The very fact that this conference is occurring is verification that we know “something is up” with our law students of recent years. Something that has reached a critical mass at this point.

We know that we are getting law students who are underprepared – by the droves.

Coming together of factors that have produced our current crop of law students:

Millennial Generation
   a. K-12 “No Child Left Behind”
   b. Colleges lowered their once-rigorous standards
   c. Result → graduates without critical reading, reasoning, and writing skills
   d. Digital Age → changes in brain structure (multi-tasking, social media)
   f. Raised by parents, education system, and society:
      -protected
      -avoid failure
      -promote high self-esteem → increased confidence → our children are special
   g. We succeeded!
      -our students feel special and entitled
      -our students feel confident → overconfident
      -some millennials are narcissistic, have high expectations and are over-confident
   h. Lest I sound too pessimistic, there is good news!
      It is not too late for students to learn the critical thinking skills they need. Brains are amazing: just as they adapted to the Digital Age, brains can re-learn or learn new things by rewiring new neural connections so students can focus and learn to think deeper (Neuroplasticity)
   i. Problem is: unmotivated students who don’t want and don’t think they need to change. Susan will speak in a few minutes to these overconfident students.

Right now, I’ll give a quick run-down of the traits of our Millennial law students, who have been nurtured all their lives to be overconfident.

We’ve been talking a lot about the traits of the Millennial Generation today and how the generations are cyclical.

However, I posit that the traits of the millennials may not go away. Due to fundamental changes in Western Society, we are beginning to see a new life stage—Emerging Adulthood—between adolescence and adulthood. Ages 18–30. It is likely here to stay.

For more on that, see our first article, Bringing a Knife to a Gunfight.
Back to Millennial/Emerging Adult traits:

Millennial Generation

a. K-12 “No Child . . .”
- teach to test; no time for . . .

b. Higher education, underprepared for
- “silent disengagement compact”
  - Student: low amount of reading & writing. Professor: less grading, high course evaluation. → leads to students with high expectations
  - Students recruited to college sports think play NFL or NBA
    - <2% get tryout; <2% last one season
  - Architect students – aspire to be like Frank L. Wright
    - Few ever are even the primary designer of a private home
    - Don’t know what it takes
    - Got trophies just for “showing up”
    - Didn’t study much
    - Have experienced academic success with little effort → success should continue. When that doesn’t work, it must be professor’s fault

c. Digital Age
- Grew up with computers. Had them as early as kindergarten, if not at home.
- Being the Net Gen doesn’t necessarily mean digitally literate.
- Distracted → can’t distinguish what is important from what is not.
- Lots of social media – yet no social support.
- Increased connections, yet isolated.
- Increased info available, yet 50% of 18-24 yr olds can’t find NY state on map.
- Multi-tasking – really brain quickly switching from one focus to another. Multi-tasking has “Switch costs”. It has wired brain to short attention span. → Lost productivity.
  - Can’t focus long enough to learn complex things, deal with complex tasks.

We know some ways to rewire brains of motivated students, but what of the over-confident, unmotivated students? My colleague, Susan Stuart, will explore the problems of the unmotivated law student.