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**The Millennials:
Police Officers of Today And Tomorrow**

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By

James D. Mosman

**Alamo Heights Police Department
Alamo Heights, Texas
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ABSTRACT

Recruiting and retaining Millennials is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of this generation's numbers. The position of the researcher is that police departments should have a working knowledge of the characteristics of the millennial generation. Police departments should prepare their current employees, especially first line supervisors, for hiring and retaining Millennials entering into the law enforcement profession. Police departments should examine their hiring process. Law enforcement supervisors should utilize mentor/coaching programs. They should educate the command staff of the characteristics of the Millennials. By the year 2020, most police officers will be members of the Millennials generation (Henchey, 2005).

Police departments all across the nation are finding that Millennials are a different style of officer. The traditional mold of the police departments will not work for the Millennials. The traits of the Millennials are perfect for law enforcement: they work in teams, are optimistic, have strong morals, and every day on patrol is different, so it will help keep them motivated. Loyalty to one career or department is not one of the Millennials' characteristics. Departments that adapt now will have a smooth transition of working, retaining, and training the Millennials into the law enforcement profession.

Research information for the support of this paper about the Millennials was based on books, reports, articles, journals, law enforcement periodicals, and online articles. Counter position articles were also examined and presented in order to further support the need to understand the characteristics of the Millennials law enforcement professional.

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INTRODUCTION

Police departments all across the nation are hiring new police officers every day. The seasoned personnel in those departments that hire these new officers are finding out that the Millennials (preferred term) or Generation Y (non-preferred term) are a different kind of officer. Authors Strauss and Howe (2002) coined the term “Millennials” and verified the preferred term in a survey in 1999. The Millennials did not like the term Gen-Y as it meant the generation after “X.” Millennials are coming of age and are beginning to enter and have entered the law enforcement work force. The oldest of this generation will be 28 years of age on their birthdates in 2010 (Born 1982-2002) (Howe & Strauss, 2002). Demographics data shows that Millennials will be the largest generation in history, with more than 102 million persons strong (Henchey, 2005). Police departments need to prepare now for all these new employees.

More than likely, there are already Millennials in most police departments. The training of the older supervisor is essential to properly understand these new, young officers. The young officers do not seem to fit into the traditional mold of the police organization. The chain of command and formal para-military structure are foreign to most of these officers. Millennials are driven to help others as a team and are great team members. Millennials were told as they were growing up “you can be and do anything” and that they can make a difference in the world, and they have begun to prove it (Martin & Tulgan, 2002 p. 9).

Recruiting and retaining of Millennials is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the sheer numbers of this generation will exceed that of Generation X. The researcher’s position is that police departments should have a

working knowledge of the characteristics of the millennial generation. Police departments should prepare their current employees, especially first line supervisors, for the hiring and retaining of the Millennials entering into the law enforcement profession. Police departments should examine their hiring process, mentor/coaching programs, and educate command staff because Millennials will dominate the work force in a very short period of time. By the year 2020, most police officers will be members of the Millennials generation (Henchey, 2005).

Millennials are the sons and daughters of the late Baby-Boomers (born 1943-1960), and some are the offspring of early Generation X'ers (born 1961-1981) (Howe & Strauss, 2002). The Silent Generation, born 1925 to 1942, has already retired or has begun planning to retire from law enforcement (Howe & Strauss, 2002). The Baby-Boomers and X'ers are the officers in most command level positions in law enforcement professions. These command positions, including chiefs, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants, need to avail themselves of the generational differences that are quickly coming to the police departments. Police departments should prepare their current employees, especially the first line supervisors, for hiring and retaining Millennials entering into the law enforcement profession.

POSITION

Demonstrated characteristics of the Millennials generation show that, as a whole, they tend to be optimistic and individualistic but team-oriented. Millennials parents kept them busy, so they would not get into trouble. Millennials were raised on schedules: sports, dance, and music lessons. As the Millennials are entering the workplace, they

seek guidance from their supervisor to coach them to their professional goals (Stefaniak & Vetter, 2007).

Millennials are confident but have been protected and sheltered by their parents. Law enforcement recruiters and background investigators need to be aware of the parents, also. Howe & Strauss (2007) stated that "Millennials are also the first children of the so-called "helicopter parents," who hover like helicopters and fly in to help at the slightest irritation, a phenomenon that does not always stop when children leave the house" (p. 85). "Helicopter parents" of Millennials are sometimes helpful, sometimes annoying, but always hovering (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Law enforcement personnel should listen to the concerns of the parents but, in the end, let them know it is time for their babies to become men and women who can fend for themselves. Millennials are ambitious, confident, and energetic. Millennials seek action. They hold their community in high regards. They have almost the perfect mind set for community based police work but do not have patience for the more monotonous tasks associated with police work.

Once hired, Millennials need to be trained and retained. Loyalty to the department is not automatic with this generation. They will quickly leave if not satisfied or motivated with their position in the department. Technology is highly important to the Millennials. Millennial officers will not stay long for police departments that are still hand writing reports. The Millennials grew up with the internet, iPods, cell phones, text messaging, social web sites, and now "Twitter," just to name a few. All of these examples are the life and blood of the Millennials generation, and some find it extremely

difficult to function without the use of technology (Stefaniak & Vetter, 2007). The uses of police coaching and effective mentors are vital to training and retaining these officers.

Millennials are looking for role models. The Field Training Officer (FTO) or the even better, new Police Training Officer (PTO) is the first officer role model the Millennials will encounter in law enforcement. A quick summary of the FTO vs. PTO: FTO shows, tells, and teaches by example. New officers, on the first day with an FTO, are often told the statement: "Forget what you learned in the academy, this is how we (police) do things here." The San Jose FTO model program has been in law enforcement since 1971 and is still effective (Hughins, 2005).

The PTO model uses problem-solving and adult-learning. For the first day with a PTO, the statement is, "We are going to build on what you learned in the academy, so you can be the best officer you can be." The Reno PTO model started in 1999. The PTO program keeps the learning process going, incorporating both problem-based learning and problem-solving, which provides the proper training needed for the Millennials (Reno, 2006).

The first line supervisors of the police department need to lead by example and practice management by walking around. The first line supervisor needs to challenge the Millennials with tasks that are important and explain the reason behind the task. The Millennials will meet their goals. It is very important that the supervisor have a hand in guiding the Millennials to a special place in the department. Millennials have worked in groups their entire lives. When possible, they should be allowed to work in teams. Team members of the same shift work out signals, phrases, eye, and hand signs to quickly let the other know about any situation with very little actual

conversation. As the team builds, work turns into fun. Fun keeps them coming back the next day. Departments that fail to understand the characteristics of the Millennials will be unable to hire top quality new officers or retain new technologically advanced officers. Departments need to establish a mentoring program in their departments. The International Association of Chiefs of Police stated that the three goals of mentoring are: “1) to promote professional growth, 2) inspire personal motivation, and 3) enhance effectiveness of police service” (Sprafka & Kranda, 2000, p. 3).

Retention of the Millennials after they are released from the FTO or PTO program is the responsibility of the whole department. Supervisors should now be coaches setting goals, and they should continue the mentor program. Supervisors have to find and provide training, especially conflict resolution skills. Millennials were taught to avoid conflict (Orrick, 2008).

Law enforcement trainers need to use reality based training scenarios to help the Millennials adapt to real world violence using training aids (red guns and Simunition). Simunition training allows Millennials to wear their own equipment, including uniform, gun belt, bulletproof vest, and radio, to train, and the Simunition gun is just like the Millennials own weapon, but it shoots a marking cartridge instead of a bullet. The scenarios should involve people of all backgrounds to allow the Millennials to learn that real life cannot be learned in a video game.

Millennials have learned a great deal of lessons from video games, but failure is not one of them. The capability to start over, gain life or health points, come back from the dead, or never die is what Millennials see as their reality. Millennials learn by failing. Failing is not a negative to the Millennials. Millennials do not practice something over

and over; they fail at it repeatedly until they feel they have it perfected. Failing in front of peers is not an embarrassment to the Millennials; it is an honor (Bertomen, 2009).

Millennials make good team members and are up for the challenge of the team to meet the goals in the community. Police coaches have to talk to the Millennials and listen even more. Personal problems are now brought to work, and the coach needs to be there to help the Millennials solve it themselves and get back in the mindset of police work. Employee assistance programs, if provided, are great resources. Millennials want honesty in corrections but do not readily accept hard criticism. If the police coach is perceived as rude or mean spirited, the response from the Millennial might not be positive or they may even be emotional if they think they have disappointed the coach (Orrick, 2008).

COUNTER POSITION

Tradition in law enforcement has strong ties. Over the last several years, law enforcement agencies, both large and small, have noticed large numbers in the loss of staff and difficulty in recruiting new quality law enforcement officers (Orrick, 2008). If law enforcement agencies stay with the same way of hiring, officers will be hired; however, the quality of the new officers will be uncertain. The retention of the new officers is imperative. If retention is only 12-18 months, an agency may not regain the money spent to hire and train during this period. Numerous man-hours go into recruiting, reviewing applications, background checks, testing, review/hiring boards, and final offers of employment. That is a large expenditure of the agencies time and budget. The training begins once hired, and a lot of police experience is gained in this period.

Some agencies “poach” officers. Poaching is when an officer is stolen from one agency to another with as little expenditure as possible (Orrick, 2008). Millennials will adapt to current hiring and retention standards, but changing old hiring traditions could address this issue. Strict hiring standards could send highly motivated young Millennials to seek totally other professions. Law enforcement departments should revise their standard hiring traditions so Millennials can see and know, even at the start, that the department is adapting with the times, which shows a positive progressive advance towards the futures of all its employees (Henchey, 2005).

Law enforcement departments are always in the news, and most of the time, it is unpleasant press. Some of the negative press is deserved, but Millennials live in a 24/7 media environment. The constant bombardment of this negative image is causing the Millennials not to seek law enforcement jobs. This cynicism is also inside the departments. Police departments have politics, both internal and external, that affect the employees of the departments. Millennials are name brand driven, so if a department gets a bad reputation in the age of the social networks, it could last a long time (Henchey, 2005). Law enforcement departments should promote themselves and show all the positive things it does for the community it serves. The Millennials will then be able to balance the information to make a more informed decision about a career in the law enforcement profession.

CONCLUSION

Recruiting and retaining Millennials is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the sheer number of this generation. The position of the researcher is that police departments should have a working knowledge of the characteristics of the

millennial generation. Millennials are optimistic and team oriented, and they want mentors and coaches not bosses.

Police departments should prepare their current employees, especially first line supervisors, for the hiring and retention of the Millennials entering into the law enforcement profession. The current police personnel will be the mentors and coaches of the Millennials. Police departments should examine their hiring process and streamline it as much as possible. Law enforcement supervisors should utilize mentor/coaching programs. The status quo of law enforcement of hiring, training, and supervising may continue in police departments. Those departments will suffer greatly in the retention of good millennial officers. Those departments will just be a stepping-stone, or poaching ground for other departments that understand the makeup of the Millennials.

Educating the command staff of the characteristics of the Millennials will enhance the whole department. The Millennials will succeed because the environment will be what they are used to, but much more challenging. The challenge is what the Millennials thrive for in their lives, and they dislike boredom (Martin & Tulgan, 2002). Millennials will dominate the work force by sheer number in a very short period of time (Henchey, 2005). The law enforcement departments that prepare now in knowing the Millennials' characteristics will thrive and flourish. The departments that do not will be wondering why they cannot hire and retain the new Millennials.

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