

**Preparing Today's Leaders for Tomorrow's Recruits: An Exploration of the Impact of  
Future Generations on the Law Enforcement Profession**

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### **Abstract**

For many years, law enforcement agencies have been adjusting to the Millennial Generation and the changes they have brought to the law enforcement profession. Agencies are struggling to attract, train and retain quality recruits from younger generations using methods that had worked previously for older generations, causing a significant impact on employee turnover. For this study, we propose to research and examine the characteristics of the emerging Generation Z as it poises to make its entrance into the law enforcement profession and discuss how current leadership needs to adapt its methods to attract Generation Z to long-term law enforcement careers and reduce employee turnover. This work will examine the perspectives of the three generations currently serving in law enforcement. We will use information from Session 2 of the National Command and Staff College and other published work to provide insight on how Generation Z uses technology, views their world and interacts. We hope to provide meaningful suggestions for current law enforcement leaders to consider as they prepare to attract, train and integrate Generation Z into their workforce.

### **Preparing Today's Leaders for Tomorrow's Recruits: An Exploration of the Impact of Future Generations on the Law Enforcement Profession**

Today's law enforcement agencies are faced with new challenges as it relates to the arrival of new generational groups entering the workforce. Currently there are three generations actively serving in law enforcement: the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, with the newly recognized Generation Z poised to make its entrance. The purpose of this research is to educate current leadership to the differences in the attitudes and characteristics of each generation in order to adapt and generate a leadership style that will be effective for both the subordinates and the leaders within the organization in order to reduce turnover (Snyder, 2018).

Currently, law enforcement agencies are experiencing transition within their agencies. As members of the Baby Boomer generation are leaving their agencies for retirement, new generations are entering the profession. The characteristics, needs and values of the new generations are not always compatible with the generations currently in leadership roles. Today's law enforcement leaders need to understand the dynamics created by different generations serving in law enforcement and take proactive steps to adapt leadership styles to best serve the needs of the newer generations of officers.

#### **Literature Review**

Being born during the Post World War II era, Baby Boomers have a natural inclination to respect authority figures which complements the paramilitary style of law enforcement. Their belief is that hard work and sacrifice equate to success resulting in a workaholic mentality. Consequently, they accept the personal dedication it takes to work the necessary back-shifts and overtime that are inherent in a career in law enforcement. They lean toward teamwork, collaboration and group decision making. As a generation, they believe that younger workers

don't work as hard as their generation and therefore are reluctant to respect individuals in the up and coming generations (Snyder, 2018).

Generation X grew up during a period where they had to be more independent and were commonly referred to as "Latch Key" kids. As a result, these individuals are more autonomous and self-reliant. They generally have strong feelings towards their family and friends, but are not overly loyal to their employers and at times will question authority. These individuals are ruled by a sense of accomplishment and not necessarily the clock; they are results driven. Generation X is viewed as being the most confident generation and as a result can be characterized as demanding. With the Baby Boomer generation dissipating, the Generation X group has suddenly become the leadership foundation of most agencies. As leaders, these individuals are more apt to value continuous learning and skill development, and tend to have somewhat strong technical skills (Snyder, 2018).

Since Generation X makes up most of the leadership within organizations, the newest and smallest group of leaders fall into the generation referred to as Millennials. These individuals have a strong desire for balance in their life, with a strong connection to family and self. This generation is purported to be one of the most highly educated generations and as a result are very comfortable using technology. They have many overlapping characteristics to Generation X in that they value training and collaboration within groups. Not surprising, they also have some overlapping characteristics to the newest generation, Generation Z, including a strong understanding of technology and social media (Snyder, 2018).

### **Employee Turnover**

Millennials and presumably Generation Z's priorities are more self-focused than organizationally focused. This has led to a drastic increase in employee turnover rates. This is

particularly critical for law enforcement leaders to address given the amount of time and effort it takes to train officers before they become proficient in their duties, especially with the often limited resources of government. According to Normore, line officers are leaving because they are not presented with sufficient opportunities for career development. Given this information, law enforcement leaders need to take a proactive approach by identifying potential solutions to adapt to the Millennials in the workforce and prepare for the Generation Z of law enforcement officers (Normore, 2018).

One factor affecting employee turnover is the tendency for Millennials to get what they can out of one job and move on to the next opportunity for self-improvement and advancement once they feel they have gotten all they could from their current employer. In order to counteract this, current law enforcement leaders need to offer opportunities for ongoing training and collaboration in order to engage the younger generations.

### **Social Movement**

We have seen in recent years that Millennials are becoming more and more comfortable within the workplace. They have gone from the generation that has brought about change in regards to technology, mobile devices, and social media, to the generation that is starting their own social movement within organizations. It has become more evident that Millennials are trying to change the culture of organizations in order to fit their own lifestyle. According to Gianniris (2018), "It shouldn't come as a surprise that millennials prefer work-life integration as opposed to work-life balance. This infers that family and personal pursuits would not be sacrificed for the sake of career growth." (para. 5).

For years, the law enforcement profession has had an expectation for new recruits to accept and follow a set of informal rules upon entry. Recruits should have been aware they were

going to have to work holidays, weekends and nights on a rotating schedule. They were going to miss important family functions such as birthday parties, anniversaries, or family reunions.

Consistent with the generational profiles, Baby Boomers and Generation X were accepting of these traditions and adapted their lifestyles to overcome these hurdles and continue on with their careers. The Millennials have, in some cases, started a social movement in law enforcement where they are unwilling to accept this structure and are pushing leaders towards incremental changes within the organization that better suits their needs.

### **Personal and Professional Experience**

Recently, a group of Millennial deputies within one of our organizations approached the administration about changing the work schedule to allow more time off throughout the year so they can better integrate their family and friends, stating their motivation and satisfaction for the job has been declining. It was also clear the group's dedication to the organization has been declining, as seen through increased sick time usage. The group was successful in establishing a committee to reevaluate the current schedule and consider alternatives that would better integrate their family life with their organizational career.

It is our belief Millennials will continue this trend of manipulating organizations in an attempt to achieve changes in the traditional operational methods. The Millennials have started the movement and we can expect Generation Z will continue this trend in trying to get organizations to adapt to their way of thinking and learning. Current law enforcement leaders need to take generational differences into consideration and prepare the organization for incremental changes in order to adapt to these future recruits.

### **Technology Adaptations**

Changes in technology, and how it impacts education, politics, and social issues, are redefining the public expectations placed on how law enforcement agencies do their work. Technology advanced at a rapid pace during their childhood, so Generation Z has grown up connected. Older generations in law enforcement have had to learn to adapt to technology that is native to the younger generations. Law enforcement leaders will need to understand Generation Z's dependence on technology, but guide them in the appropriate usage of technology that complies with applicable law and policy. The younger generations' use of technology is not always compatible with existing governmental policy designed to protect employee integrity, data and comply with open record laws. For instance, law enforcement agencies need to train recruits on open records laws to ensure they understand that using a personal device to send work related text messages subjects their personal property to discovery in future court cases. One point of note that law enforcement leaders will find encouraging is that Generation Z is reported to have learned from the Millennials' mistakes about openly sharing personal and other information via social media and is more conservative in its use (Carter 2018).

### **Role of Leadership**

Over time, routine patterns in an organization move it to stagnation and the organization loses alignment with changing external realities (Long, 2018). Many issues surrounding the younger generational workforce center around change and adaptation to new ideas. Unlike other generations, information on how Generation Z will interact with the workplace is limited. Law enforcement professionals preparing for the entry of Generation Z into their workforce should pay close attention to the education styles and events that have shaped the members of Generation Z and its impact to their experiences in the workplace. Current leadership should

consider making adaptations in traditional command structure to incorporate the younger workforce in problem-solving and decision-making, giving them a greater sense of involvement through informal leadership. Law enforcement leaders must also consider the perspective Generation Z brings to their agencies. The contribution that Generation Z can make is positive, but they must be carefully guided to ensure that they make a successful transition into law enforcement.

Generation Z's have a strong desire to capitalize on entrepreneurial visions and make a positive impact in their communities. This makes it all the more important for an agency to offer a mission-driven environment. Law enforcement leaders looking to attract and retain Generation Z recruits should focus recruiting efforts on the opportunities law enforcement provides for this generation to positively impact their communities through their work. It is more important for them to have a career that provides them with an opportunity to have transformational impact rather than just financial prosperity (Carter 2018). This is an important consideration in a time when the public is demanding change in law enforcement expectations to include greater community engagement.

Law enforcement leaders need to adapt to Generations Z's use of technology in the area of attracting top candidates to their organizations. In order to reach these upcoming candidates, we will need to incorporate social media and online job boards to recruit prospective Generation Z candidates. Leaders wishing to appeal to this web-driven generation should consider the branding of their agency. This will give a strategic edge as Generation Z's are consistently browsing your website and social sites, so the agency brand and how it's communicated will be vitally important to attracting top talent.



### **Conclusion**

The key to being a successful change agent is to learn to apply the right amount of disequilibrium to an organization. What works for one group of employees may not be successful with another, especially when considering the differing values of the generations. Law enforcement leaders will need to be able to adapt to meet the needs of this new generation.

As the Millennials entered law enforcement, current leaders in law enforcement have been compelled to adapt to the value systems and technologically savvy ways of the Millennials in order to attract, recruit, and retain this generation as long-term police professionals. We must also take a proactive approach to ensuring a smooth transition as Generation Z begins to enter the workforce. Our current leaders must be vigilant in developing new and innovative ways to bring out the best in current and future generations of law enforcement officers. By doing so, we will build upon the legacy and professionalism of law enforcement.

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