

**The Bill Blackwood
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Recruiting the Y Generation in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

The issue to be examined considers the challenges of recruiting the latest generation known as the Y Generation, also known as Millennials, in law enforcement. The Baby Boomer population is approximately 80 million people, which will create quite an impact in the workforce as they retire. The population of the Y Generation is estimated between 70 and 80 million, so it is extremely important to understand them and what it takes to interest them into a law enforcement career. The eldest of the Y Generation have recently entered the job market, and there are many more to follow. The law enforcement community needs to be prepared for them as their masses come of age to enter the workforce. The purpose of this research is to examine the challenges law enforcement faces in their efforts to reach out and recruit the Y Generation. The research to be examined focuses on the factors involving the recruitment of the Y Generation and whether or not the current approaches and techniques are different than in the past and also if law enforcement needs to adapt to their generation in order to enlist them. The methods of inquiry will include a review of books, articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a written survey distributed to law enforcement agencies, and telephone surveys. The research showed that law enforcement agencies are, indeed, having difficulty with their hiring efforts, and they are using different recruiting and retainment strategies than in the past. Law enforcement must continue to learn about the Y Generation and adapt with them over time as the youngest members become available to enter the workforce.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature ..	3
Methodology	7
Findings	8
Discussions/Conclusions	12
References	15

INTRODUCTION

The issue to be examined considers the challenges of recruiting the latest generation known as the Y Generation, also known as Millennials, in law enforcement. The relevance of recruiting the Y Generation for law enforcement is the importance of their recruitment, since they are the next generation entering the workforce. To give a perspective of the different generations, Generation X is the generation between the Baby Boomers and the Y Generation. Their numbers are the smallest of the current living generations, which are Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Y Generation. The dates for the various generations can vary by a few years in either direction, depending on the writers and researchers. For purposes of this research paper, the Y Generation is considered those being born between 1981 and 1999. The population of Generation X is estimated at approximately 48 million, and the majority is currently in the workforce, thus recruiting the Y Generation will become crucial as more of the Baby Boomer Generation reaches retirement. The Baby Boomer population is approximately 80 million people, which will create quite an impact in the workforce as they retire. The population of the Y Generation is estimated between 70 and 80 million, so it is extremely important to understand them and what it takes to recruit them into law enforcement. The eldest of the Y Generation have recently entered the job market, and there are many more to follow. The law enforcement community needs to be prepared for them as their masses come of age to enter the workforce.

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the current approaches and techniques are different than in the past and also if law enforcement needs to adapt to their generation in order to recruit them. To replace the large number of the Baby Boomers leaving the workplace, law enforcement will face an extremely competitive recruiting market from within the law enforcement community as well as other professions and industries in the private sector. Economics is very much a concern as budgets are increasingly being tightened. The law enforcement community must be shrewd and use intelligent, careful approaches and techniques in recruiting the Y Generation, and they must possibly rethink the work environment and culture in order to appeal to the Y Generation.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of books, articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to law enforcement agencies, and telephone surveys. One of the intended anticipated findings of the research is that law enforcement agencies are now confronted with the most challenging age group to recruit in modern times. The researcher anticipates the increasingly competitive job market, negative societal changes in affecting morals, and lack of interest in law enforcement as major factors. The field of law enforcement will be influenced by the conclusions because the findings should reveal that law enforcement agencies are experiencing difficulties recruiting the Y Generation for various reasons, such as lack of interest in law enforcement, increased competitive job market, and prevalent drug use. Additionally, the research should reveal characteristics of the Y Generation that need to be considered for future recruiting efforts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The private sectors bottom line is profitability; therefore, marketing and selling their products and services is a major endeavor. Companies place extreme importance on knowing their target audience in order to maximize profitability. However, in order to be successful, they need to hire the right people. The private sector has a long history of recruiting and retention research and using innovative methods to find the best people for their organizations. It has only been recently that the law enforcement community has begun to see the value in aggressive and proactive recruiting endeavors. Since the Y Generation is the next job pool market, it is important for law enforcement to play catch up with the private sector and get to know what they are up against to find the best candidates among the generation. Given that law enforcement is not profit driven, their budgets and the personnel dedicated for recruiting are not on the same scale as that in the private sector. Therefore, the law enforcement community must utilize the most effective recruiting strategies in order to attract the best people from the Y Generation. In order to do this, law enforcement must take a proactive approach in getting to know the Y Generation.

Currently, there are mixes of several generations in the workforce, including the latest, the Y Generation. The mix of the different generations causes clashes within the workforce. Each generational group is unique based on how they were shaped by the world in which they come of age, which directly correlates to what they ultimately bring into the workplace (Spiro, 2006). They are shaped primarily by the culture of the times, which include the political environment, the state of the economy, and historical events (McCafferty, 2003). Equally important is the advancement in technology. It is for these

reasons that a high amount of emphasis should be placed on understanding, respecting, and regularly addressing generational differences by respective employers as a high priority. Since the Y Generation is the latest arrival to the workforce, research has begun in an effort to understand them. Different researchers and authors have discovered and written about the numerous characteristics that are unique to members of the Y Generation, but there are several key factors that were found to be common after review of literature. Some of these factors blend with one another. The Y Generation tends to be racially and ethnically diverse and technologically savvy; they feel empowered and entitled, independent, and they highly value a balanced work and home life.

Thirty-three percent of the members of the Y Generation are considered a minority (NAS Insights, 2006). As the population becomes more diverse, the word “minority” will eventually have a decreased meaning as it relates to people. Due to their diversity, regardless of race or cultural background, their interaction with one other is considered conventional. According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002), the use of oral birth control and the fear of overpopulation have hindered the U.S. birthrate within the last 30 years. Due to the decline in the U.S. birthrate, the major reason for population growth is through immigration, which could explain the changes in the diversity of the U.S. population. The relevance to law enforcement is that they are dealing not only with an increase in cultural diversity among the population that law enforcement serves, but also in hiring the Y Generation members from among that population. This will become more important over time. Law enforcement will need a more, at the least a more

knowledgeable, culturally diverse workforce to effectively deal with the communities they serve.

Those who associate themselves as belonging to older generational groups most likely remember the world without cell phones, personal computers, instant messaging, iPods, the internet, and numerous other major high-tech developments. The Y Generation has not only grown up with technology but also has experienced the changes at a breakneck pace. Sixty-two percent of 18 to 29 year olds, in 2005, used instant messaging; 84% used the internet, and 46% downloaded music. The advancement of technology has created a world of instant information, from the internet to numerous television stations. The information age, of which the Y Generation has always known, has lead to a sense of instant gratification. If they cannot get what they want from one source, they go to the next. There is one trait that the Y Generation is currently known for: questioning things in the workplace (Grossman, 2006).

Members of the Y Generation naturally feel empowered and entitled. As a result of parenting trends and the media, they have been taught from an early age how important they are, that the sky is the limit, and that they can achieve anything. Self esteem is certainly not lacking for this group. If they are unsuccessful and get no support away from home, they know they can rely on parental support. They also believe they are entitled to early rewards and expect immediate gratification. An article from a newspaper, *The Dallas Morning News* ("More Youths," 2007), sums up this point with the first sentence: "All the effort to boost children's self-esteem may have backfired and produced a generation of college students who are more narcissistic than their Gen-X predecessors..." (p 8A). Indications about them, thus far, are that they will not remain

at one job for a long period of time, they expect to promote quickly, and they are extremely competitive (NAS Insights, 2006). Combined with the technological aspect of the Y Generation, members of this generation tend to want it all and want it now. If they do not quickly get the results they expect, they become bored and move on to something else. One positive result of growing up in the Y Generation is their ability to multitask to achieve several desired results simultaneously. The members of the Y Generation in the workforce, so far, have shown they are excellent at multitasking, but they tend to get bored easily without new challenges and learning experiences. If challenges and new learning experiences are lacking in a career, members of the Y Generation will quickly seek something else. It is predicted they will have up to ten career changes throughout their lifetimes. Given the current state of the economy, it is vital to use their multitasking abilities as an asset for an organization. It reduces the financial burden of employing more personnel, and the organization benefits by cross-training, which focuses on retention, primarily to members of the Y Generation (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Equally important to a Generation Y member's work environment is their home and personal life. They strive for balance between the two, not wanting to repeat the pitfalls of work consuming their lives as done by many of their parents. Members of the Y Generation are more interested in their jobs accommodating their personal lives. Money as a motivator is not as important as the flexibility of the organization. They are motivated by ongoing learning, clearly defined short-term goals, direct professional development, the immediate need for responsibility, and flexibility in their work schedule to allow for a balanced personal life (Grossman, 2006). The members of the Y

Generation are creating challenges for employers to find ways to accommodate them. If they are successful, the workplace will change significantly for all (Huntley, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The research to be examined considers the challenges of recruiting the Y Generation in law enforcement. The Y Generation is the next generation to enter the workforce. Their population is large, second to that of the Baby Boomer Generation. As members of the Baby Boomer Generation reach retirement age, they will need to be replaced in the workforce by the newly available eldest members of the Y Generation.

The researcher hypothesizes that law enforcement agencies are facing recruiting challenges similar to recruiting challenges faced by the private sector. The researcher also hypothesizes that the unique characteristics of the Y Generation may be part of the difficulties in law enforcement recruiting, so these characteristics need to be considered for future recruiting efforts.

The researcher anticipates the need to rethink the work environment and culture within law enforcement in order to appeal to the Y Generation. Due to the current inherit para-militaristic nature of law enforcement, there are only so many things that can be changed. The researcher expects to find that law enforcement agencies will have to meet “somewhere in the middle” with the Y Generation in order to effectively recruit and retain them.

The methods of inquiry will include a review of books, articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and written surveys distributed to law enforcement agencies and police applicants who are members of the Y Generation. In addition, telephone surveys will also be conducted with law enforcement personnel. A total of three surveys will be

conducted, two written and one by telephone. Two of the surveys will be conducted with police officers from various Texas law enforcement agencies, one of which will be a written distributed survey for non-recruitment personnel. Of this survey, 23 agencies were surveyed with a written questionnaire, and a 100% response rate was obtained. The second survey will be conducted via telephone with agencies that had officers whose job description included recruiting for their agency as opposed to a Human Resources or Personnel Department. Ten agencies were surveyed with a 100% response rate. The third survey will be written and distributed to police applicants who are members of the Y Generation. Twelve of twenty-seven applicants indicated they were members of the Y Generation. The response rate to the survey given at the time of police applicant test was 100%. The surveys showed similarities to the review of literature, but there were also new findings.

FINDINGS

The issue to be examined considers the challenges of recruiting the Y Generation in law enforcement. The findings revealed members of the Y Generation are culturally diverse and technologically savvy. They have a sense of empowerment, independence, and strongly value a balanced work and personal life. The Y Generation is considered extremely complex by the generations preceding them as well as being misunderstood. The Y Generations' complexities present challenges for their predecessors, especially for law enforcement in general due to organizational structure, para-militaristic nature, and tight budgets.

The survey of police officers who are non-recruitment personnel revealed the following. Seventy percent of the agencies had a dedicated recruiter within the police

department, 65% of the agencies were actively recruiting, 91% perceived recruiting has become more difficult within the last three years, and 83% believed there should be an emphasis on recruiting the Y Generation. Some of the results revealed from the telephone surveys conducted among law enforcement recruiters from the ten agencies throughout the State of Texas are as follows: 100% of the agencies were actively recruiting, 100% perceived recruiting has become more difficult within the last three years, and 40% believed there should be an emphasis placed on recruiting the Y Generation.

One of the questions asked involved the challenges law enforcement agencies face during the background portion of the hiring process. The question was broken down into seven categories. The categories reflect behavioral indicators that are not conducive to a law enforcement career.

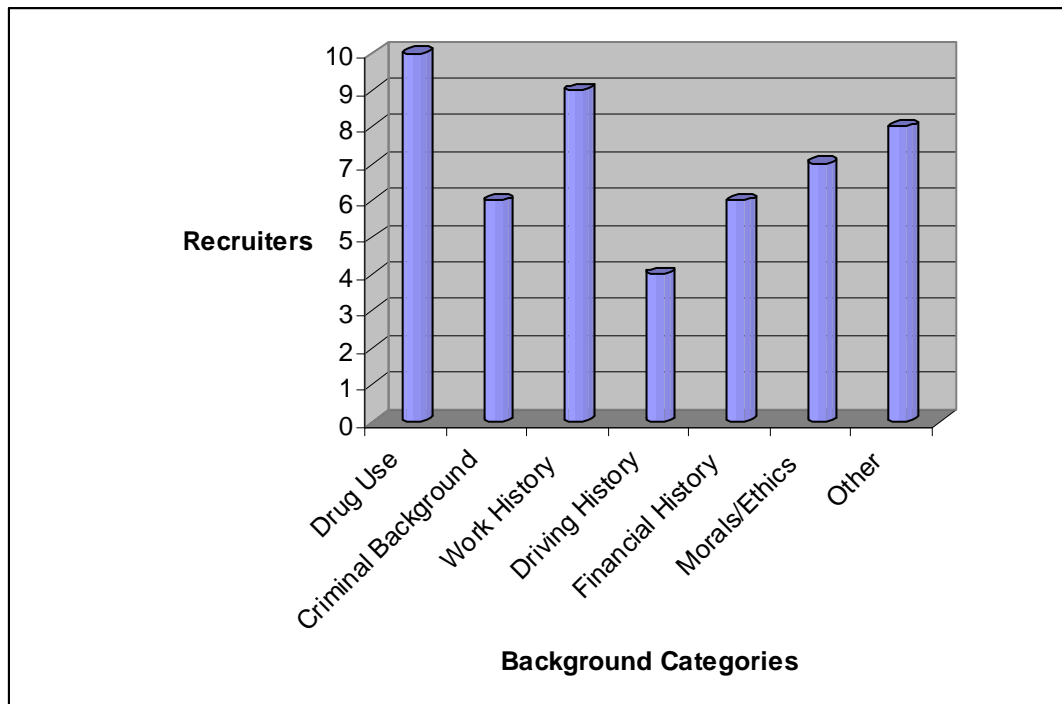


Figure 1. Number of recruiters that cited categories of unacceptable behavioral indicators.

Drug use is the most prevalent among the background issues for police applicants of the Y Generation. The “Other” category was left as open for the respondents to add any other reason not categorized. Recruiters cited such things as family history; current military involvement; lack of understanding the nature of law enforcement; intangibles among agencies, such as pay, agency size, call types, and camaraderie; lack of responsibility; and applicants’ sense of entitlement to bypass requirements were cited. Seventy percent of the recruiters responded that an increased competitive job market was a factor, and 60% responded that lack of interest in law enforcement attributed to hiring difficulties.

The recruiters surveyed were asked about their recruiting efforts, approaches, and strategies they utilized. Most common were the use of newspaper ads, internet sites, and job fairs. Some responded that they were using innovative methods, such as radio and television ads, billboards, and interns. All responded that they were using different recruiting efforts and approaches than those utilized in the past when older generations were being sought for employment. The last question of the survey was the belief of the recruiter that law enforcement may need to change the internal culture and work environment to appeal to the Y Generation. Eighty percent indicated yes, and several commented they were in the process of changing as a result. Two of the recruiters commented their agencies have begun to change as a result. One stated they are implementing a change to the field training officer program to focus on more of a mentoring mindset. Another recruiter indicated the agency has a more sensitive approach to new recruits by being more flexible. They allow a 10 hour work schedule, and officers can wear full beards.

The third survey given to police applicants inquired about what interests and motivators they had in reference to law enforcement. Twelve out of 27 respondents were members of the Y Generation. The first question surveyed was what interested them about a law enforcement career and to rank them in order of importance. Six choices were offered: police equipment, use of technology, ability to use problem solving techniques, opportunity for continuous learning and professional growth, meaningful work, and salary and benefits. Meaningful work was the number one answer followed by the opportunity for learning and growth. The survey further questioned whether on-the-job mentoring and balance between home and work life were important factors in their career decisions. The response was unanimous that job mentoring was an important factor. Ninety-two percent indicated that a balanced home and work life was important factor in their career decision.

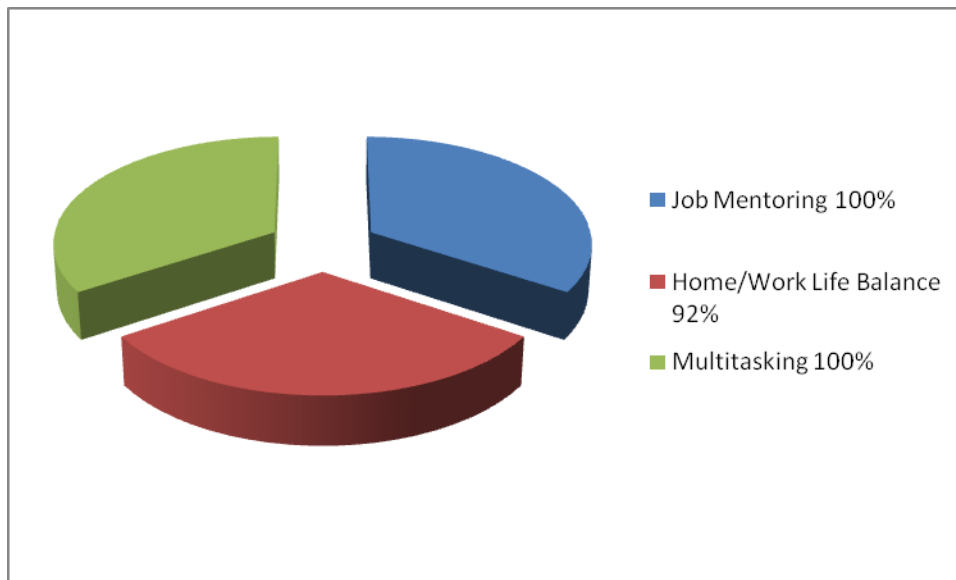


Figure 2. Percentage of Y Generation applicant responses of elements considered important in a career.

The survey concluded with whether or not they enjoyed multitasking and if they were considering another career choice other than law enforcement. One hundred percent answered they enjoy multitasking, and 58% indicated they considered other career choices. They were questioned about what career choice they considered, and the answers varied greatly. Some of the answers that were given included medical, fire prevention, post office, library science, fitness, and president.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The focus of the research analyzes the difficulties of recruiting the Y Generation, who are, arguably, proving to be a challenging generation to recruit into the workplace. Hiring the Y Generation will become crucial as more of the Baby Boomer Generation reaches retirement. Due to the Y Generation's population being estimated between 70 and 80 million, second in numbers compared to the soon-to-be retiring masses of the Baby Boomer Generation, it is extremely important to understand them and what it takes to interest them into law enforcement. The oldest members of the Y Generation have recently entered the job market, and they are just the tip of the iceberg. The law enforcement community needs to be prepared as a large number of them come of age and are seeking employment. Law enforcement agencies today are equally experiencing difficulties in recruiting, particularly in recruiting the Y Generation. Many agencies have cited similar reasons for their hiring difficulties. The characteristics of the Y Generation need to be considered for current and future recruiting efforts, and there is a need to rethink the work environment and culture within law enforcement in order to appeal to the Y Generation.

The information gained from the research supported the premise that the Y Generation is, indeed, proving to be a recruiting challenge, particularly for law enforcement, and updated recruiting techniques and benefits have been, or are, in the process of being implemented. The review of literature revealed the unique characteristics of the Y Generation and how their culture was and still is being shaped. The Y Generation tends to be racially and ethnically diverse as well as technologically savvy. They also feel empowered, entitled, and independent, and they highly value a balanced work and home life. They place importance on meaningful work, mentoring, the opportunity for learning and job growth, and they enjoy multitasking.

It was the belief of 80% of the recruiters surveyed that law enforcement may need to change the internal culture and work environment to appeal to the Y Generation, and several commented they were in the process of changing as a result. Due to the current inherit para-militaristic nature of law enforcement, there are only so many things that can be changed. Law enforcement agencies will have to meet “somewhere in the middle” with the Y Generation in order to effectively hire and retain them. Some of the modern recruiting strategies for law enforcement include the use of the internet, job fairs, personal one-on-one meetings, interns, radio and television advertisements, billboards, advertisements at sporting arenas, movie theaters, and airports. Law enforcement officers, who began their careers ten years ago or more, can remember when a newspaper advertisement for police testing would generate a large turnout of applicants. The days of a large pool of police applicants for most agencies is just a memory. Agencies have begun the retainment effort by providing alternate scheduling, such as utilizing ten or twelve hour patrol shifts with an emphasis on the use of

compensatory time off; relaxing their grooming policies by allowing beards; and using more of a mentoring approach to field training. Law enforcement must continue to learn about the Y Generation and adapt with them over time as the youngest members become available employment candidates.

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