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**Police Supervision:
The Generational Differences**

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ABSTRACT

The growing philosophy of less supervision and less discipline, coupled with the belief that employees must be treated as individuals and supervised based on their individual generational issues, may have become acceptable in other professions, but it will not succeed in the field of law enforcement. The research conducted was to support the belief in and defend the historical organizational structure of law enforcement. Research has shown that the new generations of officers entering law enforcement have different morals and values than officers from older generations (Dittman, 2005; Garner, 2003; Grant, 2008; McCafferty, 2003; Sullivan, 2004). However, the standard of law enforcement remains the same. The public demands a level of professionalism from individual officers, their supervisors, and the department that serves the community in which they live.

The information gathered in researching this topic was obtained through a review of articles, internet sites, journals, personal communications, and books. The information researched will support the philosophy of the pre-existing paramilitary structure of law enforcement in professionalism, supervision, and discipline. Although younger officers may have different expectations regarding the way in which they are supervised, they should not be supervised differently than older officers. Supervisors must remember that one must do so in a manner that is fair and consistent within the organizational structure, which demands a high level of professionalism and discipline. Supervisors who promote and follow the philosophy of a strong professional and disciplined approach to supervision will gain the respect and support of the community and subordinate officers alike.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of law enforcement is a very complex and demanding career field. Individuals, who enter this career field, may find themselves tasked with dealing with the public in a way they never thought possible. The law enforcement officer may also find themselves in a career field that places strict demands on them, not only from the public they serve, but from the supervisors who watch over them every day (Garner, 2003).

Law enforcement, from its advent, has generally been associated with the government and is looked at as being paramilitary in structure. Several of the strict guidelines and traditions of supervision, discipline, and professionalism that are placed on today's law enforcement officers originated from the military (McCafferty, 2003). This can be contributed to the manner in which the public was policed prior to the advent of organized law enforcement (History of Law Enforcement, n.d.). This was also due to those individuals who had prior military exposure entering the law enforcement career field (McCafferty, 2003).

As law enforcement has progressed, officers who wish to become supervisors may discover that it can be very complicated and are tasked with attempting to come up with new and exciting ways of policing or serving the communities in which they work. Law enforcement supervisors also find themselves working with officers who may be much older or much younger than themselves and who may have different morals, values and ethics, which were learned based on the generational era in which they were raised (McCafferty, 2003). Supervisors of today may be placed in a position of having to oversee several different types of officers, which can range from the very old to the very

young, with each officer having a different set of morals, values, and ethics, thus creating a difficult and challenging task in supervision (Sullivan, 2004).

Supervisors today are being taught that the generations of officers most prevalent in the career field are baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y. They are taught that each generation of officers must be supervised differently and that the newer generation Y officers must be taught, trained, and supervised in a manner that requires constant tutoring and routine reminding, with less discipline and more counseling (J. Biery, personal communication, July 14, 2009). While this may be true in other professional career fields that allow for mistakes and a lack of discipline, this theory is unacceptable in the field of law enforcement, as it would be unacceptable in the medical, financial, or other legal career fields, where mistakes could be detrimental to the lives of others.

There is always one constant in the law enforcement organization: the basic structure and organization of the law enforcement organization must remain the same. The level of supervision, discipline, and professionalism must remain consistent regardless of the age of the officers. Law enforcement officers are charged with dealing with those tasks in which others do not wish to deal with. Law enforcement officers routinely respond to those situations most citizens will likely never be exposed to. It is during those times that officers are expected to remain calm, composed, professional, in control, and emotionless while protecting citizens from what they fear: being a victim of crime.

Officers must be supervised on a level that is consistent and fair. Supervisors must remain the same in dealing with every officer, from the oldest to the youngest. If a

supervisor chooses to supervise their subordinate officers on an individual basis, they will almost certainly find themselves in a compromising position, in that other subordinate officers may claim that the supervisor is biased and prejudiced. If two officers were to commit the same violation and one officer receives a day off, but the other receives a letter of reprimand, the supervisor could find himself in a position of having to answer before a grievance committee. This does not mean that an officer who has had previous disciplinary issues should receive the same form of discipline, but should be subject to progressive discipline (Garner, 2003). Fairness must be a key component in the supervisor's ability to deal with subordinates in handling misconduct. If a supervisor chooses to supervise an officer on a level that is not fair and consistent with the manner in which they supervise other officers, this could cause problems for the officer among their peers. He could become isolated from the other officers.

Law enforcement is a profession that places demands on officers from the public. If the officer is not supervised in a manner consistent with what the public expects, this could not only create a problem for the officer through complaints being generated, but for the city and department for which the officer works. Newer officers should not be supervised any different from that of older officers. Law enforcement, in general, has not changed because the basic foundation has remained the same. Public expectations remain the same, and professionalism is demanded from all officers. If supervisors begin to oversee subordinate officers on an individual level, they will most certainly create problems for themselves and the department.

POSITION

There is a need to recognize the different generations that are now entering or are currently involved in the field of law enforcement, and each generation has within its very make up, a different set of values, morals, and way of thinking. Although the rest of the working world may embrace a changing philosophy of management and supervision, the law enforcement community cannot afford to assume this theory in its totality. Law enforcement historically has a paramilitary structure of enforcement, professionalism, and discipline (History of Law Enforcement, n.d.), which depending on what type of agency an officer may work for, is charged with not only enforcing the laws of a municipality, county, and state, but of the United States (Dr. J. Alexander, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

The citizens, whom law enforcement is charged to protect, demand a certain level of professionalism in dealing with that which they choose not to face and fear, being a victim of crime. The same citizens want and expect a more severe treatment of violent offenders when others may want the norm in allowing the judicial system to deal with them (McCafferty, 2003). Law enforcement at its roots, being a form of government, is required to protect all citizens and to offer equal protection under the law. Law enforcement officers are unique in that they are held accountable and are responsible for protecting the rights of those they serve.

According to McCafferty (2003), "The rate of violent crime has gone down in the nation as a whole. This is simply the lull before the storm" (p. 82). Supervisors, in their responsibilities, need to realize that crime is perpetual in nature and that the nature of law enforcement, which may not fit into other professions management style of thinking

based on its structure, places demands on officers, which is evident by the strict general orders or policies they are required to follow. Officers are held to a higher standard of expectations and discipline. This involves a completely different type of supervision and, by its very nature, requires those entering the field of law enforcement to conform to the paramilitary style of structure and supervision (Sullivan, 2004).

Another recently recognized facet of law enforcement is that it creates stress, which can be overwhelming at times, that can create serious issues for the officer as they once again deal with that, which the rest of the world chooses to not face. The officer then realizes that they are mortal, and death and destruction is an everyday occurrence (McCafferty, 2003). It is these realizations that further strengthen the concept and belief in the organizational structure of a law enforcement agency being paramilitary, which does not dehumanize the officer, but allows them to momentarily remove themselves from the emotional aspect of that, which most citizens find disturbing.

Subordinates as well as supervisors define supervision in many different ways. The most basic definition can be defined as overseeing the actions of others. This, at its very mention, can deliver a negative vision of being authoritarian in nature. Supervisors must look at themselves in a positive way as being able to deal with their subordinates actions and abilities, no matter which generation they are supervising, while being able to deliver their best in police service to the public. Supervisors should look at their abilities in leading by example and not take the negligent approach of “do as I say and not as I do” (Garner, 2003, p.6).

Supervisors, as well as officers, should look at themselves as being an extension of the law enforcement agency for which they work. They should display a high level of professionalism while providing a high quality of police service that not only represents the morals and values of the department, but the community in which they are serving and protecting. The officer is at the forefront in representing the department. They and their actions must be looked at as being professional and fair, while protecting the agency's reputation (Sullivan, 2004). The supervisor plays a very important roll in assuring the agency's reputation is protected by leading their subordinates by example, and ensuring those sometimes demanding policies are followed. This is accomplished through discipline.

For many, the word discipline is negative in nature. This may be true for many supervisors in the manner in which they supervise their subordinates. Discipline taken in its totality carries many positive attributes, such as a way of thinking and actions, but also carries the negative and at times difficult reality of formal disciplinary action, which may include the termination of a subordinate (Garner, 2003). In assuring that discipline is maintained, supervisors should be given independence as well as the ability to guide the shift according to the supervisor's own beliefs, while assuring that their beliefs and supervision style are in compliance with the agencies policies and mission (Sullivan, 2004).

Discipline, by its very nature, involves the aspects of rank and chain of command. Supervisors in their actions promote this within their subordinates, which cannot tolerate so called generational differences. This is not done merely by title alone, but by recognition and earned respect. This is accomplished by ranking supervisors,

who are disciplined and able to display and promote those qualities of confidence and competence in their subordinate supervisors (McCafferty, 2003). A disciplined subordinate should be a reflection of their supervisor. The disciplined subordinate takes pride in their job and successfully completes assigned task not for fear of facing punishment but because they know it is the proper thing to do (Garner, 2003).

Supervisors who are well disciplined themselves will promote a solid foundation of discipline within their subordinates. A good supervisor will take ownership in accountability and responsibility while leading their subordinates. A supervisor, in taking formal discipline against a subordinate who does not meet agency expectations, must do so with caution. They must be able to take the appropriate action in assuring that they are being fair at all times and that such discipline is equal in distribution depending on the misconduct. This will ensure that the subordinate feels they are being treated fairly (Sullivan, 2004).

For subordinates to accept disciplinary action as being fair, they must view the action as being consistent with what has occurred before. The supervisor in their administering of discipline must be cautious and refrain from handing out one form of discipline to one subordinate and then handing out another form of discipline to another subordinate who has committed the same misconduct under similar circumstances. By not administering discipline in a fair and equal manner, the supervisor and or agency may find themselves answering to police associations or unions. However, this does not mean that a supervisor or agency should issue the same level of discipline for perpetual misconduct by a subordinate officer (Garner, 2003).

COUNTER POSITION

Sergeant Byrd enters the squad room where he finds himself faced with having to supervise three very different types of people, which have been described as being the baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y. Proponents say that by their very nature these officers have three different personalities depending on the era in which they were raised. Some researchers and instructors may include a fourth generation, the traditionalists, who were born between 1922 and 1945. This article will focus on the most recent three. According to M. Martin (2007), with the University of Missouri Extension Human Resources Department, baby boomers are described as those individuals born between 1946 and 1964, generation Xer's are described as those individuals born between 1965 and 1980, and the generation Y individuals were born between 1981 and 2001. Martin further explained and described the baby boomers work ethic as having self worth, identity, and fulfillment. Generation Xer's work ethic meant that they worked to live and work smarter, not harder. Generation Y's work ethic is that of being a hard worker and entrepreneurship, with an ability to multi-task.

Supervisors are being taught that each individual group has its own set of values based on the era in which they were raised. They have very distinct and differing opinions on what is important in their core values (Martin, 2007). Supervisors are further being taught that they must supervise each group of officers differently and on an individual basis (J. Biery, personal communication, July 14, 2009). Some research has shown that there are distinct differences in the generational workforce, and police agencies should modify the way in which they manage and supervise these individuals (Braun, 2007).

Supervisors must learn that each generation of workers has its own set of values, with different ways of communicating and styles of working, which should be embraced. Supervisors should make themselves aware of these generational differences, and must learn to respect them and work with those differences (Martin, 2007). According to Dittmann (2005) with the *Monitor on Psychology*, who interviewed Constance Patterson, PhD, a training director for the Louisiana School Psychology Internship Consortium, “a lack of understanding across generations can have detrimental effects on communication and working relationships and undermine effective services”(p. 54). While conflict within the generational differences is inevitable, not all conflict is of a negative nature and, in fact, can be healthy. It may actually promote the mission of the organization and achieve positive results. For conflict to be successful and healthy in promoting the mission of the organization, members of the different generations must be open and honest in their communications in expressing their opinions, while respecting the opinions of other generations, and learn to “blend” generational work ethics in achieving successful results (Dittman, 2005).

According to Grant (2008), “3% of young people think of policing as a career. 63% never would consider policing as a career. That leaves 34% undecided” (p. 2). Proponents further offer a solution in what is called “Flexible Management Leadership,” and one way of decreasing the clash of generational differences within the workforce is to move away from the paramilitary structure. While failing to change may not be a total loss, it is not an option (Grant, 2008). Supervisors must choose a different approach in their supervision styles, to embrace the changing workforce, while accommodating the needs of those entering the generational workforce (Braun, 2007).

While Grant (2008) offered up solutions to the reported clash that is present within the ever growing workforce and that it calls for agency supervisors to change in their approach to their management and supervision styles through 'Flexible Management Leadership', the fact still remains that the basic structure of law enforcement is grounded in its paramilitary structure and discipline (McCafferty, 2003). If supervisors were to adjust to an individual style of supervision and discipline based on the generational eras in which their subordinates were raised in becoming more accommodating, as proposed by Martin (2007), Braun (2007), and Biery, they will find themselves caught in a situation of subordinates or even their supervisors claiming a bias form of supervision, which, in the long run, will most certainly create problems for them. The true key to success as a supervisor is to be firm but fair in their approach, and any discipline or rewards given is closely associated with the actions of a subordinate (Garner, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Public respect and support are at the forefront of every law enforcement agency. Officers and agency alike should recognize this and strive to provide the highest quality public service, while gaining public respect, support, and confidence. The public demands this service. Supervisors should strive to instill in their subordinate officers the professionalism and discipline required to fulfill the demands of the public. Supervisors in their attempts to achieve this level, while supervising their subordinate officers should do so in a manner that is equal and fair to all employees. It is essential that younger officers be treated no differently from older veteran officers, who may have been trained at a time when the paramilitary structure of law enforcement was more prevalent.

While proponents may believe that in the changing world, supervisors and administrators need to change in recognizing the generational differences and eras in which officers were raised and that officers should be supervised on a level that is reflective of the era in which the officers were raised, one must realize that “each generation owes a debt of gratitude to the previous one as well as a responsibility to lay an even stronger foundation for the next” (Hall, 2008, p.12). Supervisors should realize that law enforcement fundamentally requires a special type of officer, and that those officers will be called upon to perform tasks unlike any other found in other career fields (Garner, 2003). Proponents in their thinking and approach to an individualistic style of supervision must realize that other career fields may not place the same demands upon individuals as law enforcement. Employees in other career fields may think of themselves as a normal everyday worker, while law enforcement employees think of themselves as being part of a profound cause (Garner, 2003).

It is due to the demands placed on officers and supervisors alike that the paramilitary structure of law enforcement has existed for many years and will continue in its current form. Law enforcement has within its very foundation the paramilitary style of structure, which is why every law enforcement agency in the United States has a rank structure, similar to that of the military, which is not found in any other career field. The paramilitary structure of law enforcement places demands upon officers in setting and maintaining a high level of professionalism and discipline, which allows officers to perform those tasks placed on them by the public. When an individual enters the field of law enforcement they must realize that they are in a career field of service to others, which requires them to perform at standards set by those they serve.

Supervisors must realize that all officers are part of a combined effort in achieving a single goal. Supervisors must be fair and consistent with young and older officers alike (Sullivan, 2004). Supervisors must assure that the level of professionalism and discipline displayed by their officers is consistent with public expectations, and that those officers upon entering the career field learn to adapt (Garner, 2003). When supervisors maintain a consistent level of discipline, fairness, and structure within their subordinate ranks, the officer will begin to feel as if they are part of a team (Hall, 2008).

By maintaining a consistent level of supervision, professionalism, and discipline with their officers, supervisors will gain their respect and admiration and increase the morale and effectiveness of the officers. Officers who adapt to and accept the paramilitary style of structure will learn self respect and maintain a high level of discipline and professionalism. This will improve the relationship between the community and agency, while also improving interagency relationships. Supervisors, officers, and agency alike are rewarded through reduced complaints and increased community support, while maintaining a high level of employee retention.

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