

YOUNG WARRIORS IN GENERATION Z:

PROFESSIONALISM CHALLENGES FOR THE NEWEST LAWYERS IN THE ERA OF REMOTE PRACTICE

By Hon. Nicola Henry-Taylor and Samantha Dorn

Generation Z (otherwise known as Gen Z), born roughly between 1997 and 2012, are a significant and growing segment of the legal profession. With the oldest now in their late 20s, they are beginning to fill associate and junior lawyer positions. This is the most diverse and tech-savvy cohort to enter law, but with it comes expectations for flexibility, purpose-driven work, and technological integration that are reshaping firm culture and practice.

While their entry into the profession was marked by unprecedented disruptions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, these “young warriors” can thrive through intentional mentorship, professionalism, and preparation.

Key Characteristics of Gen Z Lawyers

Gen Z lawyers are digital natives—they grew up with the Internet, smartphones, and constant and speedy access to information. They expect



technology to function seamlessly and prioritize digital-first solutions. Gen Z prioritizes flexibility and mental health, and they are more likely to resist traditional expectations of being constantly available (even where remote work is the norm).

These lawyers seek meaningful work—work that connects to the firm’s mission and causes like access to justice. They are outspoken on values such as diversity, equity, inclusion

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WHAT TO DO WITH PROPERTY BLIGHT IN A CHANGING COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE

By Julia Nista

Allegheny County is a county of industry and foresight. It tends to change with the times and adapt to technological developments. It was, after all, the birthplace of U.S. Steel. However, historical developments do not make up for modern struggles. From shuttered storefronts to struggling corridors, commercial property blight has become one of Allegheny County's most persistent economic and legal challenges. Empty retail spaces, neglected industrial sites, and declining property values ripple outward, affecting local governments, landlords, small business owners, and community developers alike. While the issue of property blight is not relegated to Allegheny County alone (many counties across the country are experiencing shifts in use of large commercial spaces for a number of reasons mainly due to technological developments), for the legal community and our clients, understanding the adjacent legal implications is critical.

What is Property Blight?

"Blighted property" is defined by Pennsylvania Act 79 of 2019 (Act of Nov. 7, 2019, P.L. 611, No. 79.), and includes eight separate criteria:

1. A property deemed a public nuisance or containing an attractive nuisance;
2. A dwelling unfit for occupancy;
3. A structure determined to be a fire hazard;

4. A lot that is neglected, vacant, and accumulated trash, rodents, or both;
5. A vacant property receiving notice for corrective action and not rehabilitated within one year of that notice;
6. A vacant parcel for which there is an unpaid municipal lien for the cost of demolition of a structure;
7. A vacant parcel on which municipal liens are greater than one and a half times its fair market value; or
8. A property abandoned by the owner, stipulated by writing.

In practice, municipalities have used blight designations to secure federal funding, attract developers, and assemble land for new development projects. However, declaring commercial blight is a double-edged sword. While it can unlock redevelopment financing, it also signals high risk.

Property Blight's Legal Burden on Neighborhoods

For existing business owners and residential neighborhoods caught in or near a blight-designated zone, the consequences can be significant. Property values can experience decline with a formal label of property blight. Vacant or partially used commercial properties face heightened scrutiny under local code enforcement.

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There is also environmental responsibility for blighted areas: older industrial properties may contain hazardous materials like asbestos, oil tanks, or contaminated soil that trigger obligations to maintain safety. Business owners seeking to sell or lease such properties may have to conduct an elongated environmental due diligence process to avoid future liability. Commercial property owners must also take into consideration the possibility of eminent domain and due process.

Financing and Tax Implications

Blight also changes how financing and taxation works for commercial properties. Lenders often treat blighted areas as “high-risk,” requiring higher interest rates or rejecting loan applications outright. This limits small businesses’ ability to expand or renovate. Many commercial blight areas suffer from cyclical tax delinquency.

On the other hand, Pennsylvania law offers incentives like the Local

Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA), which allows municipalities to exempt improvements from property taxes for up to ten years. Attorneys can play a direct role in helping small business owners navigate these programs. Structuring a redevelopment deal to capture tax abatements or grants can make the difference between a feasible project and one that stalls indefinitely.

A Key Issue with Zoning

Another key dimension of commercial blight lies in Allegheny County’s zoning rigidity. Many blighted commercial areas in Allegheny County are zoned for outdated uses, and neighborhoods that wish to rebuild often encounter a laborious process to do so. Property owners often face lengthy variance or conditional-use hearings to repurpose buildings into modern business spaces. Add to that the cost of bringing old structures up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

or fire safety code, and many owners simply abandon the properties.

One solution to this is for municipalities to revise their zoning maps to promote business redevelopment and new construction builds, or for municipalities to ease the variance process in favor of new business and property development. For business owners, proactively seeking zoning relief or conditional use approval early in the process can prevent costly delays or non-conforming use disputes later.

Emerging Solutions and the Legal Community Next Steps

Recognizing the magnitude of the problem, Allegheny County is expanding its anti-blight toolkit. The Allegheny County Vacant Property Recovery Program (VPRP) allows individuals, nonprofits, and businesses to acquire tax-delinquent properties for reuse, provided they demonstrate the capacity

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DOMESTIC BY DESIGN: HOW ‘BUY AMERICA’ REWRITES THE BID SHEET

By Elizabeth Fitch

After nearly half a century, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is officially revoking its long-standing waiver that allowed foreign made manufactured products to be used in federally funded highway projects. The change, finalized in January 2025, represents one of the most consequential shifts in federal procurement policy in decades, and is designed to ensure that the infrastructure rebuilding America is, quite literally, built by America.

Under this new rule, the phrase “Made in America” will no longer be a patriotic slogan stuck on a product, but instead a binding condition of federal funding. For construction contractors, this means new procurement requirements and higher costs. For policymakers, it is a chance to redirect billions of infrastructure dollars into domestic manufacturing and jobs. But as with any major design change, the real question is whether America can rebuild its supply chain fast enough to keep its projects on schedule.

The push to prioritize American-made goods in public spending dates back to the Great Depression. In 1933, Congress passed the Buy American Act (BAA), requiring federal agencies to favor “domestic end products” and “domestic construction materials” in covered contracts performed in the United States.¹ The goal was straightforward: protect struggling American industries and preserve domestic jobs during a period of severe economic instability.

Over time, Congress expanded these domestic preferences. In the late



1970s, sector specific “Buy America” laws extended similar requirements to federally funded infrastructure projects, including highways, bridges, and public transportation.

In 1983, however, the FHWA issued the Manufactured Products General Waiver, effectively exempting most manufactured products, except iron and steel, from Buy America rules. Under the waiver, contractors could purchase foreign products or use foreign construction materials without violating the BAA. The exemptions primarily applied if the use of domestic construction materials was “impracticable,” “insufficient,” or “inconsistent with the public interest,” or the cost of those domestic materials were “unreasonable.”² For decades, this waiver significantly narrowed the scope of Buy America enforcement.

But as foreign manufacturing grew more competitive, critics argued that

the waiver was a loophole for sending billions of taxpayer dollars overseas. In response, Congress moved to reassert domestic production priorities. The effort culminated in the Build America, Buy America Act (BABA), enacted in 2021.³ BABA considerably tightened domestic sourcing rules and signaled a major shift toward stricter enforcement moving forward.

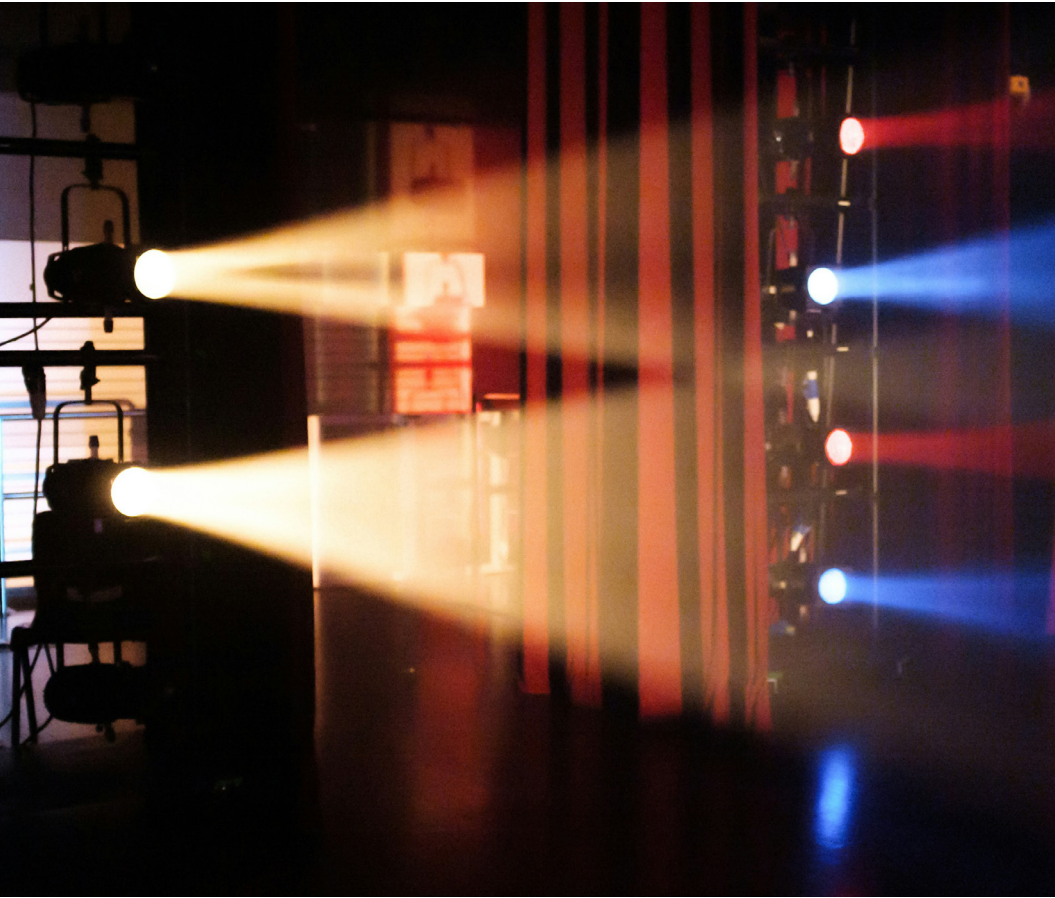
The shift came into full effect in January 2025, when the FHWA issued its final rule formally rescinding the Manufactured Products General Waiver. After over 40 years of exempting various manufactured products from Buy America rules, the FHWA now mandates that all products used on Federal-aid projects be “produced in the United States.”⁴

To ease the transition, the administration adopted a phased implementation schedule. Beginning

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, OBJECTION!

By Sarra Dotts



Although often joked about, the theater kid to lawyer pipeline is real. Theatre becomes intertwined with mock trial and trial advocacy programs, where young adults argue a fictional case in front of an audience, typically comprised of attorneys and judges. For young adults who become litigation attorneys, the performance does not stop there. An attorney in a courtroom usually puts on a well-crafted show for a judge, jury, and other attorneys to witness.

What many attorneys do not realize is that there are many lessons learned from acting that they can incorporate into their oral arguments, jury trials, etc. Not every attorney has a theater background, but every attorney can benefit from the rules of acting.

TELL A STORY BY MAKING A CHOICE WITH THE DIALOGUE.

Actors and attorneys alike are storytellers in their own way. If the line is “You shouldn’t have done this!”, then an actor who is playing the role of a girl who was just gifted a car by her loving parents will be stated differently than an actor playing a criminal seeking revenge.

This is all done by “making choices” with the lines of the script. An attorney should also focus on their vocal delivery. Before walking into the courtroom, counsel should know what story needs to be told to the judge or jury. After figuring out this step, lawyers are then tasked with ensuring that the story is told

properly. This can be done by making the correct choice with dialogue.

An attorney-at-law should be conscientious of their delivery and when to deliver. There is a time to be aggressive, soft, loud, passionate, reserved, boastful, or calm. Knowing when and how to speak takes plenty of preparation and experience.

KEEP THE STORY GOING BY USING THE “YES, AND...” METHOD.

In theater improv, actors are often taught to say “yes and...” to whatever is thrown at them. This allows the plot (that is being made up on the spot) to move forward. If an actor were to say no, the whole performance becomes stagnant. An actor, no matter how silly or random, must work off the choices of the other actors.

This advice is not to say to agree with everything stated in the courtroom. Instead, it is to prepare how to continue their dialogue. What happens when the client testifies to something completely different than what the attorney prepped them on? Or when opposing counsel hands off discovery that hurts the lawyer’s case, how can one respond? Counselors must remember to keep the performance moving.

Oftentimes, during improv performances, an audience member will shout out where the scene is taking place and who the actors are playing, to give some structure to the scene. A trial lawyer will have a similar situation, knowing why they are entering the courtroom and who they represent, but what actually occurs within the four walls of a courtroom usually forces an

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(DEI), and sustainability. Gen Z lawyers expect the firms they work for to reflect these values. Gen Z believes in open communication, clear feedback on assignments, and transparency in career progression and work culture.

Impact on the Legal Profession

Workplace norms have shifted as a result of Gen Z's wants and needs. Firms have been adjusting to flexible schedules, providing remote work options, and emphasizing mental health and personal well-being. Gen Z are pushing for the adoption of new legal technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), and digital practices. Gen Z is exploring non-traditional legal paths, such as in-house counsel, government, and non-profits. They are looking for jobs that provide purpose and a work-life balance. Having an inviting and welcoming culture, advanced technology, and growth opportunities are critical to attract and retain this generation.

Unique Professionalism Challenges Post-COVID-19

When the world paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, so did the soft skills of younger attorneys. With a lack of in-person court experience comes a loss of in-person cues, such as when to stop talking or when the other side is getting upset. Some lawyers may not fully understand the formality and decorum that is expected in the courtroom. Judges have observed young lawyers attending remote proceedings in their pajamas, or in their car (sometimes while driving!), and having distracting backgrounds. All of these undermine the professionalism that is expected among all attorneys. Most of all, the lack of in-person court experience causes lawyers to lose out on those interpersonal lessons all lawyers must learn.

But it does not end with just a slip in decorum. The spontaneous learning moments that we may learn from being in court have been lost in remote

environments. Blurred work-life boundaries create lack of separation between work hours and duties, and non-work time causes stress and burnout for Gen Z lawyers. And the glitches and lags that come with remote proceedings have caused all of us to be creative with our technology usage. Sometimes, improvised technology use can save the day in a hearing or trial, but this also carries errors and risks, especially breaches of attorney-client privilege and inadvertent work product disclosures.

Specific Issues in Remote Court Proceedings

Remote court proceedings bring with them their own issues, most notably technical challenges. Issues regarding internet connectivity, lagging video and audio, and unfamiliarity with platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams create challenges for lawyers, and could potentially carry a risk of malpractice if unnecessary delays are caused by them.

The crucial human element is lost when on a virtual proceeding. Without the non-verbal cues that are present in in-person proceedings, an attorney's advocacy is weakened. They cannot accurately assess the credibility of opponents or witnesses without these cues. There can also be difficulty conferring privately with clients, especially if the lawyers and/or courts do not know how to use breakout rooms, or if the platform does not allow for them. Video hosts could also accidentally jump into a breakout room, thus breaking attorney-client privilege.

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to rehabilitate them. Further, the Act 152 Blight Removal program provides funds for demolition of blighted properties and blight remediation planning. Such programs put property use directly into the hands of those who wish to redevelop their own neighborhoods. Encouraging affordability for new business owners stimulates economic growth in the county, and therefore a better standard of living.

Commercial blight presents both challenge and opportunity. Corporate transactional attorneys can guide clients in acquiring distressed assets and structuring deals that comply with redevelopment requirements. Estate and probate practitioners increasingly encounter commercial properties trapped in long-dormant estates, which is a common root of blight, and advise individual and corporate clients accordingly to quiet title. For the litigators, they could encounter more disputes over code enforcement, tax

foreclosure, and redevelopment agreements as municipalities accelerate revitalization efforts.

The Road Ahead for Improving Property Sites in Allegheny County

While the county eyes its next phase of revitalization, particularly with the 2026 NFL Draft, the Cultural District revitalization, local artificial intelligence (AI) data center growth, and new construction on Market Square, attorneys stand at the intersection of policy, property, and progress with the juxtaposing blight issue that stands out like a sore thumb. The law itself cannot rebuild a storefront or reopen a factory, but it can lay the foundation for a fairer, faster, and more resilient redevelopment future.

Allegheny County has the opportunity to seize a moment of great new development, as do other counties nation-wide. New and beautiful architecture with truly unique and

inspiring buildings could experience a new dawn. Community spaces that encourage kids and families and mentorships have a moment to encourage a new generation that deeply craves friendship. The ideas for new business and neighborhood revitalization are endless. Property blight is not the ultimate termination of a community's heartbeat. It is the end of an era, yes – but if coordinated properly, it can make way for a new beginning. ■



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In a criminal case, the implicit biases that we all have upon seeing certain items or clothing, such as visible restraints on a criminal defendant or a uniform on a police officer, could impact a defendant's presumption of innocence. And there are other breaches that could occur without one knowing about them. These include a client being coached off-screen (either by an attorney or another lay person), cybersecurity gaps, and confidentiality lapses if a breach were to occur.

Addressing and Overcoming the Challenges

Despite all of the challenges that Generation Z faces in the post-COVID legal profession, there are ways that the legal community can assist young lawyers in overcoming them:

- ***Virtual Etiquette Training*** – The American Bar Association (ABA), the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA), and the Allegheny County

Bar Association (ACBA) all offer guidance on what is considered proper virtual etiquette. There are also numerous books and articles which address how one should act when in a remote situation.

- ***Mentorship and Guidance*** – Organizations, both big and small, need to implement structured mentoring programs to assist young lawyers and to model behavior.

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DOMESTIC BY DESIGN: HOW 'BUY AMERICA' REWRITES THE BID SHEET

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October 1, 2025, manufactured products must undergo final assembly in the United States. One year later, by October 1, 2026, at least 55% of total component costs must be U.S. sourced.⁵ Although some waivers remain available, for example, public interest, non-availability, and cost waivers, the FHWA has made clear that approval of these waivers is project specific and should not be relied upon.

While this new rule advances national policy goals around domestic manufacturing, it also introduces new compliance burdens and cost considerations for suppliers and contractors receiving federal funds, raising operational and legal questions across the construction industry. According to the FHWA's Regulatory Impact Analysis, sourcing U.S. made products is expected to increase material costs by \$41 million to \$980 million per year, with an additional \$22 million per year in administrative costs associated with certification and compliance.⁶

As a result, construction contractors should anticipate higher bids and tighter profit margins, particularly for products with limited domestic suppliers. Supply chain constraints may also lead to project delays and claims related to material shortages or cost escalations. Compliance under the new rule will require extensive documentation, including supplier traceability, which in turn will increase audit exposure. Further, firms may need to revisit subcontract terms and conditions, while state DOTs may adjust bid evaluation and reimbursement procedures to reflect new compliance risk. Legal disputes could arise over

waiver denials, domestic suppliers may gain pricing power, and smaller contractors may struggle to keep up.

So, who stands to benefit? Policymakers view the rule as a long-term investment in the United States economy. And as any successful investor would tell you, the market rewards patience. In time, intended beneficiaries are United States manufacturers, workers, and domestic supply chains. Nearly 100 years later, the goal of Buy America is the same as when it originated: to protect American industries and preserve domestic jobs. Additional benefits include increased consistency among domestic content procurement preferences across federal programs and reduced reliance on foreign supply chains, especially in a post-pandemic America.

In the short term, however, rising material costs and heightened compliance risks may create financial pressure across active projects. Still, the full benefit of the new rule is expected to accrue over time as U.S. manufacturing capacity adjusts to meet the increased demand created by the stricter sourcing requirements.

The new Buy America regulations indicate that the true measure of a project is no longer the lowest bid. For the construction industry, the next few years are bound to bring growing pains: supply chain constraints, higher costs,

and compliance headaches. However, for U.S. manufacturers and workers, the new rule presents an opportunity to reclaim the decades lost to global outsourcing. Whether those benefits outweigh the immediate increase in costs will depend on how quickly domestic production scales and how leniently new mandates are interpreted. In short, America's infrastructure is now domestic by design. Quality comes at a cost, but if done right, "Made in America" could become a legacy built to last. ■

¹*The Buy American Act and Other Federal Procurement Domestic Content Restrictions (2025)*, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46748>.

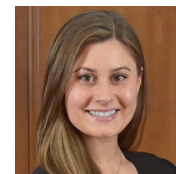
²*Id.*

³*Buy America Requirements for Manufactured Products*, 90 Fed. Reg. 2932 (Jan. 14, 2025) (to be codified at 23 C.F.R. pt. 635).

⁴*Id.*

⁵*Id.*

⁶*Id.*



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LIGHTS, CAMERA, OBJECTION!

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attorney to think on their feet. This can be done by expecting the unexpected and preparing for it.

An actor who is ready to improvise, no matter how much they prepare, is a better-equipped lawyer who tries to stop the scene by stating no.

BLOCKING IS ESSENTIAL.

Blocking is the process during rehearsals in which an actor learns where to move and position themselves on stage. A director will take it line-by-line and instruct the actor on where to stand, whom to talk to, and what emotions should be displayed. Essentially, blocking is like choreography for actors.

Litigants will benefit from taking a moment to “block” themselves. This can be as simple as mapping out where exactly one is to stand in the courtroom to practicing not stating one’s “lines” with an audience to their back to figuring out when to use a “prop”.

If permissible, attorneys should go to the courtroom with another individual to block their “scene,” such as where they stand for opening statements, direct and cross examinations, or when speaking directly to the judge. Having another individual to sit in and “direct” the blocking can be helpful to know how they will be perceived by their audience. Testing how loud to speak

and how much room one has to move around in during a “rehearsal” and before the “performance” will not only help deliver a better story, but also calm the nerves of the attorney.

KNOW WHEN TO MONOLOGUE.

A monologue is a long speech delivered by an actor. Attorneys, unlike actors, do not have a script to read. An actor has the benefit of a playwright who knows when the scene needs a monologue. Lawyers must gauge the situation to know when to bring out their big speech.

Attorneys should be cautioned that monologuing too often can lead to the audience drifting off and not focusing. Delivering lengthy orations after every objection can make the objections themselves feel less impactful.

In moments when attorneys are expected to monologue, such as during opening or closing statements, or oral argument to the judge, attorneys should follow suit with actors. Take pauses when delivering the biggest part of one’s argument. Move slightly when moving onto a new topic. Use props when appropriate.

Actors, in preparation for their monologues, often record themselves to know how it is being delivered. Litigating lawyers could benefit by following suit.

Another aspect of monologuing an attorney should be conscious of is ensuring

their witnesses do not monologue. Whether it is on the stand or during a deposition, an attorney should break up the witness’s long response with questions peppered intermittently.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

A theater kid always knew that a Saturday evening show audience was different than a Sunday matinee show. Sunday audiences might not laugh at a joke that had the Saturday audience laughing for a minute straight.

Not only should attorneys always keep in mind who their audience is, but also how many times the audience has seen the show. A performance will be viewed differently the first time one comes into motions court on a case versus the fourth motion in three months. A juror will not react to one’s performance the same on the first day of jury trial as the second week.

An attorney must have ways to keep the audience engaged. A skilled attorney will know their audience well enough to craft a narrative that keeps the storytelling captivating for all. ■



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- **Technology Proficiency** – Young (and seasoned!) lawyers should receive hands-on training for various platforms, either from an in-house IT department, or from a provider that works with the technology in your firm. They should prepare in advance for a proceeding by testing the platforms and learning how they work.
- **Work-Life Boundaries** – Set clear expectations regarding schedules and what is expected of them during work hours. Along the same lines, protect the wellness of your lawyers by not infringing on boundaries, such as avoiding non-emergency communications outside of business hours.
- **Focus on Outcomes** – Instead of focusing on how many billable hours a lawyer earned during remote work, prioritize and focus on the results of litigation and building trust between yourself and the young lawyer.

Judicial Perspective and Advice for Young Lawyers

Judges expect professionalism in both in-person and virtual courtrooms. Preparedness, respect, and adaptability are key markers of a strong advocate. Young lawyers should embrace mentorship, refine courtroom etiquette, and prioritize ethics.

Practical Tips for Young Lawyers

1. **Test Your Technology in Advance** – Log in to Teams or Zoom early. Check your internet connection,

camera, and microphone before every virtual proceeding. Have a backup device or hotspot available if technology is not working for you.

2. **Maintain Professional Decorum** – Dress as if you were in the courtroom, even if the proceeding is virtual. Choose a neutral, distraction-free background and avoid multitasking onscreen. Do not eat or drink or have other inappropriate items visible.
3. **Be Fully Present** – On Zoom, your attentiveness is noticed. Maintain eye contact with the camera, avoid looking at your phone, and keep your posture professional.
4. **Seek Out Mentors** – Do not wait for mentorship to come to you. Reach out to experienced attorneys, judges, or bar associations to build relationships and ask for feedback.
5. **Prepare Thoroughly** – Over-prepare for virtual court. Anticipate technical glitches, know the rules of procedure, and rehearse your presentation to avoid awkward pauses.
6. **Respect Confidentiality** – Never discuss client matters in a place where you can be overheard. Use secure platforms, avoid public Wi-Fi, and confirm breakout rooms are private before conferring with clients.
7. **Set Work-Life Boundaries** – Define clear remote office hours. Protect your mental health and avoid burnout by taking breaks and disconnecting when the workday ends.

8. **Model Civility and Respect** – Even in stressful moments and contentious cases, always remain courteous to opposing counsel, clients, and court staff. Your reputation for professionalism will precede you.
9. **Ask for Clarification** – If you are unsure about courtroom expectations, contact the judge's staff or senior counsel in advance. It is always better to ask than assume.
10. **Embrace Feedback** – View constructive criticism from judges or mentors as an opportunity for growth. Keep a running list of lessons learned to refine your practice.

Conclusion

The pandemic disrupted traditions but opened opportunities for new practice models. Generation Z lawyers, as digital natives and socially conscious professionals, are uniquely positioned to reshape the profession. By committing to professionalism, seeking guidance, and using technology as a tool—not a crutch—they can thrive. Courts remain spaces of solemnity and justice; and our young attorneys play a vital role in upholding these values. ■



***The Honorable Nicola Henry-Taylor** (left) serves as a judge for the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, PA.*

***Samantha Dorn, Esquire** (right) serves as Judge Henry-Taylor's Law Clerk.*