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L-R: Andres Hidalgo of Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain , Rasheed K. Nader & Meaghan Goldstein of Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton, and Maria Castro Sanchez of Reed Smith. Courtesy photos

## Young Lawyers Counter Veteran Critiques, Embrace Zoom Expertise

"I think millennials just grew up with technology in a way that's different from the baby boomer generation or anybody older. ... We had no choice but to roll with the punches," said one young attorney about litigating in the post-COVID era.

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🕒 7 minute read

Litigation



By Lisa Willis

***Editor's note:** In the Daily Business Review's ongoing series of articles, young attorneys respond to some of the observations from seasoned attorneys, law partners and judges sometimes critical of their courtroom inexperience in the wake of the coronavirus.*

*They argue what they bring to the table can be just as valuable in "Zoom Justice: The Lost Art of Litigation?"*



Credit: Chelsey Fredlund/ALM

With courtrooms shifting from physical spaces to virtual platforms like Zoom, young lawyers face unique challenges and opportunities as they build their careers. And they're sometimes doing so against the attitudes of a different generation of lawyer or judge who might perceive their legal experience as unconventional in the post-coronavirus era.

Attorney Meaghan Goldstein, who began her career at the peak of COVID said, "Every generation is different from

the one that came before, but whether that's better or not is a different question."

With a couple of federal court clerkships under her belt, Goldstein does plaintiff-side class action work and complex commercial litigation. While she admits the post-COVID era has redefined litigation, she is aware that young attorneys are caught between adapting to virtual norms and mastering traditional courtroom skills.

While some might fear missing out on critical experience, she thinks her generation's adaptability and tech-savviness are their undeniable strengths.

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Goldstein, who along with colleagues Rasheed Nader of Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton in Coral Gables, Andres Hidalgo of Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi and Cain, and Maria Castro Sanchez of Reed Smith in Miami, understand the responses to criticism from seasoned attorneys, have a few things to say about what the "older" generation thinks.

Castro Sanchez, who became an attorney in 2020, said one of the good things about learning to practice law since COVID is that the pandemic forced law firms to go online and begin a whole new way of lawyering.

"So it's kind of like a good transition state, because you get really Zoom and in person hearings," Castro Sanchez said. "It all boils down to the same thing, which is being prepared to make your points before the judge and explain what your position is, and really have a conversation with the judge so they'll understand that."

For many young attorneys, the transition to virtual hearings has been both a blessing and a curse.

Hidalgo, who was admitted to the Florida Bar in 2023, acknowledges the convenience of Zoom, but feels that some seasoned attorneys who view the new generation of attorneys as less experienced, need to see with different eyes.

"I think Zoom is a platform that we should embrace, because it allows for your access to the courts and I'd like to respectfully push back a little bit on some of the comments that were made by some of the older generation of attorneys," Hidalgo said in reference to a [Daily Business Review article](#) on courtroom civility and the perceived declining opportunities for young lawyers to gain meaningful courtroom experience—and decorum.

"Even before COVID, young lawyers weren't getting as much time in the courtroom, in front of juries and even in front of judges," said attorney John Uustal of Kelley I Uustal in Fort Lauderdale. Uustal believes this lack of exposure creates professional challenges that Hidalgo thinks have turned out to be advantageous to young attorneys.

"I think with the integration of technology, it's very much the great equalizer," Hidalgo said. "There are many things that a younger associate can bring to the table in terms of embracing technology. A younger associate may likely not know more of the law than a senior partner, but if you're able to help the senior partner convey points, either in a hearing or at trial with the use of technology, then I think that makes the younger associate invaluable."

Hidalgo pointed to a recent hearing in Miami-Dade circuit court where discovery dialogue was lengthy and his skills came in handy: "That can be quite boring if you're just hearing the attorney speak about what's wrong with this interrogatory or that interrogatory, but I was able to create a PowerPoint and show it to the judge over Zoom, and I felt that that allowed me to better argue my points—make them more concise—but also the judge was [better] able to follow them on the screen."

Goldstein thinks COVID formed some positive aspects for her generation of attorneys.

"Those of us who were on the younger side during COVID, I think, are just inherently more comfortable with all the technology that COVID

brought," Goldstein said in support of younger attorneys who she maintains already knew how to use webcams, Zoom set-up for group meetings.

"Not that there aren't hiccups, but I think millennials just grew up with technology in a way that's different from the baby boomer generation or anybody older. ... We had no choice but to roll with the punches," Goldstein said, using her bar exam experience as an example noting it was rescheduled three times.

"The bar exam that I wound up taking was not the one that we had studied for for six months. And you just learn to cope," Goldstein said. "There's a kind of flexibility and resilience that was forced on us that I think is beneficial to this kind of career."

## **'Finger Wagging' From Older Generation**

Goldstein said every generation has done the same 'finger wagging' and down-talking to younger counterparts when assessing the trials and tribulations of youth and experience, or lack thereof.

"I hear my parents talk about how their generation was disrespectful for having their trendy Beatles haircuts, right? That happens in every generation," Goldstein said. "I think there's also a measure of truth to some things. For a lawyer in their 70s or 80s to point at me and Rasheed and say, well, 'if Westlaw went down, you wouldn't know what to do, because you don't know how to use hard-bound recorder books.' And that's absolutely true. We don't."

During the interview, Nader chimed-in and said, "But we can learn through a YouTube video."

In agreement with Nader's comment, Goldstein said they could also ask ChatGPT to teach them how to get by. "My point is yes, of course, every generation is different from the one that came before, but whether that's better or not is a different question."

Nader and Goldstein praised their firm in support of their youth.

"The older generation partners here lift us up. They don't beat us down. I think Harley Tropin and John Kozak, Chuck Throckmorton, are some of our biggest cheerleaders, and look to the younger lawyers for new energy and for new ideas, rather than telling us how much we don't know," Goldstein said.

Nader thinks the new Zoom generation of lawyer is better prepared because of COVID.

"There seems to be this understanding that if you didn't go to court in person, you weren't getting adequate experience as a young lawyer," Nader said. "But something that COVID brought in this the Zoom generation is that it also allowed court to be open more frequently, and it actually made litigants have to be more concise."

Nader said in state court had the benefit of arguing through theatrics, as opposed to the actual arguments where Zoom hearings no longer have that ability. Zoom's ability to shuffle through cases more rapidly created a volume of experience to their advantage.

"I guess growing up as a litigant in the Zoom court, I did have some benefits," Nader said. "It was easier to get in court because it was happening more often, and now it has actually helped prepared me for the more in person [cases] I've been litigating recently."

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