

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

MILLENNIALS TO WATCH

## YOUNG LAWYERS ON THE RISE

They entered the profession at the worst possible time, but these Philadelphia attorneys are already having a major impact.

BY JEFF BLUMENTHAL,  
14-30

Kevin Harden Jr. and Nicole Simon are among the young lawyers to keep your eye on in 2017 and beyond.

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

## WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

Careers born in the recession have shaped young lawyers' perspective

BY JEFF BLUMENTHAL | JBLUMENTHAL@BIZJOURNALS.COM | 215-238-5136 | @PHLBIZLAWBANK

**I**magine enrolling in law school during a boom time and exiting during the worst recession since the Great Depression. That's what many lawyers from the millennial generation endured. And it has shaped the way they approach their careers. ¶ "It was eye opening because many students had been oblivious to market factors for employers hiring lawyers," said Kevin Harden Jr., who graduated from the Temple University Beasley School of Law in 2010 and landed a job at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

A recent survey of millennial lawyers conducted by the Above the Law blog and legal recruiting firm Major Lindsey & Africa found that while partnership remains the most common, long-term career goal, a third of junior associates plan to leave their firms in two years or less.

While 70 percent consider themselves loyal to their firms, they want something in return, and it's not necessarily more money. Firm culture is the most important variable in deciding whether to accept an employment offer – ahead of compensation or firm prestige, and work/life balance is what they perceive to be the most important aspect of that culture.

Harden, 31, who now works as an associate at Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, said the recession made his generation of lawyers "cautiously optimistic" about creating personal wealth solely by practicing law. Millennials do not view the brass ring of partnership with the same reverence that their predecessors did.

Millennial lawyers have learned through the turbulent times in which their careers were born that they need to cover their bases. Harden said he knows many from his generation that have multiple ventures that include nonlegal fields such as real estate, tech or financial services.

"When I first started law school, there was a stigma attached to alternative uses of law degrees," Harden said. "Now I think there's almost a stigma for those who stay at firms."

Melissa Lennon, assistant dean for career services at Temple Law, said the millennial generation is very much present in the now. They have never experienced an economic boom cycle or annual billing rate increases twice the inflation rate that served as monetary deodorant for some firms that were not run well. They just know about the post-recession new normal

of reduced demand, particularly for younger lawyers, and increased client scrutiny on billing and staffing.

"So there's no use in telling them about the way things used to be," Lennon said. "It's not like they are looking to recreate those days. They don't have pangs of regret. They were born into this reality so they don't know any different. It's those who graduated in 2004 that had to endure big change."

While Harden and his Temple Law classmates worried about the shrinking job market, Nicole Simon, who graduated from Harvard Law School in 2010, was not directly affected by the recession. But she said the recession made her more mindful of how law firms treated their employees during that difficult

*"I wasn't interested in a place where I would stay for three years and leave. I wanted to find a firm where I could work for a long time."*

**NICOLE SIMON**

time. That played a significant role in her interest in Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, which did not recruit on campus at Harvard Law. Simon was interested in working in Philadelphia and sought a firm with a strong investment management practice – which Stradley Ronon does.

"I wasn't interested in a place where I would stay for three years and leave," Simon said. "I wanted to find a firm where I could work for a long time. I talked to a number of law students and they said Stradley was a firm that was compassionate during the recession ... so I reached out to them."

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL



**Nicole Simon and Kevin Harden Jr. graduated law school in 2010 at the height of the recession.**

JEFF FUSCO

## ► SURVEY SAYS

More than 1,200 associates at 132 different U.S. law firms participated in a study conducted by Above The Law and Major Lindsey & Africa. Among the findings:

- **PARTNERSHIP** remains the most common long-term career goal for associates.
- Millennials see little need for **CLIENTS' VALUES** to **ALIGN WITH THEIR OWN**.
- Approximately **70 PERCENT** of millennials described themselves as **LOYAL** to their firms.
- **FIRM CULTURE** is the most important variable in the decision whether to accept a potential employer's offer, far ahead of "compensation" or "prestige."
- **WORK/LIFE BALANCE** is the most important aspect of firm culture.

Lennon said millennials are most focused on creating a different workplace experience than were prior generations – one that includes time to deal with their lives outside the office but also more responsibility and professional growth opportunities.

"They have that expectation," Lennon said. "And I think a lot of today's partners have kids the same age as these associates, and the partners have raised their own children to want it all in life."

Simon said her generation is focused on a holistic approach, despite any grumblings from their Generation X and baby-boomer colleagues.

"It's easy to say we do less work but I don't think it's true," Simon said. "We can add as much value for clients while

still having a balanced life."

Philadelphia law firms became more popular for students at top-tier law schools such as Harvard or the University of Pennsylvania during the recession, as firms in bigger markets hired fewer of them. But there was a trickle down effect felt at many of the other schools that lingers to this day.

"A significant number that went to law school between 2007 and 2012 never found their footing in the profession," Harden said. "They did contract work, paralegal work... and then some just disappeared. They are sort of a forgotten group of lawyers. And I am always saddened by that because I remember them as bright and ambitious people. I feel like it was wasted talent."

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

## MILLENNIALS TO WATCH IN LAW

# NICOLE SIMON

*As part of the firm's vaunted investment management practice, Simon focuses on regulatory matters. In the wake of Dodd-Frank and the many new regulations promulgated thereafter, she works with corporate clients to determine the applicability of rapidly changing regulations. She was recognized as a Fund Action and Fund Directions Mutual Fund Industry Awards Rising Star in 2016. She also was part of the Stradley Ronon team that assisted Franklin Templeton Investments in the launch of the Franklin K2 Long Short Credit Fund.*

**Why did you decide to go to law school?** When I was really little, my dad was in law school, and during finals we would take turns reading from my Dr. Seuss book and his Constitutional Law textbook. When you learn about the Bill of Rights before you start preschool, you grow up with a reverence for the Constitution and the rights it protects, and law school is a natural choice.

**What unique challenges does your generation of lawyers face in the post-recession world?** We are lucky enough to live in an age of innovation, and with that comes the challenge of applying existing regulation to new products and businesses that don't quite fit the mold. Our generation is uniquely suited to bridge that gap by participating in the conversation about how these new ideas should be worked into the existing rubric, or how that rubric may need to be adapted.

**What is your favorite place in Greater Philadelphia and why?** I love going to Metropolitan Bakery in the morning. Everything they make is freshly baked and delicious, and I love the down-to-earth personality that Philadelphia gets from local businesses like theirs that have become city staples.



**Age:** 31

**Title:** Associate

**Firm/Company:** Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young

**Original hometown:** Scranton

**Current residence:** Rittenhouse

**Law School:** Harvard (2010)

STRADLEY  
RONON