bar Association. I hope to continue to shine a light on the good works of our Young Lawyers Sec-

tion this year as I continue the legacy and tradition that has been carried on through the hard work and dedication of the chairs who came before me. ■

Notes

1. American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, *Law School Tuition* 1985-2012, July 23, 2018 at 3:50 EST, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/lstuition.authcheckdam.pdf; adjusted for inflation that would be \$4,280.
2. American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, *Average Amount Borrowed* 2001-2012, July 23, 2018 at 3:52 EST, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/avg_amnt_brwd.authcheckdam.pdf.
3. Abigail Hess, *Only 23% of law school grads say their education was worth the cost*, CNBC, July 23, 2018 at 3:45 EST, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/21/only-23-percent-of-law-school-grads-say-their-education-was-worth-the-cost.html>.
4. Pew Research Center, *The Rise in Dual Income Households*, June 18, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/.

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