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Generation X in Law School: The Dying of the Light¹ or the Dawn of a New Day?

Tracy L. McGaugh²

I. INTRODUCTION

All good legal writing teachers extol to their students the virtues of carefully considering the writer's audience. Many teachers also tell students that good writing is, at its heart, good teaching. However, when it comes to considering *our* audience—our students—we tend to teach them as we believe they *should be* rather than as they really are. This has become increasingly more frustrating as more and more students in the generation not-too-affectionately dubbed Generation X pass through the halls of our law schools.³ The divide seems to be growing between what students should be and what they actually are.

The good news is that the students of Generation X are reachable. The problem has not been that we have placed expectations on Gen Xers that they are not willing to meet; the problem is that we have been communicating our expectations in a foreign language. If we can frame our expectations in terms they can understand, they can meet them — and they do so much more enthusiastically than we would have imagined.

This article will attempt to help teachers begin bridging the gap between themselves and their Gen X students. Section I of this article gives some background about the generations currently in legal education. Section II addresses the myths of Generation X and tries to put each one into perspective by explaining the reality behind the myth. Knowing what has shaped Generation X makes their values and motivations (or lack of motivation) more understandable. Finally, Section III describes some teaching methods that capitalize on Xers' strengths and minimize their weaknesses while not sacrificing course content.

¹"Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Dylan Thomas, *Do not go gentle into that night*, in *Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas, 1934-52*, at 128 (W.W. Norton & Co. 1971).

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³Although this generation has been called many things—MTV Generation, Baby Busters, and 13th Generation, to name a few—the name that seems to have stuck is "Generation X," a term coined by author Douglas Coupland. Neil Howe & William Strauss, *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* 12, 17 (Vintage Books 1993). Although Coupland used the term in the title of his novel *Generation X: Tales for An Accelerated Culture* (St. Martin's Press 1992), he later tried to disclaim it. See Douglas Coupland, *Generation X'd*, *Details Mag.* 72 (June 1995).

II. WHAT'S IN A GENERATION?⁴

Before getting into the specifics of who Generation X is and how we can teach them, we need to start by defining the generations whose members are either students or teachers in legal education.

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Birth Years</u>	<u>Age on Dec. 31, 2002</u>
Silent Generation	1925 –1942	60 to 77
Baby Boomers	1943 –1960	42 to 59
Generation X	1961–1981	21 to 41
Millennials	1982 –?	under 21 ⁵

Each generation is shaped by the historical events that took place during its members' critical development stages.⁶ Although many generations may live through a particular event, one generation's reaction will differ from another's reaction because of the difference in their ages at the time of the event.⁷ For example, while Woodstock symbolized freedom to the young adult Baby Boomers, it symbolized the adult world turning upside down to Generation X.⁸ Generations are defined by shared values, experiences, and world views.⁹

For the Silent Generation, the events that shaped them marked some of the most difficult times in United States history. They were born into the stock market crash and the Great Depression. Although Charles Lindbergh successfully made the first transatlantic flight, his son was

⁴ Obviously, it is not possible to do justice to the complex social and historical events that shaped a generation or to the complexity of the generation itself in a single paragraph about that generation. This section is meant as only a very general overview to put the discussion about Generation X into a broader context.

⁵ Chart adapted and updated from Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 42.

⁶ William Strauss & Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584–2069*, at 48 (William Morrow & Co. 1991).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Ron Zemke et al., *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace* 64 (AMACOM 2000).

kidnapped five years later. The 1930's brought FDR, the Dust Bowl, the New Deal, and Social Security. The 1940's brought Hitler, Pearl Harbor, D-Day at Normandy, and finally, victory in World War II in Europe and Japan. As many Silents entered the workforce, the Korean War began. This strife in their formative years created a generation that craved consistency and uniformity.¹⁰ They valued conformity, logic, and discipline.¹¹ They were conservative in dress, spending, and politics.¹² This generation understands, perhaps better than any other in legal education today, the value of "putting your nose to the grindstone" and "your shoulder to the wheel." Sacrifice today for the good of the firm/company/community, and you will benefit in the long run.

Because the Silents' sacrifices produced war victories and a prosperous economy, the childhood of the Baby Boomers was marked by optimism, growth, and opportunity.¹³ The Boomers' parents had lived through turbulent times, trying to preserve a way of life that seemed destined to disintegrate. The Boomers also experienced turbulence, but it involved building things up and making life better. In the 1950's, their experience included the McCarthy hearings, polio vaccine, the first nuclear power plant, and the beginning of movements for civil rights, women's rights, and Indian rights. In the 1960's, they got birth control pills, JFK, MLK, the Peace Corps, NOW, Vietnam, a lunar landing, Woodstock, and Kent State. These events shaped a generation that is optimistic and believes in growth and expansion.¹⁴ Boomers can easily see themselves at the center of everything, both because the Silents sacrificed so much for them and because the sheer size of the generation commands the attention of government and business alike.¹⁵ Although the Boomers grew up amidst an educational philosophy that encouraged them to share and work in teams, they have also mastered the art of pursuing their own gratification— material, spiritual, sexual.¹⁶

Enter the Xers. If the Boomers had a front row seat to America's greatness, Xers have had a front row seat to its decline. Some of the seminal events for Xers were Watergate, the energy crisis,¹⁷ the introduction of the personal computer, Three Mile Island, the Iran hostage

¹⁰ *Id.* at 37.

¹¹ *Id.* at 38–39.

¹² *Id.* at 40.

¹³ *Id.* at 63–64.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 66.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at 67–68.

¹⁷ Born almost in the very middle of the Xer birth year span, I remember the television commercials of my childhood warning that there would no energy, natural resources, forests, or social security left for me. I fully expected my adulthood to look a lot like *Planet of the Apes*.

crisis, the Challenger disaster, the stock market crash of 1987, the savings and loan scandals, the fall of the Berlin wall, the Rodney King beating, the L.A. riots, and the O.J. Simpson criminal and civil trials. In the words of Dennis Miller (a Boomer): "It's no wonder Xers are angst-ridden and rudderless. They feel America's greatness has passed. They got to the cocktail party twenty minutes too late, and all that's left are those little wieners and a half-empty bottle of Zima."¹⁸ How these seminal events have affected Generation X and how we can use this information to reach them is the focus of the rest of this article.

Although the concept of a "gap" between each generation is widely accepted, the distance between the Baby Boomers and Generation X seems less like a generation gap and more like a generation chasm, with the Baby Boomers and everyone who came before them on one side of the chasm and the Xers and their followers on the other side. The most common explanation for this is the technology revolution, which has required a major paradigm shift in how we acquire and sort information.¹⁹ Because education is, of course, all about the acquisition and sorting of information, the chasm has been especially salient for teachers.

III. WHO IS GENERATION X?

*We grew up with single parents, divorced parents, both parents working to maintain a threatened standard of living. Our friends and loved ones are vegetarians, coming out of the closet, customizing everything, joining therapeutic movements, New Age churches, and Eastern religions, losing their jobs, losing their health insurance, terrified of AIDS—or flirting with it or dying of it—getting new jobs, shopping for better health care, and electing a president whose first inauguration included an MTV inaugural ball.*²⁰

The span of birth years from 1961–1981 is the largest span assigned to Generation X. Some biographers of generations begin the span as late as 1965²¹ and others terminate the span as early as 1977.²²

¹⁸ Zemke, *supra* n. 9, at 93 (quoting Dennis Miller).

¹⁹ See Arthur Levine & Jeanette S. Cureton, *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student* 11 (Jossey-Bass 1998) (noting the shift in the United States from an industrial economy to an economy based in services, information, and technology).

²⁰ Bruce Tulgan, *Managing Generation X: How to Bring Out the Best in Young Talent* 60 (W.W. Norton & Co. 2000).

²¹ Although the rise in fertility rates that gave the Baby Boomer generation its name did end in 1964, the generation itself is defined by a set of shared values rather than simply having been born during the exact span of years the country experienced increased

Assuming, however, that the last of the Xers were born in 1981, the last of them will begin entering law school in 2003 as new or "first career" students. After that, they will begin law school as returning or "second career" students. The time is coming when we cannot even rely on our older students to reassure us that some students still value education the same way we do.

Although almost no one will confess to being a member of Generation X,²³ everyone has an idea of what an Xer is like. The following statements should look familiar to those who have either taught or worked with an Xer.

"They have short attention spans."

"They don't know much (certainly not as much as Boomers) and aren't interested in learning much more."

"They are arrogant and don't respect authority."

"They won't pay their dues. They want to do 'important' things from the beginning."

Although each of these statements contains a kernel of truth, they are more myth than reality. Xers really are more than just lazy, arrogant slackers with an attention deficit. These qualities just scratch the surface of a generation that has come of age in complex times and is, as a result, complex.

1. Myth #1: The Short Attention Span

[T]hink of music videos, VCRs, satellite dishes, the Internet, and MTV, CNN, CNBC, MSNBC. Vivid images of constant change: revolution, war, terrorism, diplomacy, politics from Carter to Reagan to Clinton and beyond, from Heath and Wilson to Thatcher to

population growth. While the Birth Boom continued until 1964, the identifying characteristics of the Baby Boomer generation tend to trail off with those born around 1960. See Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 12.

²² In *Managing Generation X*, Bruce Tulgan closes Generation X with those born in 1977. Tulgan, *supra* n. 20 at 37. However, Tulgan seems to define both Generations X and Y more narrowly than other biographers of those generations. For example, Tulgan limits Generation Y to those born between 1978 and 1983. *Id.* Most other authors include in Generation Y those born between about 1980 and 2000. See e.g. Strauss & Howe, *supra* n. 6, at 335; Zemke, *supra* n. 9, at 127.

²³ I will confess to being a member of Generation X, but only in a footnote.

*Major to Blair and beyond, famine, fire, earthquakes, floods, violent crime, sicko crime, kangaroo courts, urban riots, oil spills, nuclear accidents, New Coke, Coca-Cola Classic, Tab, Caffeine-Free Diet Coke, Pepsi One, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the freedom of Nelson Mandela, Michael Jackson, Tonya Harding, O.J. Simpson, the making and unmaking of heroes, the making and remaking of meaning.*²⁴

In Peter Sacks's book *Generation X Goes to College*, he describes giving to his community college journalism students a questionnaire that asked, among other things, what the two most important qualities were in an instructor (after "being knowledgeable" of course).²⁵ The most popular first choice was "entertaining."²⁶ For Peter Sacks, this seemed to confirm a notion he considered distasteful: Xers always want to be entertained, even in higher education.²⁷

While the idea that education should be entertaining may be distasteful to Silents and Boomers, that is largely because education and entertainment have been two separate endeavors for those generations. The assumption, then, is that if a student asks for entertainment, she is not asking for education. This is not necessarily so for Xers. For Xers, education and entertainment are inextricably intertwined. They are not asking for entertainment *instead of education*, they are asking for *more of the same entertaining education* that they began receiving as preschoolers in the form of *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company*, *Zoom*, and *Schoolhouse Rock*.²⁸

The flip side of wanting to be entertained is not wanting to be bored. This "right" not to be bored may seem ridiculous to the Silent or Boomer. However, Xers have come of age in an era when information and services can be accessed more and more quickly. The board games that children and teenagers used to play have been replaced by desktop computer versions with slick graphics or handheld versions that they can take anywhere so they are never at risk of boredom. Thanks to remote control and an explosion in the number of cable channels, few Xers have ever had to sit through a commercial or a slow moment in a program until the programming either returned or got more interesting. Powerful

²⁴ Tulgan, *supra* n. 20, at 67.

²⁵ Peter Sacks, *Generation X Goes to College* 55 (Open Ct. 1996).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *See id.* (categorizing "entertaining" as a "soft" trait).

²⁸ *See* Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 64. Ask any Xer to recite the Preamble to the Constitution, and you will notice her humming under her breath before each sentence as she tries to recall the words as set to music by *Schoolhouse Rock*.

desktop computers allow them to download a program from the Internet while simultaneously writing an e-mail. Xers have not considered boredom as a possibility and rejected it. They simply do not know what it is or how to handle it.

However, to say that their attention spans are short reflects a misunderstanding of what they are doing. Xers are not doing one task at a time for a short period and then moving quickly to something else. They are instead multitasking, doing many things at once.²⁹ This is how information has been presented to them—from the television, the Internet, and the telephone all at once. They have learned to process as much information as possible at one time for maximum efficiency.³⁰ Their attention span is not short so much as it is wide, encompassing a number of things at once. Criticism that they have short attention spans is lost on Xers. The alternative presented to them as preferable is the long attention span. To an Xer, focusing on a single thing for a prolonged period of time is a waste of time and energy. Why read a book when you could read a book, talk on the phone, and watch television?

If we want to compete for their full attention, we have to let go of the myth of the short attention span as well as the idea that an entertaining education is inherently less valuable than a "dry" education. When we do this, we can address the reality: Xers need a lot of stimulation to be fully engaged.

2. Myth #2: The Apathetically Uneducated

*I do have a test today. . . . It's on European socialism. I mean, really, what's the point? I'm not European. I don't plan on being European. So who gives a crap if they're socialists? They could be fascist anarchists. It still wouldn't change the fact that I don't have a car.*³¹

Two factors have contributed to the myth that Xers are uninformed and, worse, apathetic about it. The first is that educational reforms of the 1960's and 1970's significantly changed what teachers expected from students and what students expected from an education. The second factor is the filtering mechanism Xers have developed to manage the overwhelming amount of information that comes to them from multiple sources simultaneously.

In the early 1970's, the Boomers believed that they had found the

²⁹ See Zemke, *supra* n. 9, at 112; Linda Green Pierce, *X Lawyers Mark New Spot: Understanding the Post-Baby Boomer Attorney*, 61 Or. St. B. Bull. 33 (2001).

³⁰ See Zemke, *supra* n. 9, at 112.

³¹ *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Paramount Pictures 1986) (motion picture).

solution for reforming schools so that children would be smarter and more socially aware than even the Boomers had been.³² The solution was "open education."³³ The emphasis shifted from mastery of traditional school subjects to mastery of the self. Rather than being provided an education, the students would be provided with an educational *experience*.³⁴ The theory was that traditional grammar and math, for example, confined students.³⁵ Students needed to be given choices and then each child trusted to select what she needed to realize her potential.³⁶ The teacher's job was simply to help the child go where she wanted to go, promoting the child's self-esteem along the way.³⁷ While this kind of education did help children to be more sensitive to people who were different from themselves and made them proficient diarists of their own feelings, it failed to instill a sense of discipline or accountability.³⁸ Students had learned neither to tackle difficult subjects nor to respond to grades or feedback with increased effort.³⁹

The death knell for this educational reform was sounded by the 1983 report on the quality of education, *A Nation at Risk*, commissioned by the Secretary of Education.⁴⁰ The National Commission on Excellence in Education found that school curricula had been "homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose. In effect we have a cafeteria style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses."⁴¹ The Commission also found that academic standards had been lowered by insufficient minimum requirements of competency exams as well as textbooks that had been "written down" to lower reading levels.⁴² In response to their findings, specifically in the teaching of English, the Commission recommended that:

The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to:

(a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read:

³² Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 71.

³³ *Id.* (citing A.S. Neill, *Summerhill* (Penguin 1968)).

³⁴ *Id.* at 71-73.

³⁵ *Id.* at 73.

³⁶ *Id.* at 71, 73.

³⁷ *Id.* at 73.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 75; see Natl. Commn. on Excellence in Educ., *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Apr. 26, 1983) (available at <<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/>>).

⁴¹ Natl. Commn. on Excellence in Educ., *supra* n. 40, at *Findings: Findings Regarding Content*.

⁴² *Id.*

- (b) write well-organized, effective papers;
- (c) listen effectively and discuss intelligently; and
- (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture.⁴³

If school children were leaving school without these skills, then this change would certainly seem necessary. However, what to do in the meantime about those whom the skills had eluded? The Commission did not make any recommendations about what to do with the Xer students who had been educated during the failed reform and those who would be educated while schools sorted out how to implement the *new reform* recommendations.

Ever since elementary school, they had constantly been told that there weren't any standards, that they were doing well, and that they had to listen to their feelings. Now, after all those years, they heard that there had indeed been standards, that they had failed to meet them, and that no one much cared how they felt about that failure.⁴⁴

Although Xers failed to learn on their own many of the things that the 1983 report claimed they should have been taught, they did learn one thing on their own: how to filter information. At the same time the educational reform of the early 1970's was gaining steam, so was the technology revolution. And the same overwhelming information stream that turned Xers into multitaskers also turned them into skillful managers of information.⁴⁵ Because Xers have managed more information at every stage of their lives than any generation before them, they have developed the new skill of quickly sorting information into three categories before they ever let it sink in to their memories: (1) information needed now, (2) information definitely needed later, and (3) information that can be found later if needed. This has given rise to the distinction between "just in case" learning and "just in time" learning.⁴⁶

"Just in case" learning focuses on acquiring information that the student may need sometime in the future; this is the traditional educational model. "Just in time" learning focuses on learning information-acquisition skills so that the student can find any information

⁴³ *Id.* at Recommendation A: Content

⁴⁴ Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3 at 75.

⁴⁵ Tulgan, *supra* n. 20, at 68.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Sarah Feldman, *The Link, and How We Think: Using Hypertext as a Teaching and Learning Tool*, 28 Intl. J. Instructional Media 153 (Mar. 22, 2001).

she might need in the future when the need arises. The “just in time” model of education has already been accepted in a variety of educational contexts. For example, many academic librarians are beginning to adopt a “just in time” approach to acquisitions – rather than build the largest possible collection based on anticipated patron needs, they develop systems to acquire materials quickly when they are needed.⁴⁷ Businesses are beginning to adopt a “just in time” approach to employee training, both because of its flexibility and its cost efficiency.⁴⁸

Xer students have long since moved to a “just in time” model of learning. They mastered the technology for acquiring information early in life. However, they are inclined to disregard pieces of information they do not currently need or do not see an impending need for. Although it may seem that the affinity for “just in time” learning means that Xers are less interested in learning, the converse is actually true. Xers expect to be lifelong learners, constantly acquiring information as they need it. Because of the volume of information that bombards them constantly, they know that no school can possibly teach them all of the information they may someday need. Instead, they expect to learn in school the most efficient skills for continuing to acquire information on the subjects that are relevant to them.

If we expect Xer students to leave law school with the information they need, we must first understand that they may not have some of the basic skills or information they need to succeed. However, they are enthusiastic consumers of skills training — good news for skills teachers — and will willingly make up for gaps in their education if the missing information’s immediate relevance is made clear to them. So while the myth is that Xers are uninformed and apathetic, the reality is that they want the skills necessary to acquire information “just in time” throughout their careers, and they need to understand the “just in time” value of everything they learn if they are expected to retain it.

3. Myth #3: The Arrogance and Lack of Respect

*Boomers are finally growing up, and we don't hold it against them that they forced so many of us to beat them to it.*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Barbara Baruth, *Cutting-Edge Technologies Can Assure Our Place in the Big Picture*, Am. Libs.58 (June 1, 2002); Martin Riash, *Academic Librarians Offer the Crucial Element in Online Scholarship*, Chron. Higher Educ. B4 (Apr. 21, 2000).

⁴⁸ See e.g. Robert Buckland, *West Link-Up to Exploit Rapid Growth in Field of E-Learning*, Wes. Daily Press 39 (Aug. 13, 2001) (suggesting that compliance training and refresher courses can be provided at an employee's desktop rather than requiring off-site training).

⁴⁹ Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 46 (quoting Kate Fillion, Xer from Toronto).

While it is true that Xers do not regard authority the way that past generations might, this is largely the result of understanding themselves and those in positions of authority differently. This different understanding stems from their lifelong relationships to adults and information.

Xers growing up had very different relationships with adults than previous generations. Because of the rising divorce rate, nearly half of all Xers were raised in single-parent households.⁵⁰ Even in two-parent households, an increasing number of families had two parents working outside the home.⁵¹ While their parents worked, Xers took care of themselves. They developed their own homework, hygiene, and feeding schedules. Having been left to fend for themselves, Xers became self-reliant.⁵² They were accustomed to taking care of themselves and unaccustomed to being told specifically how to do it. This self-reliance was reinforced by the lack of structure and abundance of choices that "open education" offered. Because they were left to themselves during so much of their childhoods—both at home and school—they drew the conclusion that they were competent to take care of themselves, that they did not *need* anyone to supervise them. Having been given some adult responsibilities, they came to view themselves as on a par with adults in many ways.

At the same time Xers were becoming more and more confident of their competence with adult-type responsibilities, they were becoming less and less confident about adults' competence with adult-type responsibilities. Many of the seminal historical events that shaped Xers involved public failure of authority figures—Watergate and Nixon's resignation, the Iran hostage crisis, savings and loan scandals, and the effort to impeach Bill Clinton, just to name a few.⁵³ Xers quickly got the message that being in authority did not require any special set of characteristics—people who lacked intellect, character, or both were in positions of authority. It seemed to Xer children that they might actually be better at taking care of themselves than adults were at taking care of them.

Even if events had not helped change the traditional view of authority, the technology revolution would have done so. With increased access to television and the Internet, the power to provide information has lost its mystique. Throughout Xers' lives, they have been accustomed to

⁵⁰ Lawrence J. Bradford & Claire Raines, *Twentysomething: Managing & Motivating Today's New Work Force* 40 (Master Media 1992).

⁵¹ *Id.*; see Strauss & Howe, *supra* n. 6, at 325.

⁵² Strauss & Howe, *supra* n. 6, at 329.

⁵³ *See id.* at 317.

viewing television skeptically. Television programs have commercial sponsors. Television networks have commercial sponsors. Actors and athletes have commercial sponsors. Politicians have commercial sponsors. Even news organizations are businesses. Information is inherently untrustworthy because of the agenda, hidden or obvious, of the provider of information. The Internet has only reinforced what Xers already believed about information: anyone can provide it. On the Internet, information is provided by experts and amateurs alike, with little guidance for most users in determining which is which.⁵⁴ Ask a question on a discussion board⁵⁵ about a complex legal issue, and you are just as likely to get an answer from a fifteen-year-old boy as you are from a partner in a law firm.⁵⁶

All of these factors have created a generation that relates to authority differently. What may be perceived as disrespect is, in fact, a lack of recognition. Xers do not see people in positions of authority as fundamentally different from themselves. To use the Xers' own politically correct jargon, those in authority may be "differently abled" by having skills and education that the Xers do not yet have themselves, but this does not necessarily make those in authority inherently more intelligent, moral, or valuable. It is especially difficult to disabuse an Xer of this notion when she is the "go to" person for technology questions for everyone from her parents to her boss. Because Xers perceive a much more level playing field than Boomers and Silents did before them, Xers are much more likely to communicate with teachers and supervisors in a way that is considered challenging or confrontational. In particular, Xers are very comfortable making suggestions to and questioning those further up in a hierarchical structure. They are very *uncomfortable* with heavy-handed supervision that lays down rules or gives instructions but gives little or no explanation for them.

This seems to be the cause of the most contentious conflicts between generations. Silents and Boomers give instructions and do not understand why the Xers cannot simply carry them out without comment. Xers, on the other hand, have been left to their own devices for most of their lives and are perplexed, and sometimes offended, that Silents and Boomers want to step in at this late stage in the game with some guidance. The reality is that Xers simply do not relate to a hierarchy. If we want to have more productive relationships with Xer students, we

⁵⁴ See Laura Sessions Stepp, *As Students Rely on the Internet for Research, Teachers Try to Warn of the Web's Snares*, Wash. Post C01 (July 16, 2002).

⁵⁵ A discussion board is the computer equivalent of a bulletin board. These boards are usually devoted to a specific topic, and anyone with an interest in that topic can pose questions or answer them.

⁵⁶ See Michael Lewis, *Faking It*, N.Y. Times § 6, 32 (July 15, 2001).

have to be willing to shift from a top-down model of the student-teacher relationship to a lateral model.

4. Myth #4: The Slacker

*It's not that I'm angry at you for selling out to the system.
It's that there won't be a system for me to sell out to, if I want
to. . . .*⁵⁷

One way in which the Xer students seem fundamentally different from previous generations' students is that Xers seem unwilling to sacrifice for a long-term goal. They do not seem willing to postpone recreation or personal relationships for the three short years they are in law school.⁵⁸ When they get to law firms, as either clerks or associates, they seem to want to jump right in to something "important." They seem to scoff at "menial" tasks.⁵⁹ How, we ask ourselves, did they derive this underdeveloped sense of the importance of law school and overdeveloped sense of their own importance?

The truth is that an Xer's desire to keep one eye on his personal life while simultaneously trying to leap to the top is not born of a sense of importance. It is born of a sense of fear. Xers learned two things from being raised by adults who poured themselves into careers. First, they learned that the price of pouring yourself into your career is paid by your family. Second, they learned that the institutions that their parents spent their lives building and supporting can no longer promise the future they once could.

By and large, the parents of Xers who both entered the workforce and divorced in record numbers believed that both of those decisions were positive changes.⁶⁰ The consensus seemed to be that children benefit when parents are professionally fulfilled and emotionally satisfied, thus justifying single-parent households and those in which both parents work. Xers, however, take a different view of having been left to take care of themselves.⁶¹ It is no secret to Xers that the experiments in

⁵⁷ Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 46 (quoting Daniel Smith-Rowsey, Xer student).

⁵⁸ Despite first-year orientation admonitions to maintain balance, spend time with loved ones, and maintain hobbies that give them joy, we seem to be offended when they actually do it.

⁵⁹ Jim Oliphant, *X-ing Out Tradition*, 73 Miami Daily Bus. Rev. 16 (Dec. 18, 1998); Mark L. Byers, *FindLaw for Legal Professionals, Find Satisfaction in the Law: The New Associates: A Letter to Puzzled Partners* <<http://profdef.lp.findlaw.com/column/column19.html>> (accessed Nov. 20, 2002).

⁶⁰ Strauss & Howe, *supra* n. 6, at 324.

⁶¹ *Id.*

hands-off parenting and open education failed.⁶² While Xers value the resulting self-reliance and independence, they do not value them enough to repeat the experiment with their own families. Therefore, Xers are far less willing to sacrifice time with their families for career goals.

The equation involves more, though, than Xers' concern for the damage to their families that an intense career focus might cause. In the past, when previous generations' workers focused on careers, the sacrifice was an investment in the family. When employees were loyal to an institution, the institution rewarded the employees with lifelong employment and security through retirement. This is no longer a promise that institutions can make to their employees.⁶³ Even if institutions could make this promise, Xers would not believe it.⁶⁴ Xers are as familiar with the public failure of institutions as they are with the public failure of those in authority. During the course of their lifetimes, Xers have watched government, the banking industry, major law firms, and major corporations become damaged or destroyed by greed, inattention, or incompetence. The recent accounting scandals at Enron and WorldCom have only confirmed what Xers already knew: no matter how great an institution is, it could be gone tomorrow. Therefore, Xers are far less willing than previous generations to "pay dues" to an institution, because the institution no longer has anything to offer in exchange for an up-front sacrifice.

For the most part, we have dismissed a student unwilling to "put her nose to the grindstone" as a slacker. However, we have failed to take into account the need that Xers have to carve out time for the people and non-law-school activities that are important to them. We can approach them much more productively when we understand that they are not simply being lazy when they refuse to devote themselves fully to the study of law. They are simply reluctant to invest in an institution without some assurance that they will get something in return that will justify rethinking their current balancing of personal and academic/professional lives.

IV. WHAT'S A TEACHER TO DO?

The fact that there are reasonable and complex reasons for Xer characteristics does not change the fact that we are responsible for teaching and they for learning a specialized body of knowledge in three years. At the end of the day, they still have to pass the bar exam and function in law practice. Understanding how Xers got to be Xers is easy.

⁶² *Id.* at 111.

⁶³ Howe & Strauss, *supra* n. 3, at 98–99; Tulgan, *supra* n. 20, at 159–160.

⁶⁴ Tulgan, *supra* n. 20, at 159–160.

The challenge is figuring out what to do with that information.

Faced with that challenge, we have three choices. Our first choice is simply to continue doing exactly what we have been doing. We *can* refuse to accommodate the ways in which Xer students are different from previous generations of students. We can insist that they receive their education in the way we are most comfortable delivering it. We can continue to try, in effect, to mold the audience to the teaching.

Our second choice is to *pretend* to adapt by using the same teaching methods but with visual aids. However, a lecture accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation is still a lecture. While using a PowerPoint presentation makes the lecture more interesting, it does not fundamentally change the way the students are receiving information. Although students expect to be entertained and are accustomed to impressive graphic images, graphics alone are not sufficient to fully engage an Xer's attention. To be engaged on all levels, students need to *interact* with information.

Our third choice is to actually adapt the delivery of education to the needs of the students receiving the education. This is, of course, the most difficult in the short run, but it does pay off in the long run. Fortunately, this difficult task is required of a profession whose members largely come from generations that excel at frontloading effort and delaying gratification.

If we choose the third option, the questions that come to mind for many are, "Aren't we selling out? Don't we have a responsibility to hold the line?" The answers are no, we are not selling out, and, yes, we do have a responsibility to hold the line. This *is* the future of education. That law schools are among the last, if not the last, to catch on, does not make it any less the future. If we refuse to change, the frustration level of most faculties and students will simply continue to increase. Law teachers will become increasingly less in touch with how their students process information, and legal education will consequently become less and less effective while students and faculties point fingers of blame at each other. Alternatively, if some law schools are willing to change but others are not, students may begin to gravitate to the law schools that have adapted. Certainly, some schools are sufficiently prestigious to attract students regardless of the quality of teaching, but most law schools do not fall into that category.

Choosing to adapt will mean two things: (1) educating students about generational issues they will face in practice and (2) developing teaching methods that capitalize on what we know about Xers. The first one is easy enough. While *we* need to be able to adapt to our students in order to teach them, *they* need to understand what the expectations are in practice. Just as Xers' perceptions of the world are foreign and illogical to Silents and Boomers, the way Silents and Boomers perceive the world

is foreign and illogical to Xers. Just as ethics training can be woven throughout the fabric of law school, discussions of generational differences can also be woven throughout. This will help students better understand what they can expect from supervisors, judges, juries, and clients.

So now the trick is to merge what we know about Xers with what we know about legal education so that we can turn Xers into lawyers. Some relatively simple techniques capitalize on each characteristic discussed in this article.

1. Teaching Methods For Reality #1: Xers Need Stimulation

If Xers in your class are balancing check books and checking e-mail, they are not doing it instead of listening to you; they are doing it *while* they are listening to you. They require multiple and varied stimuli so they can fully engage. This does not mean you have to sit by while they balance their checkbooks and read their e-mail. If you want them to stop, you will need to engage them in a variety of ways on the topic on which you want them focused. To meet the Xer need for stimulation, use teaching methods that help students do many things at once while still focusing on a single topic.

Although a lecture format is not appropriate for many skills topics, it can be very effective at times. Visual tools can be used to keep students' attention better than just the lecture alone.⁶⁵ PowerPoint and document projectors are great tools for presenting information in a way that is visually stimulating. But do not stop at just adding visuals. Because the goal is to engage as many of the students' senses as possible at once even during a lecture, another tool to consider is guided note-taking in conjunction with visuals when you need to use a lecture format.⁶⁶ Guided note-taking involves giving students a handout that looks something like this:

⁶⁵ For additional ideas on different visual aids available and how to use them, see Gerald Hess & Steven Friedland, *Techniques for Teaching Law* 81-104 (Carolina Academic Press 1999).

⁶⁶ This is the same technique bar review courses use to keep student attention during lectures. Thanks to Dr. Mark Steiner, South Texas College of Law, for introducing this to me as a teaching tool for any class, not just bar reviews.

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Four Myths of Generation X	
Myth #1	_____
Reality #1:	_____
Myth #2	_____
Reality #2:	_____
Myth #3	_____
Reality #3:	_____
Myth #4	_____
Reality #4:	_____

The student fills in the blanks as she listens to the presentation of material. Handouts like this take some time to create, and they require that you stick closely to the presentation of information in the handout. For example, if you indicate on the handout that there are four elements of negligence, students tend to get very confused if you end up combining two elements like "causation" and "harm." One way to avoid this problem is to simply print out your PowerPoint slides as handouts with three slides per page and lines next to each one. This method gives the students some structure while still leaving you some flexibility.

The most common objection to this method is that it is hand-holding or spoon-feeding. This would be true if Xers already knew how to take notes. Remember, they know how to keep journals that chronicle their feelings about their educational experiences; they do not necessarily know how to organize information as it is given to them. Guided note-taking has the dual advantages of making sure they take down what you believe is important for them to take away from class while also helping them see what clearly-organized notes look like. Obviously, this method will not work with every topic. However, it can be very effective with the types of topics that are most effectively handled through lecture. A lecture accompanied by both a visual presentation and a handout requiring that students take down information will keep the Xer stimulated on a number of different levels at once in a way that straight lecture cannot.

In general, the more students are required to interact with the information, the less likely it is that something else will occupy their attention simultaneously, whether they are preparing for or participating in class. In-class exercises that require students to use information to solve a problem, draft something, or edit something all require that the students stay focused on the topic so they can participate. Consider

posting instructions or other helpful information for the exercise on a PowerPoint slide or transparency. This method keeps important information in a convenient place for students and can also help keep students with wandering attention focused on the exercise.

Computer tutorials can help students absorb information that might otherwise be presented in a conventional reading assignment. Even though reading in law school generally requires more concentration than any other reading students have done, many Xers simply do not have the concentration skills necessary to stay focused on something that is presented only in print, so their legal reading does not get much more attention than any other kind of reading. A simple computer program that requires students to interact with the information by answering simple questions or completing exercises will help keep their attention so they can absorb the information in the reading.

Fortunately, free web-based tutorials abound for law teachers. The Center for Computer Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) provides free computer tutorials on an array of law school subjects, including legal research and writing. In addition, CALI provides free software called CALI Author so professors can create their own tutorials.⁶⁷ LexisNexis has tutorials available on legal research and citation.⁶⁸ In addition, the Chicago-Kent College of Law Legal Writing Program site contains web-based research and legal writing exercises.⁶⁹

2. Teaching Methods for Reality #2: Xers Want Information “Just in Time”

Accommodating the Xers' need for “just in time” learning does not mean widespread curriculum reform in American law schools. Everything students learn in law school already lays the foundation for a lifetime of “just in time” learning. A profession that requires ongoing training throughout the life of its members fits perfectly into the Xers' “just in time” paradigm. Law schools have never pretended to teach students everything they will need to know to practice law. We teach a

⁶⁷ CALI, *The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction* <<http://www.cali.org>> (accessed Nov. 20, 2002). For additional information on using CALI Lessons, see Hess & Friedland, *supra* n. 63, at 153–154, 165–166.

⁶⁸ LexisNexis, *LexisNexis Law Schools* <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/lawschool/tutorials/>> (accessed Nov. 20, 2002).

⁶⁹ Writing exercises are found at Mark A. Grinker, *The Legal Writing Teaching Assistant: The Law Student's Guide to Good Writing* <<http://www.kentlaw.edu/academics/lrw/grinker/>> (accessed Nov. 20, 2002). Legal Research exercises are found at Illinois Institute of Technology, *Legal Research & Writing Resources: Tutorials & Self-Paced Exercises* <<http://www.infoctr.edu/lrw/>> (last modified Sept. 27, 2002).

broad base of specialized knowledge combined with the skills to expand that knowledge on an as-needed basis. Therefore, providing information "just in time" will not require that we change anything that we teach. It will only require that we make explicit the relevance of the information.

We have no reason to believe that past generations immediately saw the relevance of what they learned in law school any better than Xers do. However, previous generations' students would learn it whether they understood the relevance or not. In contrast, Xers will disregard information unless they are given a framework for understanding how this information is relevant to them now and how it will continue to be relevant in the future. Skills professors have an edge in this respect. Unlike legal theory, which may be more difficult to present as immediately relevant, skills professors can tie each piece of information to a concrete task that students will be asked to perform in the skills class, in doctrinal classes, on the bar exam, and in practice.

Present information "just in time" as much as possible. Tie the topic of each class into an assignment for which students currently are or will very soon be responsible. Explain why they are doing what they are doing. Explain to them how each skill or concept fits into a particular piece of the assignment, the assignment as a whole, the course as a whole, their legal education as a whole, and, when appropriate, their needs in practice, both as a clerk and practicing attorney. An explanation for every piece of information that covers all of those bases would probably be overkill. You might choose several of the most relevant uses for the information. For example, you could tell your students at the beginning of a class, "Today, we're going to cover drafting the Issues Presented for a memo. By the end of this class, you should be able to draft the Issues Presented for the memo due on October 4. After you get some feedback on the Issues Presented from this memo, you will be expected to demonstrate some mastery of Issues Presented in the final memo of the semester. As a bonus, being able to precisely identify and state issues will also help you write better exams in your other classes." A short introduction like this that makes the relevance of the topic clear can do wonders to focus Xer students' attention at the beginning of class.

Another way to make the information in each class relevant is to give students very concrete goals for each assignment, and then connect skills covered in class to the goals so they can clearly understand specifically which skills and information must be mastered to successfully meet each goal. After giving students very clear written goals, make sure that any feedback they get specifically addresses how they performed on each goal. While past generations of students may have *appreciated* having such specific goals to meet, they certainly did not *need* them. Everyone worked to meet the unwritten goal, "do your best." In contrast, Xer students are not inclined to do their best unless

they understand why it is important. Without specific information on what they are trying to accomplish and why, Xers feel as though they are operating in the dark, leading to the ever-constant refrain of “you’re hiding the ball.” However, even Xers have a hard time making a case that a professor is hiding the ball when she gives specific goals when the work is assigned, points out at each turn how the topic covered in class meets one or more of those goals, and then uses the goals as grading criteria on the final product.

One final way of making information immediately relevant to Xers is to give written quizzes that cover reading or class discussion. A quiz is essentially the manual version of a computer tutorial that gives students questions to answer during the course of the reading; but instead, these questions are posed after the reading. Quizzes can be used in a variety of ways. For example, they can be scheduled for the same day every week and students told that all material covered in the week prior to the quiz is fair game for the quiz. They can be scheduled for every class for which the students are required to complete pre-reading. Or they can be given randomly (the dreaded “pop quiz”) and cover whatever was assigned for the day the quiz is given. To avoid taking up class time, quizzes should be short—two or three questions. Because the goal is to check whether students have read the material rather than whether they have mastered it, questions should be easy enough that anyone who read the material could answer them. If you choose the two or three most significant points from the reading, going over the quiz can segue smoothly into your class plan for the topic.

In classes where the Socratic method is not used and cannot serve as a check on student preparation, quizzes can be an effective way of making sure that the reading for the class is still considered a priority.⁷⁰ Depending on the personality of the individual teacher, though, quizzes can seem pragmatic, heavy-handed, or a waste of time. “Pragmatic” is probably the most constructive tone to set. (“I’m a realist and I know you need incentive to read beyond just the quest for knowledge—this is meant to serve as that incentive, not punishment.”) Xers will likely resent quizzes they see as heavy-handed (“I’m giving you a quiz to catch you unprepared.”) or a waste of time (“I don’t believe anything will get you to read, but I don’t know what else to do.”).

3. Teaching Methods for Reality #3: Xers Don’t Relate to a Hierarchy

⁷⁰ Brad Thompson, *If I Quiz Them, They Will Come*, Chron. Higher Educ., Chron. Rev. 5 (June 21, 2002) (reporting positive reactions of students and an increase in the number of students prepared for class).

Although Xers do not relate to a hierarchy, they can acknowledge that they came to law school to learn something. Xers respond well to having someone coach them. They do not respond well to being closely supervised. If you frame your role as that of a coach, you can avoid all of the baggage that comes with being the supervisor of Xers unaccustomed to and resentful of supervision. Although some skills professors like to teach in a "law firm" model—where the professor is a partner or senior associate and the students are summer or first-year associates—consider whether the "law firm" is Xer friendly. If the fictional law firm is built around a coaching model, then Xer students may have fun with the fiction. If the fictional law firm is more traditional, though, Xers may resent the added layer of supervision and authority from having their professor as both a teacher and supervising attorney.

As a coach, the professor's role is to give feedback. Even though Xers do not see themselves as fundamentally different from their professors, they can at least recognize that professors have expertise in an area that they, as students, have not yet mastered. Xers want to be coached in how to perform a skill and then given feedback on how well they performed. However, they expect feedback to be gentle and respectful. They will respond to constructive reactions to their work and suggestions for improvement.⁷¹ They will respond less favorably to being told what they "cannot" or "must" do. While Xers do not expect teachers to pull punches to spare their feelings, they do expect teachers to give them feedback as they would to a colleague, not a subordinate.

Although Xers want gentle feedback, they want professors to be generous in the amount of feedback they give. The Xers' chorus of "I worked so hard on this!" is a plea for recognition that their effort was substantial and worthwhile rather than insistence that you label the work as flawless. To justify the time they spent creating the work, they want to know that you put time into evaluating it.⁷² To the extent possible, consider giving them your own work product such as a separate document with detailed comments and specific suggestions for improvement. For example, if indiscriminate use of passive voice permeates the document,

⁷¹ Reader reaction such as "I had trouble following several sentences, because the subjects and verbs were far apart from each other" tells them how their audience rather than their boss might view their work. Comments such as "In a firm, I would assign this project to someone else" will not be considered constructive reaction. I will confess to having given both kinds of comments and having been much happier with the reaction I got to the former as compared to the latter.

⁷² On a related note, many professors who defer grading until the end of the semester report that their students are generally more satisfied with the course and the professor. This may be because early assignments are for the stated goals of receiving feedback and improving rather than grading. Because those are goals that can usually be met by sheer effort, students are not as frustrated with the results.

take one or two of the sentences and revise them so the student can see how the suggestion to "use less passive voice" could be implemented. Although this type of comment sheet can be labor intensive, comments can be re-used when they apply to other students. To eliminate the need to create comments from scratch for each student, teachers can use word processing macros or clipboards to store frequently-used comments for repeated use.

Once Xer students have received feedback from you, you can expect they will want to share some feedback of their own. Try to be as generous in receiving feedback as you were in giving it. Many teachers are dismayed by the number of students who are comfortable making suggestions for how the class could be improved and what content might be covered in more or less detail. In Xers' minds, though, they are just holding up their end of the bargain. You shared with them what you know about their performance, and they accepted your feedback as graciously as they could. Now they want to share with you what they know about your performance, and they expect you to accept that feedback graciously.⁷³ Simply by listening to students' feedback, a teacher increases the likelihood that they will pay more attention to hers. And, of course, the obvious benefit of frequent student feedback is that teachers do find out if the students are getting from the course what the teacher intended.

4. Teaching Methods for Reality #4: Xers Want Balance

Many Xers will not postpone a satisfying personal life to pursue the kind of excellence that we believe every student should strive for. This does not mean, though, that they are disinterested in their education. It only means that they need more flexible expectations so they can maintain a sense of balance in their lives. Law firms are already catching on to this reality and offering more flexible work "packages."⁷⁴ Some are beginning to allow part-time work; some allow an alternate non-partner track for the associate who wants to be assured that he will not have to work evenings and weekends. The payoff to the law firms is that Xers who see that their employers care about their need to maintain balance are more loyal to the employers, more productive, and more satisfied.

Just as Xer lawyers will forego a certain amount of compensation and status in order to maintain balance, Xer students are willing to forego a certain amount of success in law school so that they, too, can maintain

⁷³ For ideas on how to solicit student feedback, see Hess & Friedland, *supra* n. 63, at 261-283.

⁷⁴ See Terry Carter, *A New Breed*, 87 ABA J. 37 (2001); Steve Swanston, *Care and Feeding of the Generation X Attorney*, 16 Tex. Law. 4 (2000).

some balance between their personal and academic lives. Just as law firms offer flexible compensation and promotion schemes, law teachers can similarly offer a flexible "compensation" scheme. Rather than insist that every student perform to meet her maximum potential, teachers can offer guidelines up front as to what kind of work receives what kind of grade. Each student can then make an informed decision about which grade is worth the sacrifice.⁷⁵ Some students will, of course, always want the top grades. However, some students are satisfied doing only what is necessary to pass the class. In that case, tell them explicitly what the minimum expectation is so they can plan their work accordingly.⁷⁶ While a teacher's goal should still be to give each student the feedback she needs to make the maximum improvement and, therefore, the best possible grade, Xers will appreciate teachers who allow them to opt for something less without judging them. Law teachers will likely discover the irony that Gen X-savvy employers have discovered: allow an Xer the flexibility to do less, and she will do more.⁷⁷

Even if you are not willing to participate actively in the Xers' "reduced compensation package" theory of effort in exchange for grades, try to communicate concretely the minimum standards and consequences for falling below them. Until they are told differently, Xers will assume that they are free to reduce their effort in school as much as they need to in order to accommodate other areas of their lives. While they understand that there may be a consequence, they will assume that the consequence is negotiable. For example, while students understand that completely substandard work will receive reduced credit, many are shocked to find out that there is an absolute minimum standard below which they will receive *no* credit. Because Xers believe everything is negotiable, they are caught off guard when something is not. Any action or lack of action that will result in any consequence that you impose should be spelled out in writing. This will save time arguing about it later—even a first-year law student Xer can understand an estoppel argument.

Once the policies and consequences are set and the students have

⁷⁵ Students are already trying to do the calculus of how much time they can spend in other areas of their lives if they are willing to accept B's or C's, or whatever grade each student is willing to accept. The key is to give them the information they need to make *informed* calculations. A student who is not willing to try for less than a B may put in more effort if she *knows* what your expectation is for B work as opposed to what she *thinks* your expectation might be.

⁷⁶ A word of caution to students might also be in order that they may not be as good as they think they are at gauging whether they can meet a particular standard in such a new academic setting. First-year students who opt for "reduced compensation" should probably try to overshoot the mark a little until they have a feel for what level of effort yields what kind of grade for them.

⁷⁷ See Tulgan, *supra* n. 20, at 87.

been made aware of them, avoid judging Xer students for the choices they make. A consequence that is spelled out must be imposed (lest you give the impression that everything is negotiable after all), but it can be imposed without a lengthy lecture on professionalism. In many cases, the student has weighed the cost of coming late to class or failing to turn in an assignment and decided that the consequence is better to them than the alternative, such as not spending time with family or not getting to go to a movie. In those cases, you gain some ground with the student by acknowledging that he is an adult with his own priorities. While you may not necessarily share those priorities, there is usually no need to give the student any flack about them. Just impose the consequence and move on.⁷⁸

5. What Won't Work

In Peter Sacks's *Generation X Goes to College*, he conducted what he called the Sandbox Experiment with his community college journalism students.⁷⁹ The Sandbox Experiment basically involved two strategies: (1) lowering standards and (2) inflating grades.⁸⁰ I would argue that those strategies were not effective for his students, even though they served his short-term goal of receiving more favorable evaluations.⁸¹ However, even if those were effective strategies, they are simply not possible for law teachers.

First, we cannot lower the standards for legal education. Regardless of the characteristics of the generations passing through our law schools, we have an obligation to the profession to set and maintain high standards. So while I do suggest that we can teach *differently*, I do

⁷⁸ This approach assumes, of course, that the student is not perpetually in trouble in a way that indicates he might have difficulty complying with basic ethical rules like keeping clients informed and complying with deadlines. For that type student, a discussion about professionalism is warranted.

⁷⁹ Sacks's course evaluations were not positive for the first several quarters he taught. Sacks, *supra* n. 25, at 45–50. He concluded that his low evaluations were the result of establishing high standards for student performance and not keeping the students "sufficiently amused and entertained." *Id.* at 83. Therefore, he believed that the best strategy for better evaluations was to placate students. *See id.* at 82–83.

What I should do is to become like a kindergarten teacher and do everything possible to make my classes like playtime. I'll call class the Sandbox. And we'll play all kinds of games and just have fun, and I'll give all my students good grades, and everyone will be happy. Students will get what they want – whether they learn anything or not doesn't matter. The College will get what it wants, which are lots of happy students. And I'll get good evaluations, because students are happy and contented.

Id.

⁸⁰ *Id.* at 83, 85.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 82, 93.

not mean to suggest that we can teach *less*. When Xers graduate from law school, they must have the same body of knowledge that every generation of lawyers before them had.

In contrast, the strategy of grade inflation differs in that we *can* inflate grades, arguably with no damage to the profession so long as other standards are maintained. But I do not believe that Xers simply want good grades in exchange for nothing. They want their effort rewarded with feedback, and they want the option to choose whether or not to put in the time for the best possible grades. When they do receive good grades, they want them to mean something. While lowering standards and inflating grades are easier than the alternative of fundamentally altering our perception of our students and adapting to how they learn, they will not satisfy teachers or students in the long run.

6. The Next Wave

Teachers reluctant to adapt to the learning style and world view of Generation X should know that it will not end with them. The next generation, dubbed Generation Y or Millennials, will be similar to Xers in that they are accustomed to constant visual and auditory stimulation.⁸² Millennials will not only be accustomed to constant stimulation and activity, they will be far less accustomed than Generation X to print resources and non-computerized activities. The disconnect between teacher learning styles and student learning styles is only going to become more pronounced if teachers shun technology. The good news, though, is that if we develop techniques meant to provide a more stimulating educational experience, these techniques will be useful for many, many years to come.

Additional good news comes in the ways in which the Millennials are different from Xers. Millennials were the beneficiaries of the backlash against the educational reform that failed to adequately educate Xers.⁸³ Because the Xers' education was lacking in fundamental skills—math, science, writing—the new educational reform focused on making students more proficient in those areas.⁸⁴ Test results for Millennials also indicate that they are writing better than the Xers, likely as a result of greater emphasis on fundamental skills.⁸⁵ The downside of the Millennial education is that schools may have overcompensated for perceived inadequacies in the Xer education, resulting in students who are less

⁸² Neil Howe & William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* 250, 257–258 (Vintage Books 2000).

⁸³ *Id.* at 145–148.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 162–164.

proficient at tasks requiring creativity than at tasks requiring information recall.⁸⁶ All in all, though, Millennials promise to bring to law school the best of the past several generations.

V. CONCLUSION

Generation X has definitely caused a ripple in the legal education pond. While Xers certainly are different from previous generations' students (and, therefore, from law faculties) in the way that they learn and see the world, they are just as eager to get an education and become professionally successful. Still, coming of age during the beginning of the technology revolution has made the gap between Generation X and its predecessor generations more pronounced than past generation gaps. Unless we begin understanding the ways in which the changing social structure and quickly-progressing technology affect students, this gap will grow wider with each passing year and each new generation. If we can start by understanding how best to connect with Generation X, we can begin to bridge the gap before it gets so wide that we finally fall into it. It is a new day in legal education.

⁸⁶ *Id.*