

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Communication Among Generations for Law Enforcement**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This research topic is about communicating with the younger generations, and how better communication with them will make life easier for all. It will also foster a better police department and community. The younger generations are more educated, but at the same time are more sensitive to being corrected, so the counseling and coaching used in past years needs to be improved. Most of the research information was found in books, databases and Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) papers. A survey specific to the research was also conducted and the results demonstrated a lack of both communication and sensitivity training. The author recommends that supervisors attend yearly sensitivity training and communication classes. This should help retain good officers, boost the morale of the department, and provide the community with more intelligent, caring officers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Methodology.....	7
Findings.....	8
Discussions/Conclusions.....	10
References.....	14

## INTRODUCTION

One of the major contributing factors to the diversity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century work force is the fact that several generations of employees can be found in any job setting. This diversity is more dominant in law enforcement today than it has ever been in the past. It is unusual to see a thirty-year or more veteran continue their career while several levels of “years on the job” filter down to include the newest upcoming generation, known as Generation X or the “rookie. This creates a vast and sometimes controversial difference in job performance and ethical behavior between the generations, especially in law enforcement settings. There are many reasons for these differences.

The purpose of this research is to provide information and awareness to any law enforcement administrator, manager or supervisor who may assist others in understanding the complex nature and diversity within their departments. More specifically, this research will examine whether or not the key to communicating within a work force setting begins with understanding the generational differences that exist? Becoming aware of those differences may assist in building better relations among employees along with providing insight, which can assist management.

The method of inquiry into this subject matter will include a review of literature and other written materials on the subject of generational differences being explored. Along with this review, this author will conduct a survey to gather further information. It is anticipated that the outcome of this research will find that better communication can be achieved between management and employees, and among the employees collectively, when administrators, managers and/or supervisors understand the

differences between generations. Through a better understanding of employees or subordinates, communication can be improved and nurtured (Bassett, 1968).

Improved communication through understanding of generational differences benefits not only law enforcement, but can also benefit the community. In the law enforcement arena, administration, management and supervisors are tasked with “getting the job done.” Improving communication through understanding generational differences within a department’s structure may assist in accomplishing that task. If this improved communication was shared with line officers, it may also lead to nurturing a better understanding of the makeup of the community they serve, which might generate better community relations.

One of the major contributing factors to the diversity of the 21st century work force is the many different generations of employees. Does the key to communication within a work force setting begin with understanding generational differences?

Questions that are valuable to consider when evaluating generational differences include whether or not: an individual’s supervisor always understands him/her, a individual always understands his/her supervisor, an employee feels younger people are more sensitive or more educated, newer and younger employees understand a veteran employee.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

When considering the different generations, it is important to address the varied age differences. For instance, veterans were born between 1922 and 1945. These men and women lived and fought during World War I, II and the Vietnam War. Several of these were veterans, who fought in these wars and fought to keep America’s freedom

of speech alive. Several of these very proud men and women fought, died and sacrificed their lives for our freedom. This was a very patriotic time and these men and women loved America and our government. They were the ones who respected their parents, police officers and the elderly. They were the ones who asked “how high sir” and said “yes sir and yes maim”, who held doors open because it was the right thing to do, not because they were told to. This was a time when discipline was used and practiced regularly. These men and women are the ones who saved for a rainy day, dreamed of going to college, and loved to come home to their sisters and brothers and have a nice family dinner. The veterans were the ones who made the world a better place for all the “baby boomers” who followed.

Ideally, if some officers would learn to speak clearly and courteously, then the world would be great. However, life is not that easy. People have been reared so differently that they have different values; they are looking at things differently. Therefore, their bad actions or wrong comments will be different and a small percentage of officers might have their actions examined by a civilian review board, because people will complain (Sinclair, 2000).

Then appeared the baby boomers born from 1946 -1964, these are the ones who the veterans worked so hard for. Presently, many baby boomers feel everything is a birthright. Some baby boomers do not feel they need to work for anything because mom and dad’s inheritance might be available to them.

Then the Vietnam War changed the world and individuals began talking about rights and wanted their cut of the American pie. The baby boomers generation was bitter at the American government and wanted action instantly. This is the beginning of

a more sensitive nation. No one wanted to discipline their children in the same manner as their parents did. Discipline tactics like “time out” and putting a child in a corner was enforced by this more liberal generation (Broady, 1987). These mildly disciplined children are now considered Generation X, the individuals mothered and fathered by the baby boomers.

Generation X, the children of the baby boomers were born from 1965 -1980 and have basically lived a full life without war. Generally speaking, the only real conflict Generation X children have experienced is from: family, walking in their life and telling them what to do. Most of the time Generation X children were never home, and when they were they were busy trying to deal with parents who were not as educated as they were. Their parents not understanding their need to be on the computer or dabbling in the stock market. They were however clever in the stock market, possibly due to playing with the stock market like it was another video game. This generation was made up of a group of fun latch key kids, who often raised themselves, missed out on a lot of family time, and were full of information, yet full of skepticism. Difficult to guide, they say “I have raised myself, I came home and nuked my lunch, I did my homework, which you did not understand or care enough to look at. I have friends who I talk to all the time on my cell phone, this is my family. I am very cautious with whom I give my affection and when I do make any money; I will save it because I do not know the future” (Webb, 2000). These free spirits had children, now known as the new Generation Y.

This is the generation we now see, born from 1981-present they are called Generation Y. This author has several Generation Y employees and they have

everything pierced (ears, tongue, nipple or nose) or they wear their pants very to baggy. They are very excitable; they want to make a meaningful difference so you have to keep the job interesting. They are very confident in what they do, proud of what they look like. They are into extreme fun no matter how dangerous. They are very sociable, they love people. They have several merged families; for example, they may hang with several small groups of friends, but they still need their parents. College is a very big expense and since most are into the internet or some kind of communication, they are wondering if they know more than some of their instructors. They love to keep in touch by communicating by e-mail or picture phone. They work hard to spend their money on the next big gadget or the newest product. Often, everything is considered disposable to this generation. For instance, a thousand-dollar computer is only good for a few weeks before the next one comes out on the market. What does all of this have to do with communicating? If law enforcement administrators do not try to see where these individuals came from and try to assimilate what they went through, then it will be impossible to understand, manage and/or guide them. One way to understand the different generations is to understand the workplace characteristics and some of their values.

The veterans believed in hard work, they respected authority and welcomed it. They believed in sacrifice and the idea of doing one's duty before having fun and strictly adhering to rules and regulations. Nevertheless, they still believed in coming home to a family dinner and still communicating with the family. These were the people who were true individuals, they were told to do something and it was done.



The baby boomers on the other hand have become workaholics. They loved work, they had personal fulfillment, crusading causes and they liked to question authority. Work is an exciting adventure for them; they are team players who love meetings. They hate constructive criticisms, but love to hear that they are doing a good job or that they are a valued employee. These boomers do not try to balance family, they work to live.

The Generation X group seems to like structure and direction. They are often skeptical that they may know more than their superiors. However, they are willing to wait and see. They love a difficult challenge, they love to ask “why” and several other questions. They want to be in the “know”. They are direct and want everything immediate. Freedom is their best reward, but they also need to know they are doing a good job. When they get free reins they can do it their way and be creative, but they can also forget the rules.

Generation X, are often the ones who are thinking about what is next. They love to keep busy, are great at multitasking and are goal oriented. Their leadership styles are still undetermined because they have not worked long enough. Technically advanced, everything is at a push of a button for this generation. Most Generation X use voice mail, e-mail, PDA's and of course, their laptops to communicate. They do not have to have desks or offices to do their job; they can always be on the go. They know there are several bright and creative people out there so they are working hard, while still trying to balance work and family.

Based on the author's conversations with several veterans, they said if you yelled at them they would still look you in the eyes and say “yes sir”. One could still yell at a

baby boomer, but they would not like it, while Generation X would need to be asked politely to do something. In addition, Generation Y would need an explanation as to why it would be a good idea for them to perform a certain request. It is very important to determine what and how a person is spoken to when addressing the varied generations in order to be an effective communicator. If we turn off our own employees, then what are we doing to our own customers? (Carr & Miller, 1985).

Most of a person's waking hours are involved with communication. The simple fact that 70% to 80% of a person's life is involved in efforts to communicate proposes the crucial importance of communication skills in law enforcement. A study by Paul Rankin (1930) showed that 9% of the time a person is writing and 16% of the time he or she is reading, and another 30% of his or her time is spent speaking and the last 45% of his or her time is spent listening (Northwestern University, 1986).

Listening and speaking clearly will assist greatly in communicating with all generations. Paraphrasing is always a good way to make sure everyone understands and everyone is clear about what was said (R. Davidson, personal communication August 16, 2006).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The author's goal in conducting this research is to produce an answer to the research question which considers whether or not there is a problem in communications between the generations. The author's purpose for this research is to establish the importance of and need for education or training in this matter. The author hypothesizes that this research will confirm that both officers and law enforcement agencies benefit when everyone understands each other or everyone tries to understand how and why people think and communicate the way they do. Having

established these results through research, the author ultimately hopes that departments and the public will be able to communicate better and that some departments or public entities will understand the importance of communication training.

Additionally, data will be collected from sixty-nine Texas law enforcement officers from University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio Police Department, University of Texas at San Antonio Police Department, University Hospital District Police, and LEMIT Module III (graduates of the 2006 class). This will be accomplished through the administration of a survey utilizing thirteen questions. Survey participation will be requested of officers from agencies of varying size and geographic locations within the state of Texas, ideally resulting in a 50% response rate. Analysis of this data will produce statistics regarding the percentage of agencies currently employing the use of training in communication.

## **FINDINGS**

This author distributed a survey to the following Police agencies: University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio Police Department, University of Texas at San Antonio Police Department, University Hospital District Police, and Lemit III Graduates of 2006 class.

Out of 116 surveys sent out, 69 were returned and these were the questions and the results. One of the author's questions was, "Do you find that younger people get their feelings hurt more easily today? The author found that forty-five out of sixty-nine people surveyed said "yes" they felt people were more sensitive today than in the past years. However, twenty-four survey respondents reported that they felt people were no more or less sensitive than in the past. Fifty-seven people out of sixty-nine said "yes" to

the question asking whether or not they felt the younger generation was more educated. Thirty-two people out of thirty-seven survey respondents felt that they did not have a problem communicating with the younger generation. Thirty-three people reported “yes,” their supervisors led by example; while thirty-six said “no” their supervisors do not lead by example. Forty-eight people said “yes” their department offered training in communicating while twenty-one said “no” their department does not offer such training. Forty-one people said “yes” to having been offered additional outside training, while twenty-eight people have not been trained. Fifty-two people said women are better communicators, while seventeen said “men” were better communicators. It should also be noted that only two women returned the survey.

Seventeen survey respondents felt the age groups 18-34 were better communicators, while twenty-five respondents felt the age group 35-45 were better communicators. Twenty-seven individuals felt the age group of 45 and older were better communicators. What are some suggestions you would give a new supervisor on improving his/her communication. Some of the comments given when asked what some suggestions should be given to a new supervisor on improving his/her communication include being: direct, a good listener, sensitive, and open. Other suggestions include: following logic instead of following example (especially bad examples from bad habits), practice listening; get all known facts before opening mouth, being a great listener, waiting to correct unless urgent, using additional training, practicing and leading by example, being unafraid to communicate, keeping lines of communication open, finding a good communicator to become a mentor and once

again, being a good listener. As evident, most of the surveys mentioned the importance of listening in order to become a good communicator.

Twenty-three people agreed that sensitivity training is needed in today's world, while the other forty-six felt it was unnecessary. Forty-three said their department does require sensitivity training, while twenty-six said it is not required. Fifty-eight people reported "no" when asked if they might have a problem taking criticism from women, while eleven felt differently. Forty-eight people surveyed felt that the age group 18-34 are more sensitive, while eighteen respondents felt the age group 45-and older is more sensitive. Only three felt that the age group 35-45 was the most sensitive.

## **CONCLUSION**

After completing these surveys and conducting some personal interviews, the author concludes with the following findings. Most of the public still feels that the veterans are the older, wiser and quieter group. They usually listen and then speak; they save their money and have values and morals that are now harder and harder to recognize in a younger person. The veterans are a proud group who can be asked questions. However, do not ask them the same question twice; if you care about what they say then listen carefully! The veterans do not have time to waste and they believe in doing things right the first time, because there might not be time to do things right the second time. In the author's opinion, no generation is as patriotic and proud as the veterans. Most veterans believe in the government, police forces and respecting their parents and elders.

The baby boomers are also a proud group, but the ones who wanted and started the freedom stage in life. Many baby boomers wanted to party, to be free to listen to

what ever kind of music they wanted and dress how they wanted to dress. They thought they were invincible, they would hitch hike all over the country, which is not something an individual would want to do in today's world. The baby boomers also were the initiators of the technology craze, with the touch-tone phones and the use of instant communication tools. Some feel that this move toward technology started the disintegrating of the family unit. The boomers were so often off with friends shopping, they had the mentality buy now, pay later. Many baby boomers were also workaholics, work was a personal fulfillment and they always needed that you are valued and needed feeling. Boomers always questioned authority, which is not something the veterans did. This questioning lead to a lot of hostility between the veterans and the boomers. Then came Generation X, the self-reliance generation. They needed direction, they would ask how are they doing and they need to know they are needed. They will always be skeptical of your position; they love to ask "why". The X's are the newest generation of geniuses; they have exploded the technology world, with their gadgets. They often spend so much time on their toys that they do not spend anytime with their families. They really have raised themselves with millions being latchkey kids. Being a latchkey child led to many children staying at others houses, becoming friends with other families and the often the real family unit collapses as a result. On a good note, Generation X has one value that the veterans believe in. For example, they are cautious, conservative and believe in saving, saving and saving some more. Unlike the veterans, the new generation knows how to save through stock, on-line or off, day trading and bonds. These young investors have made millions for themselves.

These young investors then had children and this generation was called Generation Y, the techno babies. These individuals were raised on computers and are constantly upgrading, dismantling and rebuilding them. They have exploded what their parents (the X's) thought was the technology generation. Generation Y has made so much in such a short time, the old cell phone is now a pocket computer, camera, and can play over 1000 songs for the listener. This young generation loves to spend their money on the latest gadget. They believe in living life to the fullest and having extreme fun and are very confident and social. Generation X have many merged families, maybe from the computer store, skateboard track or from school. This era has even a less family unit. They feel school is an incredible expense, and some feel the diploma is not worth the money it's printed on. They feel they can earn more money from the computer knowledge they now know than what some of the teachers now know in school. When they do work they are goal oriented, they are great at multitasking. They want to do meaningful work and work with other bright, creative people.

The author concludes that everyone needs to listen carefully to what the other generation is saying. Not just hear them, but actually listen. The veterans just want to be shown respect. After all if it was not for many of them fighting wars, we might not be here. They are not just old people. They are respected, retired and capable adults. If you do not understand them, just ask them to repeat the message or explain it another way. Respect must also be given to the baby boomers who were often considered workaholics and do feel guilty about working all of the time. However, that is all they knew then. Baby boomers are capable of listening and are willing to talk a little more than the veterans. They can understand where a person might be coming from as they

were kids at one time too. As for Generation X this generation has raised themselves, they have been latchkey children. They have several different families and friends that they have stayed with after school that they can call family. They would like to go to college and often do because many have such good grades, as school is easy for them. They are still caution and conservative with their money. They will save, save and save some more. You can talk to them but they are still skeptical and they like to ask why. They like to do assignments their way and sometimes forget the rules. Their communication skills are direct and immediate.

Then we have Generation Y. These are confident, extremely fun loving, very sociable, goal oriented young men and women. They want to feel their work is fulfilling. If an administrator wants to communicate with these bright young adults, they need to talk softly and explain what the problem is without getting upset. This group feels that they are adults and expect to be treated as such. The author experienced different types of communication skills with Generation Y, by listening, hearing, and sending them proper and professional e-mails. Talking on the phone politely and trying to understand what a person is saying is important. Not only is it right for a person to show respect for a fellow officer or the public, it is expected. It is not always that these individuals do not care. Instead, they might not understand the question or know how to answer it. Sometimes they think a person is saying one thing when actually they person means something very different. More patience, caring and compassion must be shown for every generation



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