

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

---

---

**Rise of the Millennial Officer:  
Multigenerational Learning and Field Training Programs**

---

---

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

---

---

**By  
James Gresham**

**Stephenville Police Department  
Stephenville, Texas  
May 2016**

## **ABSTRACT**

Millennials are entering law enforcement in greater and greater numbers. By 2020, they will account for the majority of officers (Carlisle, 2009). Current field training programs fail to take into account their unique learning styles. Departments can address many of these shortcomings by modifying their current programs with generational learning trends.

Millennials are not only defined by the year of their birth but by the technology they grew up with. The generation started using technology at an early age and view it as a collaborative partner in their lives. This, combined with a more indulging and consulting parenting style, creates a generation with unique needs but also unique skills and abilities.

Current field training programs used by departments fail to take into account many of the changes in generational learning. Millennials work, live, communicate, and learn by different means than previous generations. By adapting current programs with these trends, departments can help integrate Millennials into their organizations and take full advantage of the many benefits that this generation possesses.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction . . . . .	1
Position . . . . .	2
Counter Position . . . . .	6
Recommendation . . . . .	9
References . . . . .	14

## INTRODUCTION

They go by many names: Generation M, EchoBoomers, Generation Y, Generation Me, the Net Generation, the iGeneration, the Nintendo Generation, or simply Millennials (Musser, 2013; McGlynn, 2005). Few sources agree on when the Millennial Generation started, but all concur that they are arriving in the law enforcement workforce in greater and greater numbers. In fact, it is estimated that by 2020 Millennials will make up the vast majority of police officers (Carlisle, 2009). They bring with them a new view of the world and new preferences for learning. At the same time, departments are increasingly faced with the prospect of training these new officers with field training programs that were designed in the early 1970's for a previous generation of officers (Hughins, 2005).

While a review of the literature shows many sources that attempt to compare and contrast various field training programs, few sources attempt to apply contemporary generational learning styles to currently accepted field training models. Current programs do not provide the best methods to address new advances in adult learning theory, and they do not meet the new requirements of these Millennial officers. However, by careful planning, they can be tailored to meet the needs of a new generation of officers

This paper will explore Millennial generational learning styles with the two most commonly used programs in law enforcement: the "San Jose Model" and the "Reno Model". Both programs differ greatly in their methodologies. The San Jose Model tends to focus more on behavior modification, while the Reno Model applies adult learning and problem solving skills (Pruitt, 2010). While both models have advantages,

the more recently developed Reno Model is designed from the ground up with more contemporary learning styles in mind.

In order to have fully successful field training programs, law enforcement agencies should tailor their programs to reflect generational learning trends. Many departments remain strongly focused on the adoption and use of a single model. By understanding these trends, law enforcement agencies will be better able to maximize their programs effectiveness and will produce officers with better understanding, faster integration with the community, and more problem solving skills. Even a few simple changes to current models can greatly increase their effectiveness with Millennial officers.

## **POSITION**

Trying to define who is a Millennial is difficult. The most common definition is that they are people born between 1980 and 2000 (Buffum, 2007). While it is easy to categorize a generation by the date they were born, this method overgeneralizes. Categorization by behavioral traits may be more accurate, but even then, millennial traits are hard to agree upon. Some describe Millennials as a generation of self-centered narcissists with an entitlement problem (Chapman, 2013), while others caution that being self-focused is not the same as being self-centered. Some would even argue that Millennials share more in common with older service oriented generations, such as the World War II veterans (Arnett, 2013). Either extreme highlights the fact that Millennials are vastly different than previous generations.

McGlynn (2005) described three core influences on the Millennials. First, they grew up in a time of economic prosperity. Until the Great Recession started, they had

lived in a time of continuous economic development, a booming job market which allowed job seekers to be particular about their choices. This would have been further exemplified by their parents who would have been able to be selective about their employment and a focus on education. They believe in work that they are passionate about. Second, they were highly protected as they grew up in terms of government, schools, and parents. No other generation has had the benefit or the burden of so much government regulation, oversight, zero-tolerance, testing, and examinations. From the moment of their birth, Millennials would have been tested, compared, and contrasted against their peers. Governments, laws, and regulations grew at record paces during their lifetimes (McGlynn 2005). Big Brother or the status quo, Millennials view government in a way vastly different from their peers.

Lastly, they were accustomed to being indulged and consulted by their parents as child rearing practices shifted to being more child focused (McGlynn, 2005). Their upbringings were strongly shaped by cultural events such as 9/11, Columbine, The Internet, and Facebook (Buffum, 2007). And now, as they emerge into adulthood, they are confronted by a weak job market brought upon by the Great Recession, where the market is flooded with older workers seeking the same entry level positions they are (Arnett, 2013). This may impart a type of delayed adulthood where Millennials wait to enter the job market fully after college, may attend further post-graduate schooling, or retain further dependence on their parents (McGlynn, 2005).

Many Millennial traits are rooted in technology. They are what Palfrey & Gasser call "Digital Natives," meaning that they have always lived in a world where technology was available, prevalent, and used (Gasser, 2013). Email, social networks, instant

messaging, and “googling” are all common tools for Millennials. Whereas previous generations might have struggled to adapt or found technology foreign, Millennials are comfortable with and technologically savvy (Werth, 2009). In fact, Millennials may view many of the older technologies, filters, and restrictions in use today as inhibiting their learning (Junginger, 2008). Millennials view, embrace, and use technology in a way that no other prior generation ever has or has ever been able to.

It is easy to view Millennial traits in a negative way when, in fact, Millennials do bring a large collection of positive skills to the working and learning environment. They are team oriented, cooperative, confident, optimistic, and problem oriented (Junginger, 2008; Werth & Werth, 2011). They seek out challenge and have a propensity to challenge the status quo. They question everything. They are diversified, open minded, and expect instant gratification or feedback in their endeavors. In short, they want to be actively engaged in the learning process.

The second point is that current field training programs fail to address millennial learning styles. While there are many variations of field training programs, they tend to follow two distinct models: the San Jose and the newer Reno Model. Research showed that between 75% and 84% of Texas law enforcement agencies follow the San Jose Model (Hughhins, 2005). The Reno Model claims a growing population of anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand departments worldwide (The Hoover Group of Reno, 2006).

The San Jose Model was born out of tragedy in the spring of 1970, when a young officer was involved in a traffic accident that claimed the life of a passenger. The young officer was known for his poor driving skills, but no documentation was available

to justify his termination prior to the accident (Moore & Womack, 1975). Over the following years, a team of officers, administrators, and psychologists designed and refined a program that would later become the national standard. At its core, the San Jose Model provides the Standardized Evaluation Guide, which lists 31 specific behavior traits that are rated according to a 7 point Likert scale. The behaviors in these traits are broken down into three categories: unacceptable, acceptable, and superior. Trainees were evaluated daily by the use of a Daily Observation Report or DOR, plus weekly, phase, and program evaluations. The Trainee then moves from one field training officer (FTO) to another field training officer through progressive phases, each typically four weeks long and followed by an evaluation phase (Moore & Womack, 1975). At the end of the program, a trainee would have dozens of DOR's and numerous other evaluations to supposedly prove or disprove their law enforcement abilities.

Over the following years, a number of state, national, and international law enforcement organizations recognized the need for standardized field training, and the San Jose Model quickly became the most widely used (Huggins, 2005). In fact, a 1987 National Institute of Justice report explored the model in detail and even called it "State of the Art" (McCambell, 1987). Over time, this model became the standard training model widely used by departments throughout the United States.

The Reno Model began in 1999 in Reno, Nevada through a grant from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). The goal was to create a program that incorporated the then emerging concepts of community policing and problem oriented policing (The Hoover Group of Reno, 2006). In the Reno Model, training officers are



called police training officers or PTOs. The program is often referred to as the PTO Program. The Reno Model accomplishes training through the implementation of Bloom's Hierarchy of Learning and problem-based learning or PBL (The Hoover Group of Reno, 2013). The program organizes trainee learning around four substantive topics: non-emergency incident response, emergency incident response, patrol activities, and criminal investigations. It then focuses these topics around 15 core competencies or skills that trainees must master.

Training is then coordinated through four main training phases with a mid-term and final evaluation. Evaluations are conducted by police training evaluator officers who are not necessarily the trainees PTOs. This separates the learning from the testing, reducing personnel bias, stress, and clearly defining teaching, learning, and testing roles (The Hoover Group of Reno, 2006). Instead of daily evaluations by their training officers, trainees in the Reno Model complete focused journals that help trainees evaluate themselves through introspective and reflectview thinking.

While the Reno Model does address many of the millennial learning styles, the San Jose Model, which is still in use by the majority of police departments, does not. While the Reno Model claims a growing segment of law enforcement agency programs, the vast majority of Millennial officers are still being trained using the San Jose Model. Many departments are reluctant to change models because of liability or familiarity concerns.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Currently accepted field training models have been in place for over 40 years. Agencies do not see a "need to change their field training programs simply for the sake

of change” (Huggins, 2005, p. 2). This response is commonly associated with an agency’s desire to protect themselves from failure to train liability, usually under Title 42 § 1983. The most commonly cited case is *Johnson v. Cincinnati* (1999). The courts in this case stated that for a department to be held liable three factors must be true. First, the training program must be inadequate for the task; second, the inadequacy must be a result of deliberate indifference on the department’s part; and lastly, that this inadequacy was “closely related” or actually caused the injury in question (*Johnson v. City of Cincinnati*, 1999).

The San Jose Model, in particular, is notable for its intensive documentation. As noted earlier, a trainee is likely to have dozens of daily, weekly, phase, and program evaluations in their file by the end of the program. Indeed, entire notebooks are filled with checklists, reports, surveys, and meeting notes listing a trainee’s strengths and weaknesses. According to Nemcic (2010), “Some field training programs have degraded into a sink or swim process with little training, a lot of evaluation, and heavy on the documentation” (p.10). Nemcic (2010) goes on to point out the purpose of many field training programs has become the documentation itself, not training. While a department may feel that this documentation benefits them and the trainee, in fact, “these daily evaluations do not address an individual’s learning style, adult-learning methods, problem-based learning, problem solving abilities, or community oriented policing” (Pruitt, 2010, p 1).

Most departments also feel that their programs are effective and accomplishing their purposes (Huggins, 2005). So, if a department has not been sued over its field training program and it is producing lots of termination justifying documentation, there is

little need seen to change things up. In fact, the program itself may not be living up to its full potential, especially with regards to Millennial officers, leaving the department with poorly trained and prepared officers.

There are, however, several compelling reasons to change. Citizens demand more of their police officers today than ever before. Police traits and actions that were acceptable in the 1970s are no longer acceptable today. Several traits of officers today would have indeed been foreign to the 1970 officer. Video production, electronic crimes, computers in vehicles, mobile phones are a few examples. The public expects their officers to be prompt, professional, and able to solve problems readily and quickly.

The world has also changed. In the 1970s, the police ranks were mostly the Veterans/Greatest generation challenged to train the up and coming Boomer generations (Buffum, 2007). Now departments are mostly made up of Generation X'ers, who are challenged to train the up and coming Millennial generations (Werth, 2009). In a short time, Millennials will be predominately training Millennials. Expectations that what worked then must work now is fallacious thinking.

Some would, however, argue that the nature of police work itself is unchanging. That to change to simply accommodate a younger generation would undermine some of the core values of law enforcement in general. The structure of law enforcement itself is paramilitary and has not changed much in the last 50 years and the services provided remain markedly similar (Goodwin, 2010). And while the values and morals of Millennials may be different from prior generations, law enforcement standards themselves are more absolute and unchanging.

Another reason that law enforcement cannot change is that the nature of the business itself deals with such important issues that there is little room for mistakes. While a corporate business could tolerate employees making mistakes, mistakes in law enforcement would be detrimental to the lives of the very people that law enforcement is sworn to protect (Goodwin, 2010). Officer training is a high priority for both the department and the community they serve.

There are many values of law enforcement that cannot be compromised such as honesty, integrity, professionalism. The idea that the way in which law enforcement accomplishes these values do not change is incorrect. In many ways, the public today expects an even greater level of service by officers who more and more represent their values (Pruitt, 2010). Indeed, the very officer that provides these services has changed over the course of time. Even Goodwin (2010) admitted that “each generation has within its very makeup, a different set of values, morals, and a way of thinking” (p. 4). To think otherwise is the equivalency of watching a black and white television while pretending that color TV does not exist and asserting that the world itself is still black and white.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Departments themselves have been slow changing in response to these trends with the advent of community oriented policing and problem oriented policing as a patrol function (Pruitt, 2010). The maturation of field training programs to meet these standards is simply a logical step in the process. Police academy classes now regularly teach the concepts of community policing, problem-oriented policing, and problem-

based learning to new recruits, and it only makes sense to begin the application of these principals as early as possible in an officer's career.

Millennial officers themselves want to be actively engaged in and involved with their own training and upbringing in law enforcement (Pruitt, 2010). They will not be content to sit back and passively absorb instruction through methodologies designed by prior generations to teach those same prior generations. In the next few years, Millennials will be assuming more and more of the training and leadership rolls themselves as they grow to become the dominant group in occupational ranks (Werth & Werth, 2011).

Departments should begin the process now of tailoring their field training programs to meet the learning styles of the new generation of officers. By acting now, instead of waiting for the proverbial trainee accident to occur, departments can produce a younger generation of officer with a high level critical thinking and problem solving skills. These new officers will be able to quickly recognize and adapt to changing cultural trends and problems. While the choice of field training methods can help move a department towards this goal, either method can be tailored to suite the individual needs of the department and its officers. And by applying the legal standards as laid out in *Johnston vs. Cincinnati* (1999), it becomes apparent what departments must do to avoid training liabilities. The sheer effort and effect of evaluating and tailoring programs goes to show that a department is not indifferent to the training issues at hand.

Werth & Werth (2011) described six goals when describing educational curriculums for the Millennial learner. The first is to minimize formal or lecture-based instruction. While such instruction will always be required, it should be minimized in

favor of more interactive or engaging learning. Second, departments should emphasize activities that rely on trial and error learning. This, in many ways, is already a key element of field training programs. Thirdly, departments should allow for learning delivered through peers. Field Training Officers are both peers and co-workers. In many ways, they are also supervisors with one subordinate. Pruitt (2010) pointed out that Millennials want coaches and mentors, not bosses.

Next, departments should design training that is divided into smaller sections that can be taught, tried, and applied within short time frames. The San Jose Model does this through the Standardized Evaluation Guideline which lists 31 specific actions and traits while the Reno Model focuses these behaviors through core competencies that are more functionally centered (The Hoover Group of Reno, 2006). Also, these skills should be demonstrated early on how they provide value to the trainee and the department. Closely associating actions with rewards, however, is a behavior modification method closely associated with the San Jose Model (Pruitt, 2010).

Finally Werth and Werth (2011) pointed out that these programs must provide for risk-taking in a safe environment. The core foundation of field training program is the shared experience of job performance. It is very important for an FTO or PTO to allow their trainee to engage in behaviors that can end in failure. While this risk must be carefully monitored and controlled, failure is a component of the learning process, especially for Millennial learners. The Reno Model addresses this through the concept of “failing forward,” where trainees review and process their failures in an introspective manner rather than being “punished” for bad behavior (The Hoover Group of Reno,

2006). The San Jose Model tends to take a more “Skinner” type form through behavior modification through negative feedback.

Law enforcement agencies do not need to necessarily develop a new model or completely abandon their current programs for the sake of this change. By tailoring their current programs with the addition of problem based learning techniques and expanding on adult learning theory, departments can begin to meet the learning needs of their department. Even slight variations or additions to their programs can result in significant learning improvements.

Departments using the San Jose Model could easily adapt some aspects of the model. By reducing the frequency of evaluations, departments would allow more focus on the training aspects of the work and reduce anxiety with the constant evaluative process. Training their FTOs to focus more on the training results than the documentation process changes the way FTO approach their work. By being less concerned with the paperwork and more concerned with the actual learning, departments will provide feedback to trainees in a manner more consistent with their learning styles. Adding reflective tools like journaling for their trainees can help further engage the trainees in their own learning process. Journaling could help trainees reflect on their progress and learn from their failures and experiences. Changing the manner of the in the field evaluations and separating them from the learning process will help formalize the process and reduce personnel bias.

While it is true that change cannot be done simply for the sake of change alone, change can be driven by more than a negative consequence or a fear reaction. True change is driven by the understanding of current practices, the prediction of future

trends, and the desire to constantly improve. Current Field Training Programs can be improved upon. With the application of Millennial learning traits and adaptation of current methodologies, departments can raise up a new generation of caring, competent, and professional officers who better reflect the cultural norms and values of the communities they serve.



## REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2013). Members of the millennial generation are not more self-absorbed than previous generations. In D. H. Musser, *The Millennial Generation* (pp. 26-34). Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.
- Buffum, S. L. (2007). *Generations at school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Carlisle, R. (2009, March). *The contemporary field training program generation X training generation Y*. Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.
- Chapman, S. (2013). Have we raised a generation of narcissists? In D. H. Musser, *The Millennial Generation* (pp. 21-25). Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.
- Gasser, J. P. (2013). Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives. In D. H. Musser, *The Millennial Generation* (pp. 35-42). Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.
- Goodwin, W. R. (2010, June). *Police supervision: The generational differences*. Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.
- Hughins, B. K. (2005, July). *The "San Jose" field-training model: Effective or outdated?* Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.
- Johnson v. City of Cincinnati, 39 F.Supp.2d 1013 (United States District Court, S.D. Ohio, Western Division 1999).
- Junginger, C. (2008, September). Who is training whom? The effect of the millennial generation. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 19-23.
- McCambell, M. (1987). *Field training for police officers: The state of the art*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

McGlynn, A. P. (2005, April). Teaching millennials, our newest cultural cohort.

*Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review*, 71(4), 12-16.

Moore, S. A., & Womack, A. M. (1975). San Jose police department field and evaluation program: A case study. San Jose, CA: San Jose Police Department.

Musser, D. G. (2013). *The Millennial Generation*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.

Nemcic, M. W. (2010, June). *Campus policing: A time to change the field training officer program*. Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.

Pruitt, C. D. (2010, January). *Moving forward with field training officer programs*. Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute of Texas.

The Hoover Group of Reno. (2006). *Reno Model PTO Program* Retrieved from The Hoover Group of Reno.

The Hoover Group of Reno. (2013). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <http://ptoprogram.com/wp/pto-program-information/frequently-asked-questions-faqs/>

Werth, E. (2009, November). Adult learning: Similarities in training methods and recruits learning characteristics. *Police Chief Magazine*, 76(11). Retrieved from [http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display\\_arc\\_h&article\\_id=1947&issue\\_id=112009](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arc_h&article_id=1947&issue_id=112009)

Werth, E. P., & Werth, L. (2011, March). Effective training for millennial students. *Adult Learning*, 22(3), 12-19.