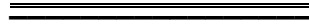


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Training the Generations



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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ABSTRACT

There are multiple generations in the work force, including the profession of law enforcement. There are generational differences especially when it comes to training and learning styles. These differences must be recognized by trainers to provide successful training. Without effective training, issues arise such as officers not retaining pertinent training information which can lead to departmental and officer liability. Providing effective training requires excellent communication skills along with progressive ways to facilitate curriculum to the officers. Teaching to the strengths of the student only increases the rate of success in producing a good quality police force. It is imperative for law enforcement trainers to seek out the preferred method of learning for each generation that they instruct.

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INTRODUCTION

Training law enforcement personnel is a fluid, ever-changing environment. This statement is truer now than ever before due to there being four different generations in the work place, including the profession of law enforcement. Currently the four generations in the workplace are Traditionalist (ages 73 and older), Baby Boomers (ages 54-72), Generation X (ages 34-53), and Millennials (ages 14-33) (Marrs, 2018). Having different generations training side by side creates a dynamic of different learning styles.

To create effective police officers, different teaching techniques should be used to reach different age groups. This is the methodology used for adult learning (Rasmussen, 2015). The trainer must use adaptive training styles to ensure the trainee retains the information. To do this, several different learning styles may need to be deployed for effective learning. The ultimate goal is to have well trained police officers regardless of their generation. To meet this goal, police trainers must use whatever means necessary for the information to be presented and retained (Stephens, 2017).

Communication while training is paramount due to the different generations in the work force who retain information differently. Communication is key in all walks of life and especially while training police officers. Marrs explained the importance of communication while dealing with different generations. "Finding ways to communicate is critical to success" (Marrs, 2018, p.8).

The need to communicate and to use effective training methods is vital due to the rise of lawsuits against officers and government entities for failure to train. There has been court case after court case that supports the liability issues when police officers

are not trained properly (Parkinson, n.d.). Trainers have a duty to use all methods of learning to ensure the trainee is retaining the information and can display a competence so it will not result in any form of liability.

Law enforcement training must evolve according to the type of learner an officer is. Different generations learn in different ways and this must be exploited to train officers effectively. Officers are raised different, have different values and different experiences, but through understanding and communication, these differences must be set aside (Murgado, 2011). The differences must be set aside to create an atmosphere of learning that is beneficial to all police officers. Law enforcement should recognize the generational differences when training police officers.

POSITION

Ultimately, the bottom line is that police training has had the same goal since the inception of the profession. In simplistic terms, people are being taught how to enforce the laws and help the community be a safer place. This job description has obviously changed throughout time, and the training has changed also. Training is fluid and changing continuously and so should the methodology. The methods of training should match those that are being trained to create a high information retention rate. Adult learners thrive academically when topics are taught in a manner in which they can readily grasp a concept. There are seven notable learning styles: visual, auditory, verbal, physical (kinesthetic), logical, social and solitary (learning-styles-online.com, n.d.). To effectively train personnel, retention of material is a priority. This means deploying the different learning styles.

A survey was completed with the participation of 16 cadets training in the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (2018) Regional Training Academy. Their age ranged from 21-36, with an average age of 27. The respondents were all male. The respondents answered 100% in the affirmative to the question on whether the instructors in the academy met their learning needs. The next question was whether the instructors were concerned that the cadets were retaining the information. Five thought the instructors were extremely concerned, eight were very concerned, two were somewhat concerned and zero answered that the instructors were not concerned. An inquiry was made as to what type of learning style the cadets thought they were. Eight responded to being a visual learner, four were auditory learners, four learned through reading and eleven were kinesthetic learners. The respondents answer to being multiple types of learners. The last question was how well the instructors related to their age group. Eight responded very good, six responded good and two responded poor (Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, 2018). The results indicate that most prefer to be hands on learners or kinesthetic, which is something police instructors should take into account while teaching multiple generations.

It is recognized that each person prefers different learning styles and techniques. Learning styles group common ways that people learn. Everyone has a mix of learning styles. Some people may find that they have a dominant style of learning, with far less use of the other styles. Others may find that they use different styles in different circumstances (Post, n.d.). Facilitators will find that adult learners have desired styles of learning, but dependent on the topic these styles may be very similar. It is up to the

facilitator to find out the best method to instruct with the highest level of retention (Brookfield, 1986).

Learning styles vary and tactics may have to change to reach certain learners. The sheriff's office in Spokane, Washington came across a problem in that new recruits, Millennials, had a hard time communicating with the public. This is not an uncommon phenomenon due to the digital age and change in social interactions. The job as a police officer obviously revolves around face to face communication. The lack of personal communication with a new officer is a major problem. The sheriff's office in Spokane, Washington came up with a solution. The department trainers came up with a remedial people skills class. The trainers have their new recruits walk around populated areas like malls or bus stations and strike up conversations with complete strangers. This is a controlled atmosphere but yet produces the desired training (Kaste, 2017). This is a perfect example of changing the style of training for different generations.

It is incumbent upon trainers to seek out different learning styles and incorporate this into the curriculum being taught. Law enforcement subjects dictate what needs to be taught and the method used is not only dictated by a preferred learning style, but learning styles should be taken into consideration while teaching. Again the goal is for the student to retain the information. If a certain learning style is used and triggers the interest of the student this in itself is a success (Stephens, 2017).

Communication is vital to success whether it is in the professional realm or personal life. A law enforcement trainer must be an excellent communicator to have success in facilitating training to multiple generations. A trainer must know how to

communicate to all persons; an example would be to know that a Millennial prefers for his or her supervisor to be a good listener (Deal, 2007, Tolbize, 2008; Jensen, 2013). This information would be helpful while training to know that listening skills will be beneficial while training Millennials. Training in a multigenerational profession the employed communication skills used must be multifaceted. People are from different walks of life and have had different experiences resulting in different ways they communicate. This requires facilitators to learn about who they are training and adapt to the ways the student communicates. Learning to communicate better will benefit everyone involved, especially when the differences between the teacher and student are broad (Murgado, 2011).

The trainer must be cognizant of various types of communication while teaching to different generations. Due to time constraints and new technological advancements, communication may be defined as digital communication. This evolution may be sought out by trainers in efforts to maintain different generational interests (Hannay & Fretwell, 2011). As stated previously there are at least four generations in the work force. Knowing the communication preferences of each is a key to the success in training.

The Traditionalists prefer face to face communication with good eye contact. Baby Boomers want a more personal meeting much like the traditionalist. Generation X are more technologically savvy and are leaning more towards computerized communication. This could result in more email communication or text messaging. Due to the negative connotations associated with Millennials, they are sensitive to older generations talking down to them. They question with respect as a way of learning, not disrespect. The Millennials are not opposed to one on one communication as long as

trainers or supervisors give them continual feedback (Appold, 2017). Knowing these differences in preferred communication can be the difference between training successes and failure.

When there is a complete breakdown due to the lack of training or training comprehension it can create an opening for agency or officer liability. Law enforcement trainers must recognize generational differences in training and do what is necessary to ensure proper training is being presented to avoid litigation. Title 42 U.S.C. Section 1983 which cited that a government entity can be held civilly liable for its employees' actions. The decision runs hand in hand with the *City of Canton v. Harris* (1989). Harris claimed the officers working for the City of Canton were not properly trained in medical treatment. The lack of training was found to cause direct harm to Harris due to a medical complication while in custody. There are numerous court cases dealing with officers not being trained. Government entities have been found liable if they have deliberate indifference when dealing with training ("Failure to train...", n.d.).

It has been determined through court cases that although officers are trained as cadets in an academy to initialize their police careers, this is not enough. Departments must continue to train their police officers during their entire careers to prevent the violation of citizen's civil rights. To train officers under this umbrella, the training must be effective and retained by the officers (McNamara, 2006). Due to lack of training, "one legal scholar has estimated that in the 1990s, law enforcement agencies faced approximately 30,000 lawsuits per year" (McNamara, 2006, para. 1). The importance of law enforcement departments recognizing the generational differences for effective training is paramount due to the amount of liability that is assumed.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Changing police training due to a certain age group or generation will only indicate bias towards that certain group. Making changes in regards to police training will not empower or benefit any group within a police department. It is argued that changing for the sake of a generational group will not only segregate that group but will indicate that a department is taking strides to treat a group completely different (Harvey, 2014).

Changing police training solely due to generation not only indicates bias but can be seen as stereotyping. This should be avoided because it furthers the chasm between trainers and new generations (Werth & Werth, 2011). This is not the best way to approach teaching to different generations. A facilitator must appeal to the learner and with new generations keeping status quo in training is not the answer. In some states, their testing standards recognize how different the new generations are and are changing curriculum to reflect the change (Junginger, 2008). Millennials in particular need to be trained with methods they understand. Research shows that they already feel isolated and misunderstood. This is the very reason their learning styles should be sought out and utilized (Negroni, 2017).

Training police officers should remain the same as it always has. The training by in large has not changed in the last 30 years due to the topics are still the same (Junginger, 2008). There is not any point in changing the way things are done for the sake of changing. Seasoned officers do not like change and should not change the way they do things for newer generations.

Research shows that people are more reluctant to change the closer they are to a topic. The reluctance to change becomes more prominent as we age. The older we are the more we dislike change (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). It is common for people to dislike change or at least being taken out of their comfort zone (Rosser, 2018).

This train of thought is preventing training trends to progress and reduces the appeal to the generations in the law enforcement field. Officers must change with the times and prevent distance from developing between the older generations and the younger generations. The younger generations, Millennials, are specific in their needs in regards to training. It is a disservice to not meet these training needs due to not wanting to change the status quo. It will lead to positive response trying new things and new technology while training Millennials (Johnson, 2010). It is a challenge for experienced officers to change their instructional process to bring in the latest technology and learning styles, but it will reap benefits. Harvey explains that teaching methods must be up to date and appeal to each generations learning desires. "It is no longer accepted practice in the classroom to accept the 'because I said so' response" (Harvey, 2014, p. 10-11).

RECOMMENDATION

There are distinct generational differences in today's work force. This should be taken into consideration by law enforcement trainers. The objective of training police is to use resources and methodology to reach each age group in the law enforcement field and prevent the violation of citizen's constitutional rights.

Through research and literature there is not much to refute that trainers of law enforcement officers must not be swayed with generational differences but must meet

the challenge of facilitating good training to each and every age group. It is imperative to train for the times and too the learner, not the learner changing for the teacher. Our objectives remain the same, but our methodology should change. Trainers should seek out the different learning styles dependent on their audience. Finding the right method is imperative for the retention of information. Everyone has a mix of learning styles. Some people may find that they have a dominant style of learning, with far less use of the other styles. Others may find that they use different styles in different circumstances (Post, n.d.).

Effective communication is essential for facilitators to relay the content that they wish to be received by an audience. Police trainers must know their audience and what types of communication should be used to best relay the information they are teaching. Students from various generations communicate in different ways and it is up to the instructor to communicate effectively (Murgado, 2011). Communication skills are the key to success in any field, professional or private.

Civil liability is an issue within all professional fields and law enforcement is not an exception. It has been established through court cases that government agencies and law enforcement personnel are susceptible to liability when it comes to the amount of training received or given. Title 42 U.S.C. Section 1983 which cited that a government entity can be held civilly liable for its employee's actions ("Failure to train...", n.d).

Section 1983 has been linked with departments who have been found to be deficient when it comes to training employees. If they are found to have deliberate indifference in regards to training, then they can be held liable for not training their

officers. It is human nature to become complacent and comfortable in the way things are done. There is a tendency to continue to do what has always been done due to the reluctance to change. This is also true when training multiple generations of police officers. Training methods should not change due to different age groups becoming students. The information is the same information that has been around for three decades, therefore the presentation method should remain the same (Junginger, 2008).

Training trends should progress and not stay the same, because that is how it always has been done. The objective to training is to ensure the student retains the information being presented. If different learning styles are not developed to create a successful learning environment, then the trainer is failing to fulfill his or her obligation.

Instructors do not need to recognize different groups among their learners, as this will do more harm than good. This isolates different generations when some are already sensitive to how they are being treated (Harvey, 2014). Police trainers should continue to teach without making concessions for any one group.

Learning the best way to facilitate to a group does not segregate that group but empowers them to learn in a manner that they are comfortable. People feel comfortable in a learning environment when teaching methods are used in which they can understand (Negroni, 2017). All departments should stay updated in training trends to appeal to every generation that they teach. It is imperative to communicate the curriculum in a style that is best suited for the recipient to ensure retention of the material. This task can be accomplished by keeping an open mind while instructing law enforcement officers and being cognizant of the students preferred style of learning.

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APPENDIX A

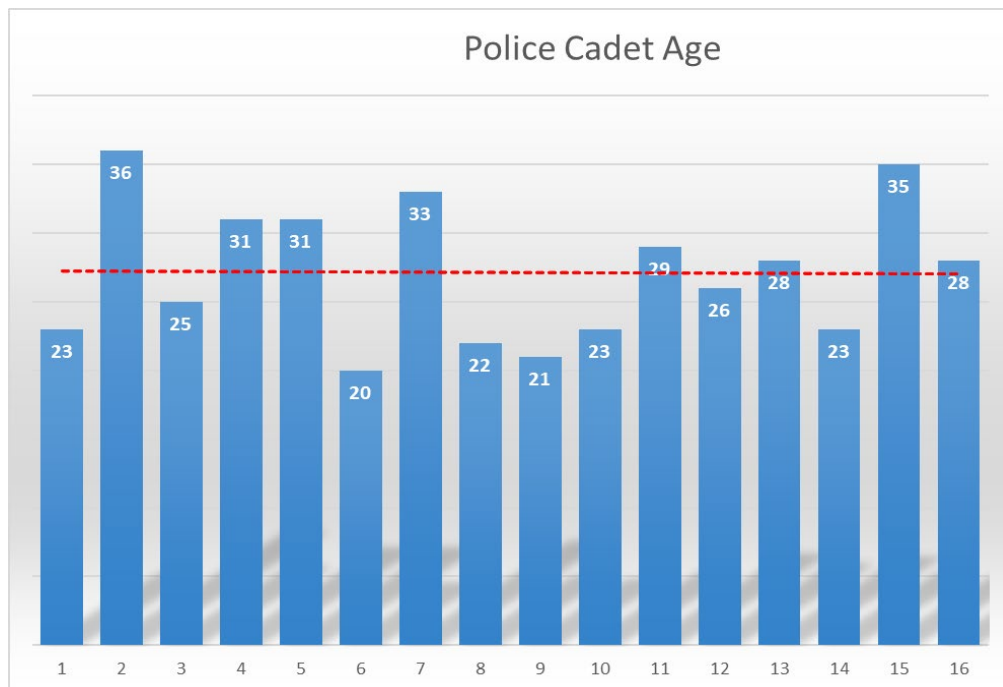
Training Preferences:

The following graphs reflect the data obtained by a survey taken at the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, 2018)

1. Age Gender

23 Male
36 Male
25 Male
31 Male
31 Male
20 Male
33 Male
22 Male
21 Male
23 Male
29 Male
26 Male
28 Male
23 Male
35 Male
28 Male

Avg. 27

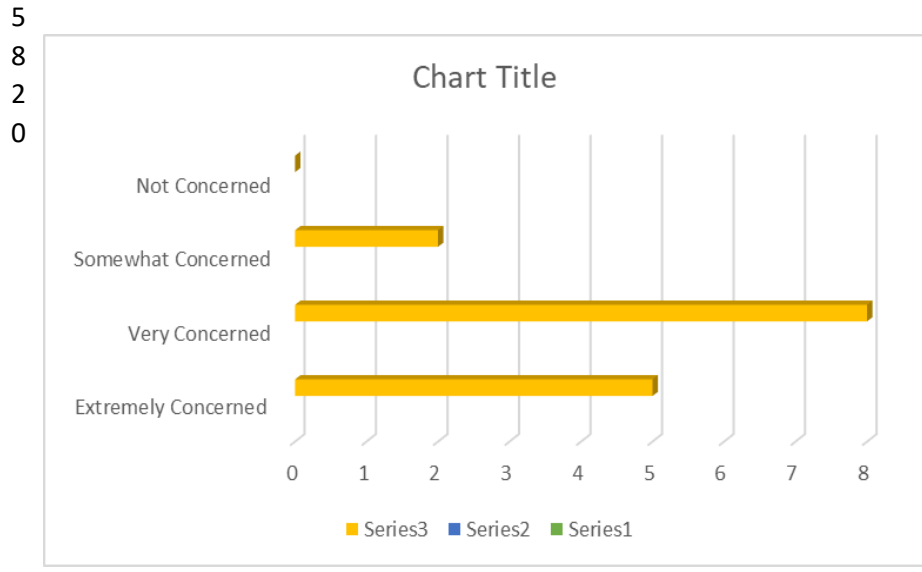


2. Were training needs met by instructor

100 % responded YES

3. Instructors concern that students were learning material

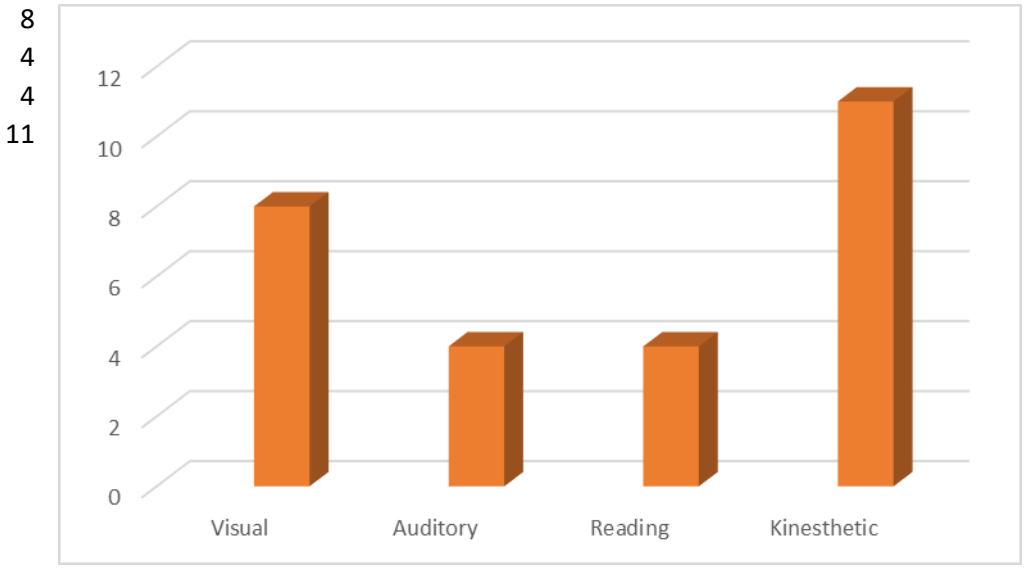
- Extremely Concerned
- Very Concerned
- Somewhat Concerned
- Not Concerned



Multiple answers were given per cadet indicating several different preferred types of learning styles, age did not show to be a precursor for a particular type of learning.

4. Cadet learning style

- Visual
- Auditory
- Reading
- Kinesthetic



5. How well did the instructor relate to your age group?

Very Good 8
Good 6
Poor 2

