

Are you a “One-Spacer” or “Two-Spacer”? Part 4: Finding Your “Aha” Talent Strategy Moment

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“My greatest strength as a consultant is to be ignorant and ask a few questions.”

—Peter Drucker, the ‘father’ of modern management

“Aha” moments come in all shapes and sizes. I recently had an epiphany that reframed my thinking about talent strategies across generations. Perhaps I’m behind the times, but I recently realized I’m a “two-spacer.”

What’s that you say? When I’m typing I automatically hit the space bar twice after a period. It’s just as routine as brushing my teeth. I’ve always done it that way. Unbeknownst to me, I’ve been making a huge mistake.

If you fit the typical lawyer personality – *skeptical and analytical* – you’ve just counted the spaces after my periods and concluded that I’m full of it. Before you flood the blog with comments telling me I’m contradicting myself, please note that most web browsers condense any number of spaces between sentences in the content of an HTML document into one space. This renders completely useless the effort of people like me who put two spaces after a period.

I learned to type on a typewriter. There, I said it. Back in the day, every character on a typewriter was given the same amount of space on the page: This is called monospaced typesetting. The extra space between sentences was necessary to make it easier to see the beginning of new sentences. Computers now use proportionally spaced fonts which adjust spacing to the size of the letter, making the need for two spaces obsolete.

Why am I bringing all of this up? It’s a generational difference. I recently asked my Gen Y colleague [Geoff Schuler](#) how many spaces he uses after a period. He looked at me as though I was from Mars. His answer: One. I subsequently asked Baby Boomer [Joe Altonji](#) and he also looked me as though I was from another planet. His answer: Two. Still don’t think using two spaces after a period is against the rules? Click [here](#) or [here](#).

My blind eye in spacing made me ponder how many other generational differences I’m failing to recognize. Last week [Marcie Borgal Shunk](#) (*a long-time reformed “two-spacer”*) highlighted core generational differences and offered [creative tactics to bridge communication gaps between clients and law firms](#). Marcie’s insight lead me to feign ignorance, channel my inner Peter Drucker, and ask a few basic questions as to whether Baby Boomers and Next Gen lawyers are actually on the same page when it comes to talent strategy. Consider the following potential generational blind spots:

	Baby Boomers	Next Gen
Attracting Talent	On-Campus Recruiting	Social Media & Community Involvement
	Traditional Interviews	Skills-Based & Behavioral Interviews
	Resume Submissions	LinkedIn Profiles
	Headhunters	Online Recruiting Platforms

How does your firm attract talent? Baby Boomers have historically enjoyed access to a pipeline of intelligent, credentialed, eager new law school graduates. As I pointed out in an earlier blog, not only is this entry-level pipeline contracting, the way firms communicate with and position themselves to potential new hires is also evolving. Whereas Baby Boomers may still look to traditional resumes to evaluate candidates (and make their own lateral moves), Next Gen lawyers increasingly rely on LinkedIn profiles and use social media to evaluate law firms. Accordingly, while potentially insignificant to Baby Boomer lawyers, the importance of resources like Twitter, Above the Law, Wikipedia, Vault and Glassdoor cannot be overlooked as a tool to attract Next Gen talent.

	Baby Boomers	Next Gen
Developing Talent	CLE Programming	Business of Law & Leadership Training
	Summer Associate Programs	Team Learning & Collaboration
	Annual Performance Reviews	Real-Time Feedback

What is the most effective way for your firm to develop talent? The skills required for Baby Boomer lawyers to excel were vastly different than the tools Next Gen lawyers will need to be successful. Training on profitability, project management and process improvement are still evolving concepts at many law firms. Providing real-time feedback may prove challenging for Baby Boomers but Next Gen lawyers are used to constant and quick feedback. They've also grown up to expect two-way conversation – *not lectures* – from parents, teachers and employers.

	Baby Boomers	Next Gen
Retaining Talent	Advancement to Partnership	Horizontal Mobility
	Compensation-Related Benefits	Flexibility-Related Benefits
	Exit Interviews	Stay Interviews

How can your firm reduce unwanted attrition? Retaining talent at law firms isn't the old numbers game it used to be. In his recent commentary [Is the Legal Profession Showing Its Age?](#) Bill Henderson illuminated that traditional law firm associates have been slowly supplanted by staff attorneys, permanent of counsel lawyers and non-equity partners, the latter which make up 40% of large law firm partners (defined as AmLaw200/NLJ250 firms). Retaining talent no longer means promoting the next equity partner. Accordingly, the "one-size fits all" approach to retaining talent doesn't translate to Next Gen lawyers looking to transition horizontally within their firm to business development, knowledge management, or pricing roles within the firm.

Old habits are hard to break. I've tried over and over again to stop using two spaces while writing this blog. It's been an abysmal failure. Asking a few questions about your firm's approach to attracting, retaining and developing talent is a critical step in avoiding unnecessary generational blind spots in talent strategy and finding your "Aha" moment.