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Millennials:
Advancing the Future of Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

The law enforcement profession is witnessing a transitional phase, due to the inevitable entry of Millennials into the force. There is hesitancy, especially from older members of the police force about the values Millennials would bring into the profession because of the perceptions they have created. This report aims at dispelling those perceptions by taking a stand and showing that Millennials have qualities and attributes that would benefit law enforcement agencies and their respected communities. After evaluating the arguments in favor and against the entry of Millennials, and by relying on secondary scholarly sources, the paper proves the immense value Millennials will bring into law enforcement by lending their positive characteristics, attributes, and applying an out-the-box thinking approach. The customers, who are the public and community, would derive the benefits for which law enforcing agencies have been created. Having established its position, this Leadership White Paper goes on to recommend ways and methods for Millennials to make their entry and continuation of a driving force in law enforcement.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement is in the midst of a transitional period. It must responsibly and appropriately respond to the change of the generation entering the profession. This generation is often referred to as Generation Y, Generation We, Global Generation, Generation Net, Echo Boomers, but most commonly, they are referred to as Millennials. This generation reflects the future of the law enforcement community. Current law enforcement officers and administrators must take into account that although there are many negative stereotypes associated with Millennials, they should not find themselves feeding into the rumor mill. The current law enforcement personnel must realize that this is an important time to effectively communicate and attempt to understand Millennials. When this is done, all parties will truly understand the values that Millennials will bring to this profession. On the same token, Millennials will understand the importance of their predecessors.

This paper will address the apparent disconnect between Millennials and previous generations within the law enforcement community. It is inevitable that there will come a time when the current leaders of law enforcement will have to pass the torch to the future leaders of law enforcement. Before this takes place, it is important that all involved parties feel confident in the abilities of Millennials. All stereotypes must be set aside, and the brother and sisterhood that is deeply rooted in law enforcement has to prevail.

Law enforcement agencies should leverage the abilities of Millennial officers to modernize their departments. In this context, some of the following pertinent facts cannot be ignored: The first is that Millennials are the future of every law enforcement

agencies in the nation. Millennials possess positive character traits that will assist those agencies in carrying out their mission and encourage a strong partnership with the community. Lastly, Millennials are forward thinkers and will not settle with the status quo. This generation is highly innovative and will think of ways to prove their efficiency and effectiveness in their roles.

At the conclusion of this paper, the goal is to raise awareness of the benefits Millennials can, and will, bring to the profession of law enforcement. Once this knowledge is obtained and examined, it must be shared with anyone who may doubt the capabilities of Millennials. Current members of law enforcement will confidently embrace Millennials and eagerly wait to see the progression this generation introduces to the profession.

POSITION

When speaking of the future of law enforcement, there may be a lot of unknowns. One thing that is for certain is that Millennials are definitely the future of law enforcement (Henchey, 2005). There are approximately eighty million people who are a part of this generation, and this number has the potential to reach a hundred million (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The majority of employees who are currently entering the workplace belong to the Millennial generation. As a profession, there is a need to identify ways to recruit, hire, and retain officers who are born in this generation. This should incorporate what and how information is taught, including the importance of the legacy that Millennials will one day leave behind. It is important that members of the previous generation, Generation X, realize that they have such an imperative role in assisting Millennials in shaping the future of law enforcement. The first step in building

the future is to remove the negative connotations directly related to Millennials, such as that they do not have strong work ethics, are not flexible in their work schedule, lack general working knowledge because they did not work as young adults, not taking responsibility for their actions, and lastly, displaying bad attitudes. According to Keene and Handrich (2010), these opinions are not true. Millennials should be greeted with an open mind; when this is done, it will be obvious that the negative connotations were not an accurate representation. Once this is accomplished, officers would then possess a positive attitude and properly assist in molding the future of law enforcement.

Millennials' involvement and commitment to formal education can also change the future of law enforcement (Rickes, 2009). The educational systems have facilitated the Millennials to be more diverse when compared with the previous generations (Rickes, 2009). Administrators and officers alike have strived for years to make law enforcement be viewed as a profession. Although, officers are becoming more professional in their day-to-day activities, they have failed to gain the professional label they are seeking. This is mainly due to the requirements and qualifications needed to become a licensed police officer. Many feel that law enforcement, specifically being a police officer, is not a profession due to the lack of formal education that is required. If Millennials are able to start and continue a trend that involves having a college degree, then this could be a small step in the direction of accomplishing the professional title that law enforcement deserves.

Appropriately training Millennials will be the key in projecting the future of law enforcement (Ellin, 2014). Millennials may have new and innovative ideas about law enforcement, but there are certain aspects that must be taught. Generation X has the

knowledge that can only be obtained from being on the job, which leads to areas of expertise, and life experiences that cannot be duplicated. Millennials are depending on Generation X to teach them how to be police officers. If Generation X becomes frustrated and shuts down, what they are really doing is hindering the future of law enforcement. It is Generation X who can present real life scenarios that will build the proper mindset that officers need to fight crime, always remembering that going home at the end of the shift is most important. Millennials should be briefly taught the history of law enforcement. This provides them with the opportunity to reflect, and truly understand, just how far law enforcement has come. Generation X is ultimately responsible for providing the solid foundation in which Millennials will build. It is obvious that Millennials are the future. It is the responsibility of the previous generations to provide a strong structure, which will enable Millennials to lead this profession in the correct path.

Millennials have several character traits that will benefit law enforcement, as well as the communities that police officers gave an oath to protect (DiLullo, McGee, & Kriebel, 2011). One of their strong traits is being team a player. Zemke and Raines (2013) stated that Millennials have to shed the inhibition of 'no one is left behind mentality'. Teamwork is a crucial element of being effective in work. In order for a team to function, there has to be a number of factors present. The first is a willingness to work together, which means team members will have to be open minded, and accepting of others thoughts and ideas. One of the most common complaints is that officers do not feel they were a part of the decision making process. How many times has it been said that if they would have just asked, members of the organization could have explained

that a particular idea would not work. Teamwork and hearing the thoughts and opinions from members of all levels of the organization is required for progress.

Another important trait that is built into teamwork is effective communication (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Without proper communication, the chances of being an effective team are slim to none. Thanks to the technology, all communications do not have to be face to face. Individuals can now communicate via cellular phones, specialized apps, text messages, Face Time, and many more methods. Millennials want and encourage communication with other individuals, which is the key difference in this particular generation.

Over the past several years, law enforcement has been moving into a form of policing that is often referred to as community policing (Diamond & Mead, 2009). Initially, there was some resentment from officers in their response to this method of policing. Even today, there seems to be some disconnect between the police force and the community (Spreitzer, 2014). An example of this, which has received national media attention, is the shooting of an unarmed African American male, which was Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. The focal point is not to determine whether or not the officer was justified in his actions, but to highlight the separation and lack of trust between the community and police force. It is the traits of Millennials that can begin to close these gaps and build relationships with the community that should last for many years. According to Ellin (2014), Millennials think about the community at large rather than themselves. Every generation offers something significant, but maybe Millennials have the ability to establish the partnership with the community that law enforcement has been attempting to do for many years.

Research also supports the theory that Millennials are forward thinkers and exhibit higher brain development (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Even in grade school, Millennials participated in more activities that challenged their minds to think of outcomes and find solutions that may be considered "out the box" to others. There is an emotional attachment to most of the activities that Millennials are involved with, which leads to a great deal of passion and commitment in their work. When discussing ways to simplify current procedures, it is a way to brainstorm and find a solution to make officers more effective.

It is said that the brains of Millennials have developed significantly more than those of prior generations (Mueller, n.d.). This can be specifically related to the abundant use of technology, and the age that technology was introduced in their lives. According to Mueller (n.d.), research has shown that younger brains are able to make the correct decisions to the same exact problem in a much shorter time compared to the older generations. This is also important because, Millennials are more knowledgeable in regard to technology. Technology is constantly changing, and it can be extremely overwhelming, especially for those who are already behind the technological curve. Therefore, Millennials can play a vital role and assist in solving and guiding other employees through any technology shortcomings they may face. Employees who have been employed for a number of years are the subject experts directly related to policing. Similarly, Millennials hold the expertise in regard to technology.

According to Webster's Dictionary (n.d.), innovation is defined as "the act, or process of introducing newer ideas, devices, or methods." Innovation is definitely a very important aspect in the lives of Millennials. Innovation is needed for any business to

either be, or remain successful, and law enforcement is no exception to this. Just as department stores and restaurants are dedicated to their customers, law enforcement is also in the business of customer service, which is indicated by the slogan that is most affiliated with law enforcement agencies: "To Protect and Serve." As the country continues to grow and expand, so will the expectations of the citizens. As a profession, administrators and officers must start preparing for the future, now. This is not a generation that has to be convinced to think ahead, that is already set in their minds. As it is expressed in many leadership classes, agencies should utilize the best tools available to accomplish the mission. With the number of Millennials entering the workforce, the opportunity is undeniably present that the tool needed to make it in the modern era of policing has arrived.

COUNTER POSITION

Some may state that Millennials are too involved in video games, which, in the long run, hinders this generation in the work place (Hazzard, 2014). However, video games and Millennials expertise in this area may not be such a bad thing for law enforcement after all. Although many Millennials may not have actually fired a weapon, a number of video games have definitely taught this generation the basic functions of many weapons. Through these first person shooter games, they also have more knowledge about a variety of guns. Most would not admit it, but it would be interesting to determine if the physiological connection to guns influenced Millennials to become police officers, especially since the characters in many of those games are functioning in a military or para military role.

It also seems that a form of video games is actually starting to become a prominent part of law enforcement training (Zogby, 2014). This was first seen with the introduction of simunition rounds, which closely resembles a game of paint ball. With the number of active shooter incidents increasing, there was a need for law enforcement to train more in this area. Like many things in law enforcement, once the attention regarding school shooting began to fade, so did the training. Naturally, when another incident occurs, the "force on force" training would become a priority again, and in no time, the pattern repeats itself.

In the last couple of years, actual video game style training has entered the workforce (Zogby, 2014). This training equipment closely resembles some of the games that are at the local arcade. For many patrol officers, their office is actually their assigned vehicle. While in their mobile office, they are expected to operate numerous pieces of equipment, talk, and answer the radio, drive safely, and keep their eyes on the roadway. However, training in this regard seemed to be sub-par in many agencies across the globe, and this has the potential to be very dangerous in a real life-training situation. Thanks to the introduction of training aids such as Patrol Slim, this problem can be eliminated. Patrol Slim is a driving simulator that closely resembles many of the racecar games at the arcade. The difference is that this simulator is police specific. All of the conditions and obstacles that police officers face on a daily basis can be integrated into this machine. This type of virtual training is very similar to a video game; however, it brings in the realities of police work. While in this training, the participant still would have to operate all of the equipment in the patrol vehicle, yet maintain

awareness. A report of the training can be saved, printed, and made a part of the officers' training file.

Another example is video game style training is revealed in many products offered by a Houston based company, Laser Shot. Laser Shot provides virtual training to police departments, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLTC), and military troops ("Innovative Training," 2008). The type of training provided by them for law enforcement is specifically geared to firearms. This type of training closely resembles a game console, specifically the Xbox One, or a PlayStation. Imagine the video game Duck Hunt that was introduced in the mid 1980's greatly enhanced and formulated to be a training tool. With this training, officers actually utilize real pistols and rifles, to shoot at the screen. Unlike Duck Hunt, shot placement is precise. When CO_2 is added to the magazines, recoil is actually felt from the weapons. When shooting a 9mm, 90% of the recoil is delivered, and with a 40-caliber handgun, 100% of the recoil is delivered. Some models of this product will also eject hot brass from the ejection port. Both of the above mentioned simulators could also be a very cost effective way to conduct more training hours in agencies. This type of training could be vital toward law enforcements growth.

A second counter position is that Millennials tend to challenge just about every decision (Nekuda, 2011). This may be correct; however, it is the challenging of previous thoughts that initiates growth and development (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). The world would be extremely stagnant if no one challenged the current way of doing things in life. The way life is known today would be much more different if no one considered that there was a more efficient way of getting the job done. It seems that it can be

human nature to focus and get saturated in the negative thoughts, making it is easy to overlook the positive effects that are present themselves. In order for change, there has to be a person, or a group of people, to challenge the current ways (Fischler, 2003). History has shown that, as a country, individuals respond to crisis, learn, and develop from the conflict associated with the crisis. A classic example of this is 9/11, which led to stricter flying guidelines, and the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) conducting more thorough security checks prior to boarding aircrafts. Another crisis has been the drastic increase in school related violence, such as active shooter incidents. Now many individuals in the community no longer frown upon police officers being present and actively involved in schools. These traumatic events have shown that it would be beneficial to have officers present to prevent, or at least reduce the number of causalities in these types of incidents.

On a lighter example, Millennials may be viewed as a crisis entering law enforcement that will have a lasting effect. Due to the large amount of Millennials entering the workforce, it may seem that a complete generation does nothing but think of ways to challenge current practices. This could be overwhelming and frustrating if the benefits of these thoughts are not explored. If addressed properly, opposition and conflict can sometimes be a blessing in disguise in the workplace. It seems that change is typically difficult for most to accept, even if the change is positive.

According to Lancaster and Stillman (2005), another common complaint is that Millennials are impatient and are too concerned with other officers' job duties. This seems to be another negative that could easily turn into a positive. Without a doubt, the world right now is considered as a society. In reality, due to the advancements in

technology, there are not many things that cannot be accessed instantly. Being impatient may not, after all, be terrible for law enforcement. On the surface, a cluster of impatient Millennials may seem like trouble. Fortunately, with the proper attitude and guidance, this does not have to be the case. A group of energetic individuals could propel law enforcement into achieving new tasks. If there is enough time to accomplish an objective today, there is no point in waiting to begin tomorrow. This is the mindset of many Millennials.

The drive that Millennials have could replace some of the procrastination that some may be experiencing. If the goals of the department were passed down to these officers, many tasks have the potential of being completed effectively, and in a timely manner. This will also build the officers stake in the department from their perspective, as well as from their supervisors. For many, there does not seem to be enough time in a day to accomplish all the goals that many planned on accomplishing. Millennials recognize that employees do not necessarily have to be physically present at work to accomplish some of the tasks associated with work. If getting more work done within the police department and with the community is the result of being impatient, maybe law enforcement has been patient far too long.

Millennials are constantly asking about other officer's job description. It seems as if the perception is because Millennials are ready to be promoted only after being on the job for a short period of time. Ironically, Sir Frances Bacon, (as cited by Kurtz, 2009) stated, 'knowledge is power', which is a phrase many have repeated. Law enforcement has many layers, and being a patrol officer is just one of those layers. Depending on the layer that one may be at will have a major bearing on their thoughts and decision

making process. The question is not always being asked because they are seeking the next job, but the answer may assist them in performing their current job better (Biggs, 2007). For example, if a Millennial had a clear understanding as to what factors led to his/her immediate supervisor making a decision they would have become educated in that given area. In the future, if that situation arises, past experiences should guide the officer in handling the situation to his supervisors' likings. Being informed of a variety of job duties could not only improve officers' working knowledge and output; it could also improve the overall quality of the agency.

A similar example of this is the prevalence of a current practice in most agencies, which is cross training officers in various divisions within the department. Some agencies rotate officers from specialized units annually. The goal of this is to have a greater number of officers that are familiar with a number of job duties. In the event there is a crisis situation, or a shortage of personnel, there is staff on hand that is capable of functioning in different capacities. The more diverse and well-trained officers are, the better product agencies are capable of producing for the communities.

RECOMMENDATION

Hopefully, from the above, it has become evident that Millennials have the potential to modernize their respected law enforcement agencies. While there are numerous ways this can be accomplished, this paper has taken three positional points concerning Millennials, which it believes make them achievable. Recognizing the fact that Millennials are indeed the future of law enforcement is important. Their willingness to work together and their drive to become better and efficient are character traits that are undeniably a benefit to law enforcement. Some of the most common reasons that

would lead to people opposing this position are that Millennials are overly involved in video games, impatient, ask a lot of questions, and seem to challenge every decision. Research has shown, and supported, that although each of these traits may be present in Millennials, they are all traits and attributes that have positive connotations that will absolutely benefit law enforcement, as well as the community. These benefits include participating in advanced virtual training, enhancing communication, partnering with the community, and improving the quality of work by striving to find a better way to do the job. There will be a day when everyone will be able to look back and realize how Millennials tremendously impacted and improved the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement. Sharing the information obtained from this research and discussing the facts found in this paper can aid in the growth of law enforcement and give a whole new outlook to those who may be in doubt of the abilities of Millennials.

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