

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Modifying Police Recruitment and Retention Practices:  
Strategies to Address the Millennial Generation**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The world today is evolving at rapid rates. Changing environments, social values, technologies, and societal needs conspire to create distinctive challenges for the law enforcement profession. Perhaps chief among these challenges is the changing demographics of the workforce; it is one inundated with members of the millennial generation. This newest generation represents the future of law enforcement. However, the millennial generation also possesses a different mentality, ethic, wants, and needs than any other generation of the workforce. If law enforcement is to succeed, it must modify and adapt strategies and processes, including the manner in which it recruits and retains members of the millennial generation in the workplace.

Examination of literature today, including peer reviewed journals and professional publications, and assessment of the state of the police field, document the plight of law enforcement as it looks to the future and highlights the need for law enforcement to adapt to a changing external environment. In order for law enforcement to fulfill its mission of providing responsive public safety services to the community successfully, the profession must adapt to changing societal needs and generational differences. Establishing the future for law enforcement starts with efforts today. If the police profession is to attract and retain a qualified workforce for the future, it must modify its current recruitment and retention strategies, particularly with an eye toward the millennial generation. It must blend the needs of diverse generations and integrate technological advancements. Police administrators must understand the changing dynamics of law enforcement and of society, and adapt accordingly. Additionally, law enforcement professionals must continue to integrate modern business management

principles rather than continuing to adhere rigidly to the more traditional militaristic mindset. In this manner, law enforcement can ensure delivery of professional police services in the modern world, and will be poised to serve the community of the future effectively.

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## INTRODUCTION

The world today is changing at a pace unlike any other time in history. In order to stay abreast of changing times, people must find new and innovative means of addressing complex issues and problems. Among the many changes being encountered everyday are the constantly changing dynamics associated with generations and generational issues. Perhaps the greatest challenge associated with the generational differences is the need to identify and utilize innovative recruitment and retention strategies in the workplace, targeting the rapidly changing workforce demographics.

The law enforcement profession is not exempt from having to address these difficult issues. As law enforcement evolves to meet the needs of a changing society, it must also change its methods in terms of securing a qualified and competent workforce. Law enforcement agencies should modify their recruitment and retention strategies to address the millennial generation. In order to understand how it needs to change or modify its strategies, law enforcement should first understand the newest generation to enter the workforce: the millennial (or Y) generation.

According to Alhambra, CA Captain James P. Henchey, the millennial generation comprises Americans born between the years of 1982 and 2002 (Henchey, 2005). As this generation infiltrates the workforce, distinct differences are evident between this generation and previous ones. For example, Lancaster and Stillman (n.d.) noted that millennials have grown up in an environment where they have become accustomed to multi-tasking, an ability that instills in them the belief that they can pursue multiple career fields simultaneously (para. 4). Additionally, East Palo Alto, CA Police Chief

Ronald Davis stated that members of the millennial generation seek a work-life balance that suits them. They approach the workplace with a desire to be entertained and expect the organization to serve them. In comparison, Chief Davis observes members of previous generations grew up in a structured and disciplined environment where individuals were committed to one job or organization for an entire career (Inskip, 2006). In view of these differences, and as law enforcement continues to expand the workforce to include members of this newest generation, the profession is learning that in order to attract and retain a qualified workforce, it has to modify its recruitment and retention strategies. The challenge then becomes identifying and implementing innovative strategies that appeal to a generation that is different from any other that law enforcement has ever encountered.

## **POSITION**

Law enforcement is a profession that dates back centuries. As societies have evolved, so too has the manner in which law enforcement serves the population. Yet, as a whole, law enforcement remains rigid in structure and staunch in the internal mechanisms that define the professional culture. In contrast, the world today is evolving at dizzying speeds. If law enforcement is to keep pace and continue to serve society, there must be change. One area that is prompting a need for change and a need for law enforcement to lend attention to outdated recruitment and retention strategies is the demographic change in the makeup of the workforce. Generational differences pervade today's labor force and dictate that, for the law enforcement profession to continue to attract and retain qualified, committed professionals, there must be a change in current recruitment and retention strategies.

In 2007, Kohut conducted a study for the Pew Research Center involving changing demographics in the workforce. Among the findings in this study was the emergence of generational differences among the workforce, differences that affect the manner in which employers, including law enforcement agencies, must recruit. The generation that is now beginning to infiltrate the workforce is referred to as the Millennial Generation or Generation Next, and is defined as that generation born between 1982 and 2002 (Henchey, 2005). According to Kohut (2007), rapidly changing and emerging technology plays a large role in influencing the millennial generation. He stated of this new generation: "They are Generation Next, the cohort of young adults who have grown up with personal computers, cell phones and the internet and are now taking their place in a world where the only constant is rapid change" (Kohut, 2007, p. 3).

The emergence of new generations in the workforce has created new and unique issues that employers need to address in order to recruit potential employees effectively. For example, newer members of the workforce do not approach employment the same as members of past generations. This newer generation does not share the same dedication to employers or professions as did previous generations. As stated in a 2008 study created by Keeter, "A much higher percentage of Millennials (70%) than their age counterparts in 1977 (52%) say they are likely to leave their current jobs in the next twelve months" (p. 16).

Additionally, differences are evident in the manner in which newer generations identify with their jobs and what they expect from their employers. According to consultants King, Graf-Lambsdorff, and Zhu (n.d.), "They (the Millennial Generation) also were likely to switch employers every year or two in their quest for career growth,

more engaging work, and higher salaries” (p. 71). Employers must account for these differences as they organize and plan recruiting strategies, and should offer job incentives designed to attract and retain qualified employees.

For law enforcement, the seemingly nomadic work tendencies of the millennial generation raise serious issues. The fact that the newer generation of the workforce is prone to change employers and professions frequently, places a financial burden on police agencies. Police administrators need only examine the cost of recruiting and hiring a police officer to see the value in modifying current strategies to meet the needs of perspective applicants. Across the nation, the cost to recruit, hire, and train officers is expensive. David DeCicco, an officer with the Clarkstown Police Department in Rockland County, New York, found that, in 2000, the New York City Police Department estimated it expended approximately \$500,000 for each new officer, a cost estimate inclusive of all expenses involved from initial recruitment through the end of the officer’s probation period (DeCicco, 2000). Similarly, in 2004 police agencies in California expended approximately \$100,000 on new officers in their first year of employment, a figure that includes salaries, benefits, and equipment (Youngs, 2004).

Given the substantial cost to hire and train a police officer, the benefit of modifying recruitment and retention strategies is evident. These financial implications carry enormously greater weight in times of economic distress. With solid practices in place to attract and keep qualified employees, agencies begin to realize the return on their investments. Agencies can assemble well-trained and dedicated employees likely to remain with the agency (and the profession). Beyond the financial implications of this



strategy, law enforcement also needs to realize that in this manner, the profession is also ensuring the future survival of the vocation.

Moreover, significant and rapid advancements in technology have led to unprecedented change in society. These technological advancements are yet another reason why law enforcement must examine and modify their recruiting strategies. As noted by Singh and Finn in a 2003 study, "The recruitment function has been undergoing dramatic changes as a result of information technology (IT)" (p. 1). Whereas employers were once able to initiate effective recruiting campaigns in newspapers or other printed sources, they must now utilize a number of resources including electronic mediums. According to Singh and Finn (2003), "There are more than 1.2 million jobs posted on the Internet, 3512 employment websites, and 5800 companies recruiting online" (p. 1). Additionally, employers are now commonly utilizing resources such as Facebook and Twitter, both of which are social networking sites that are being integrated into company and employer websites. This includes law enforcement agency and human resources web pages as these resources become effective avenues for recruiting purposes. Other rapidly growing electronic mediums for consideration include instant messaging (IM), e-mail, video conferencing, and text messaging on mobile phones. If law enforcement intends to keep pace with the changing world and remain successful, it must acknowledge the advent of technology and take steps to incorporate technology into its recruiting efforts.

One of the main differences in the advent of modern recruiting strategies is the speed and virtually instantaneous manner in which employers can reach perspective employees. Through electronic sources, employers can reach a perspective applicant

pool in near real time and in numbers that once were not possible. This has many employers competing for the same pool of applicants in a virtual first come first served recruiting atmosphere, and law enforcement is not exempt to this phenomenon. This is especially evident in larger metropolitan areas where numerous agencies typically vie for the same applicant pool.

Speaking to the fact that law enforcement agencies are competing with each other for an increasingly competitive and limited pool of applicants, Boyd, Melis, and Myers (2004), a college professor and two chiefs of police respectively, highlighted the need for law enforcement to modify recruitment strategies, and the impact this has on assembling a qualified and committed workforce. They stated, "Administrators who watch trends to consider future profiles can contemplate how best to integrate testing and recruitment that will attract candidates most likely to fulfill the skill set needed" (Boyd, Melis, & Meyers, 2004, p. 5). Engaging in such innovative recruitment strategies would allow agencies to position themselves better to compete for qualified and competent applicants in limited pools. In order to do so, law enforcement must modify traditional recruiting methods that were once trusted and successful, but which have now become outdated and ineffective.

The law enforcement profession today must also be cognizant of and account for changing social values among perspective applicants they are seeking to recruit, and formulate recruitment and retention strategies accordingly. Research has identified changes in the way that members of the workforce now identify with job, family, and accepted values and norms. According to Keeter (2008), "The economic backdrop of their time of socialization is increasing national wealth coupled with growing economic

inequality and insecurity. Lifelong employment with a single employer became a thing of the past, and a more dynamic and risky job market arose” (p. 7). Today’s workforce is increasingly comprised of individuals from nontraditional households, raised in single-family homes, many with mothers that worked full-time outside of the home. This is in drastic contrast to previous workforce makeup. Of this new workforce, Keeter (2008) observed, “Members of today’s workforce, as compared to past years, are experiencing lower levels of teenage pregnancy than their immediate predecessors, flat or declining levels of substance abuse, and lower rates of violent crime” (p. 7).

Another important change in the workforce makeup has been the growing numbers of females. Traditionally, females were considered homemakers. However, women now represent a large segment of the workforce demographics, including management level positions. According to Kreitner (2009), “Women occupy 50 percent of the managerial and professional positions in the U.S. workforce” (p. 66). In the field of law enforcement, a traditionally male dominated field, females were not as established as they are now. Jon Felperin, Director of The Center for Law Enforcement Training based in Northridge, Ca, observed that women have made great strides in non-traditional careers, including law enforcement, since the 1960's. Felperin (2004) noted, “societal changes and legal mandates have helped pave the way for women to enter law enforcement in record numbers. From less than 2 percent in the early 1970's to just over 12 percent today, woman continue to leave their mark” (para 1). Law enforcement administrators must acknowledge the changing demographics of the potential applicants. This transformation of the workforce has had a profound impact on the

expectations that young workers have regarding their careers and is a factor that employers must account for in their recruiting strategies.

Research clearly identified changes in several areas of today's workforce. The law enforcement profession and law enforcement administrators in particular, must understand the dynamics of the workforce, changes as they relate to the workforce, and then must modify their recruitment strategies accordingly. In order for the law enforcement profession to develop their workforce successfully, it must acknowledge changes that affect recruiting efforts, and must implement innovative strategies that will attract and ultimately retain qualified employees.

### **COUNTER POSITION**

Law enforcement is a paramilitary organization. The organizational structure and leadership styles of civilian law enforcement mimic traditional military structure, thus drawing comparisons. The mindset of civilian police also mirrors that of traditional military, with a hierarchal chain of command, uniformed appearance, and regimented structure. Thus, many would argue that law enforcement should not change nor otherwise modify their recruitment and retention strategies. The argument would be that law enforcement, much like the military, needs a specific type of individual or personality in order to make an effective and qualified police officer. Least of all, police organizations should not cater to any demographics of the workforce. After all, police organizations have survived for years, and the need for law enforcement in society will ensure that the profession will endure. Thus, law enforcement should maintain its paramilitary mindset and should not modify its recruitment and retention strategies, or any other strategies for that matter.

Ironically, to counter this argument effectively, one has only to look to the military. The military, in view of the changing environment to include the workforce demographics has begun to modify its strategies accordingly. One area that has prompted the military to redefine its recruitment efforts is the proliferation of millennials enlisting in the military. A study conducted by Colonel Drago (2006) of the United States Army sought to examine challenges the military faced in effective recruiting in relation to, among other things, generational differences. Drago (2006) wrote, "Using generational theory, [the study] will review the characteristics, beliefs, values, and attitudes of ...the Millennial generation, the target audience of the Army's current recruiting efforts. Specifically, it will investigate the Millennial generation's attitudes about military service" (p. 6).

In his study, Drago (2006) highlighted the importance of the military mission, and the implications for national security to adequately staff military forces. Citing a low unemployment rate and a recruiting pool showing less of a propensity to serve in the military, Drago illustrated the current challenges posed to the Army in terms of recruitment. Drago's study listed parents, technology, the economy, education, and the media as factors influencing military recruitment among millennials, and noted that examining each factor individually could provide military recruiters with valuable information with which to recruit millennials effectively (Drago, 2006). Further, Drago discussed the tremendous impact that technology has on millennial generation –and the workforce – and how the military should respond. He said, "As technology is the dominant force of influence on this generation, it is essential that the military tap into it as it develops its recruiting plans" (Drago, 2006, p. 14). Drago's study illustrated the

military's desire to understand the factors that influence potential recruits and the military's efforts to modify their recruitment strategies through innovation in order to maximize their recruitment efforts. Indeed, the military is modifying and adapting, as should civilian law enforcement.

Additionally, the military is changing the manner in which it communicates. Brum (2010) observed, "Today's Army is busy following and tweeting on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to reach young Soldiers and potential applicants in their preferred medium - when, where and how they want to receive their information" (para 2). Brum stressed the military's desire to stay in touch with the new generation of military service members and the need to utilize technology to achieve this goal. He went on to claim that "Leaders seek to reach 18 to 24-year-olds with vital information. The Millennial Generation gets its "news fixes" from online sources and commanders want to reach them" (Brum, 2010, para. 3).

For an institution that was once regimented and unyielding, the military is adapting to fit into the next generation. According to Brum (2010), all Army majors maintain an internet webpage, various military divisions utilize social media, and "U.S. Army-Pacific reaches out to its cyberspace audience via three blogs, YouTube, TroopTube, MySpace, Flickr and Twitter" (para. 5). Brum made interesting reference to generations past, ones that included renowned military figures such as MacArthur, Patton, Schwarzkopf and Powell. While each of these military heroes undoubtedly adhered to a strict militaristic mindset, replete with accepted strategies, the military of today is adapting. Today's military seeks to understand the forces that affect and shape prospective service members and seeks to modify accordingly. So, too, must civilian

law enforcement. For those that argue that law enforcement is paramilitary and thus should not change or modify accepted practice, the military serves as a clear example of how change is good necessary to the sustained well-being of an institution.

Moreover, some would argue that law enforcement is not like business, and unlike corporate America, law enforcement should not adapt to the changing external environment. In fact, common sentiment is that the best way to manage a police agency is in a situational fashion. That is, police agencies should adapt to the changing external environment. This is in part because police management emerged to some extent by utilizing and implementing management concepts from the private sector. According to the encyclopedia Police (n.d.), since the early 1970s, “reformers have urged police administrators to adopt more democratic styles of management...Reformers argue that policing is ill-suited for military management strategies because the vast majority of police work involves dealing with citizens in ambiguous “low visibility” settings” (para. 3). In other words, the philosophy is that traditional militaristic management hinders civilian law enforcement, and, in fact, civilian law enforcement should model professional or business strategies for management.

The shift towards contemporary business management practices in law enforcement has led to the advent of policing strategies such as community oriented policing. Of particular note, the implementation of community oriented policing requires a shift in the culture and mindset of the organization. This requires the implementation of traditional management principles. The encyclopedia Police cited a definition for community oriented policing as one offered by the Justice Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services as a policing strategy “which contains three

elements: organizational and managerial change, problem-solving, and community partnerships” (Police, n.d., para. 5).

Similarly, Buchholtz and Carroll (2009) defined business in one sense as “proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations” (p. 5). Partnerships become a critical area of business and management and have tremendous implications for efficiently managing a police agency. Police administrators frequently make use of community partnerships to achieve the law enforcement mission. In this manner, innovative strategies, such as community oriented policing, proved effective. Consequently, police management now incorporates other corporate business strategies such as Total Quality Management (TQM). Law enforcement has demonstrated that it is, in fact, businesslike in nature. Police organizations operate like businesses, and traditional organizational management practices apply. Public safety is the service that police organizations provide to the stakeholders, including the community and other businesses. For those who would argue that a police agency, and police management, is not at all like traditional business, they would find that, in fact, a police agency is modeled after traditional business, and corresponding management practices apply.

Furthermore, many police chiefs today seek and possess advanced degrees in business or public administration, which is a testament to the fact that being knowledgeable in business and management practices are essential for a modern police administrator. A 2004 study of police chiefs in the Michigan area conducted by Bruce L. Benson, a retired police chief, a Ph.D., and an associate professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, verified this fact. Benson (2004) examined 50 departments from the Michigan (Detroit was not included). The department sizes



ranged from 48 to 366 sworn officers, and the city populations ranged from 20,000 to 198,000. The results indicated that “89 percent of the police chiefs had at least a four-year college degree; 54 percent had a master's degree or law degree; and 3 percent had a doctoral degree” (Benson, 2004, para. 5). According to Benson (2004), this education shows the chiefs are “a group of outstanding, professional leaders. They are highly educated and well-seasoned in police administrative experience and overall law enforcement experience” (para. 20).

Benson's evaluation of police chiefs and the need for administrative experience further illustrates how police organizations and police management are very much like businesses. In order to be competitive and effective, law enforcement should monitor the external environment and adapt accordingly. Law enforcement administrators should be knowledgeable in best practices and possess the requisite experience and education to lead the business of a law enforcement agency effectively. In this manner, law enforcement practices, such as recruiting and retention, integrate contemporary principles and create effective methods of sustaining the organization and the profession.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Law enforcement is a profession vital to the existence of society. In order to maintain the stability of the profession and in order to develop a solid foundation for future generations, law enforcement must adapt to the changing environment. Much like the military, in fact, often referred to as a paramilitary organization, law enforcement operates with a rigid and formal organizational structure. Personnel within the law enforcement profession must possess certain attributes and disciplines, given the

dangerous and legal nature of the profession. However, in view of a rapidly changing world, law enforcement as a profession should examine its accepted practices and modify and adapt to keep pace with the evolving public safety needs of society.

Several key factors have combined to pose significant challenges to the future of law enforcement. Chief among the challenges are rapidly changing demographics in the workforce, swift and diverse changes in modern technology, and changing social values. Law enforcement exists to serve the greater good of society and to maintain civil order among the masses. If the police profession is to exist and flourish, it must adapt and change. Changing social values, varying work ethics, and new ways of thinking collaborate to shape a new generation of workers. If law enforcement is to survive, it must evaluate these changes and adapt its mindset and methodologies accordingly. Law enforcement should embrace changes that are now beginning to define the future. While traditional policing strategies have served their purpose, it is now time to look to the future. The future of law enforcement lies in the hands of the current generation. Since it is not feasible to think that law enforcement can change the generation, law enforcement should then adapt to the changes that have molded this generation.

Civilian law enforcement has long taken its cues from the military. In fact, the military of today is recognizing the need to adapt to the changing environment. The military has a tremendous obligation in providing for national security. In order to meet that obligation, and ensure a qualified and competent complement of service members, the military is changing the manner in which it conducts business and the strategies that it implements. Law enforcement should pay heed. In terms of recruiting and retention

strategies, the military is embracing the changing environment to formulate effective practices. So, too, should civilian law enforcement. Similarly, law enforcement is a business. Law enforcement administrators should approach the delivery of public safety as such, and integrate professional models into their law enforcement repertoire.

In the end, adapting law enforcement practices to the changing environment will ensure that public safety meets the need of society. In an ever-changing world, law enforcement must adapt. The future of the profession and the sustained well-being of society demand it. Law enforcement will ensure that the profession remains healthy and progressive, in part, by modifying its recruitment and retention strategies. By doing so, law enforcement will guarantee that there is a qualified, knowledgeable, and competent workforce capable of meeting the needs of society and carrying the profession well into the future.

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