

New Lawyer Division PRMCLE

Webinar

October 9, 2026

Noon

Welcome/Introductions

Ashleigh Zurek, New Lawyer Division Chair

12:00 – 1:00 PM

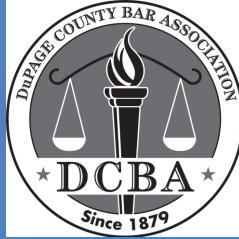
Program

Same Case, Different Expectations: Communicating Across Generations in Legal Practice – Dr. Christopher Miller, College of DuPage.

Christopher James Miller, Ed.D., is a Professor of Speech Communication at College of DuPage, where he has taught since 2002. An award-winning educator, he specializes in communication competence, public speaking, and the ways people navigate difference through everyday interaction. His teaching and scholarship draw upon more than two decades of experience in higher education. Dr. Miller earned his doctorate in Curriculum and Instructional Leadership from Northern Illinois University, where his research explored communication, performance, and lived experience.

What sounds efficient to one lawyer may sound abrupt, evasive, or disrespectful to another. Generational differences can influence how attorneys interpret tone, urgency, authority, feedback, and professional expectations—but generational labels often conceal more than they explain.

In this interactive CLE, speech communication professor Christopher James Miller, Ed.D., moves beyond stereotypes to examine how culture, professional identity, autonomy, power, and



experience shape communication among colleagues, supervisors, clients, and opposing counsel. Through practical legal scenarios and small-group discussion, participants will learn the CARE framework: Consider the context, ask for the insider's perspective, respond strategically, and ensure shared understanding. Attendees will leave with adaptable strategies for managing difficult conversations, reducing misunderstandings, and communicating more effectively across generations

Link to Evaluation

The evaluation must be completed in order to receive CLE credit.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewLawyer10926>.

Upcoming Events:

October 15, 2026 - [October Unwind / Pro Bono Awards](#) - DuPage Historical Museum, Wheaton.

October 28, 2026 - [Lawyers Lending a Hand October Project](#) - Western DuPage Special Recreation Association.

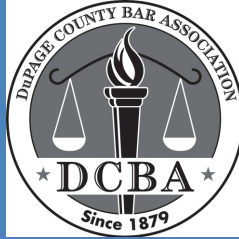
December 17, 2026 - [2026 DCBA / DAWL / Justinians Holiday Gala](#) - Harry Caray's Ballroom, Lombard.

DCBA OnDemand CLE is Available on IICLE:

Members can find the link to The Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education (IICLE) catalog on the DCBA website under the menu item CLE & Events □ IICLE Online Library. You must be logged into your DCBA Membership Profile to view courses for free or at a reduced price.

View & Print CLE Certificates through the DCBA Website:

CLE Certificates can take up to a week following the date of the CLE program to appear in your member profile. Members can view and print their certificates for any DCBA CLE program attended by first signing into their account on the DCBA website. Hover over the **CLE & Events** menu item and select **Find My CLE Credits**. This page will list all the CLE credits



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Communication Across Generations in Legal Practice

Face, culture, and the CARE framework

Christopher James Miller, Ed.D.

One-hour interactive Zoom session



Our hour together

0–15

Experience and expectations

What have we learned to expect?

15–30

Frames and face

What kind of encounter is this?

30–45

Communication choices

How should we respond?

45–60

Application and reflection

What will we carry into practice?



What the research supports

GENERATION LABELS

Broad workplace profiles have limited empirical support.

COMMUNICATION

Age stereotypes and workplace context shape interactions.

PREFERENCES

Personal technology habits can differ from professional behavior.

Ask about the person, the task, and the relationship.



Experience shapes what we expect

INTERACTION

What a person brings meets the conditions of the present situation.

CONTINUITY

Earlier experiences influence this encounter. This encounter shapes what comes next.

Does this experience open us to further learning?



How do lawyers communicate today?

What patterns—or stereotypes—come to mind?

BABY BOOMERS

**Speech
Dress
Expectations**

GENERATION X

**Speech
Dress
Expectations**

MILLENNIALS

**Speech
Dress
Expectations**

GENERATION Z

**Speech
Dress
Expectations**

What experiences shaped these perceptions? What might change them?



Generational labels are clues—not verdicts

**A generation may shape experience.
It does not determine a person.**

Age
Career stage
Professional role
Power
Workplace culture
Technology and history

The disciplined move is curiosity: Which expectation is operating here?



Read this message before you interpret it

**Need to discuss your draft.
Stop by when you can.**

In the Zoom chat: What emotion, urgency, and relationship do you hear?



One message, different frames

Mentoring

A chance to develop the argument together?

Evaluation

A formal assessment of the draft?

Discipline

A warning about performance or status?

Coordination

A routine check before the next step?



Every legal interaction puts identity on the line

People do not enter interaction as neutral processors of information.

THE SUBSTANTIVE CASE

What must be decided, explained, corrected, requested, or accomplished?

THE RELATIONAL CASE

What does the message imply about competence, authority, respect, belonging, and autonomy?

A message can win the first case and lose the second.



Competence and autonomy are at stake

APPROVAL AND RESPECT

The desire for one's identity, ability, values, and contributions to be understood and approved.

Threatened by criticism, disagreement, rejection, exclusion, or dismissal.

AUTONOMY

The desire for autonomy and freedom from unnecessary imposition.

Threatened by requests, orders, deadlines, interruptions, pressure, or unwanted access.

One request can threaten both concerns.



Legal work requires difficult messages

Ask difficult questions
Correct an error
Challenge an account
Reject a proposal
Deliver unwelcome advice
Set a deadline
Establish a boundary
Disagree with authority

**Some professional messages
will challenge people.**

**Careful delivery reduces
avoidable damage to the
relationship.**



Authority, familiarity, and burden

1

AUTHORITY

Who can impose consequences or control resources?

2

FAMILIARITY

How familiar, similar, or relationally close are we?

3

BURDEN

How burdensome or consequential is this act here?

The variables are perceived—not objective. Cross-generational friction often begins when the perceptions do not match.



Ways to deliver a difficult message

DIRECT

State the act plainly

Clarity and urgency

CONNECTION

Show solidarity or approval

Connection and belonging

AUTONOMY

**Acknowledge autonomy or
burden**

Deference and choice

INDIRECT

Imply rather than state

Tact—but ambiguity

More polite is not automatically more effective. The strategy must fit the goal and context.



When communication crosses generations, lead with CARE.

C

Consider

A

Ask

R

Respond

E

Ensure



Consider the context. Ask for the insider's perspective.

CONSIDER

Look beyond age to worldview, role, power, career stage, workplace culture, technology, and history.

What expectation may be operating?

ASK

Surface meaning rather than assigning it.

‘How would you prefer that I communicate urgent matters?’

‘What did that message signal to you?’



Choose what should happen to the pattern

KEEP

Preserve what already supports clarity, trust, and professional purpose.

BRIDGE

Accommodate or negotiate when legitimate preferences do not naturally fit.

CHANGE

Repattern a practice that causes confusion, exclusion, ethical risk, or harm.

Keep what works. Bridge what differs. Change what harms.



Delivery of the necessary message

1 Name the professional goal

What must the listener understand, decide, disclose, or do?

2 Identify what is at stake

Does the act challenge identity, autonomy—or both?

3 Choose the delivery

Use directness, connection, acknowledgment, or a pause.

CARE never requires ambiguity, unethical conduct, or acceptance of discrimination and disrespect.



Ensure shared understanding

Understanding is demonstrated—not assumed.

MEANING

What did the other person understand?

DECISION

What was chosen or resolved?

ACTION

Who will do what—and by when?

RELATIONSHIP

What expectation should guide the next interaction?



Breakout: examine a communication disconnect

1. Each person briefly shares an experience.
2. Select one example for deeper analysis.
3. Choose a reporter and a timekeeper.
4. Prepare one sentence to share with the full group.

7 minutes • Groups of 3–4



BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

Analyze the disconnect with CARE

- C** What context shaped the interaction?
- A** What assumption needed to become a question?
- R** **What should be kept, bridged, or changed—and how should the message be delivered?**
- E** What needed to be confirmed afterward?

Protect confidentiality: change names and identifying details.



Report the pattern—not every detail

The apparent generational conflict was _____.

The underlying face or expectation issue was _____.

We would keep _____, bridge _____, and change _____.

What did CARE reveal that the generational label concealed?



BEFORE THE NEXT IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Do not ask only, ‘Was I clear?’

Ask whether the other person could understand, participate, and respond.

C Consider
A Ask
R Respond
E Ensure

When communication crosses generations, lead with CARE.



Foundational works

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987).
Politeness: Some universals in language usage.
Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, J. (1938).
Experience and education.
Macmillan.

Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self
in everyday life. Doubleday.

Goffman, E. (1967). Interaction ritual. Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1974). Frame analysis. Harvard UP.

Leininger, M. (1996).

Culture care theory, research, and practice.

Nursing Science Quarterly, 9(2), 71–78.



Recent research for further reading

Ravid, Costanza, & Romero (2025)
Generational differences at work?
Journal of Organizational Behavior
DOI: 10.1002/job.2827

Mentado-Labao et al. (2026)
Intergenerational communication among
university teaching staff
Higher Education Quarterly
DOI: 10.1111/hequ.70078

Janssen & Carradini (2021)
Gen Z workplace communication habits
IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication
DOI: 10.1109/TPC.2021.3069288

Giles (2025)
Theoretical approaches to intergenerational
communication and aging
International Journal of Aging and Human Development
DOI: 10.1177/00914150241297398

Shen et al. (2026)
Intergenerational contact and knowledge sharing
Journal of Applied Gerontology
DOI: 10.1177/07334648251359001

Yu, Beigi, & Parry (2026)
Ageism and career outcomes: A systematic review
Human Resource Development Review
DOI: 10.1177/15344843261451382