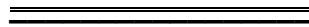


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Effectively Communicating to Multiple Generations in Law
Enforcement**



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



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ABSTRACT

There is a lot of concern among departments when it comes to Millennials and how different they seem to be when they are introduced to the law enforcement profession. Some of the concerns are their ability to understand simple directions or what everyone else believes to be simple and clearly stated. Today's workforce has four generations. The research conducted was to support that Millennials are not causing issues in the law enforcement profession. The research provided is to support that existing members of law enforcement must adapt to the changes that Millennials bring to the workforce in order to reduce stress caused by miscommunication or ineffective communication.

The information obtained through research is to help everyone understand that communication styles based on culture, values and morals in the law enforcement profession is changing. Communication is a necessary tool in police work among other skills. Currently, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement mandates certain training like family violence, crisis intervention, cultural diversity and many others. This training is necessary to help officers recognize an event that is critical to their investigation. Officers must be able to clearly articulate what they want another officer to understand, regardless of which generational group they belong in. Each officer has their own expectations in how they want to be communicated with as well as how they interpret information. With communication being a key in the profession, it should be mandated that officers receive training in effective communication within a multigenerational workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's workforce consists of a diverse group of employees with generational differences in communication, attitudes, work ethic, and culture. Getting everyone on the same page by using an effective communication style can be an exhausting task. Police administration and police instructors should first understand the differences in generational cultures, social skills, and work ethic in order to effectively communicate their message to avoid interpretation by a generationally diverse group of trainees. Instructors should take into consideration that there are four generations in the workplace. Currently, there is the Traditionalist or Silent Generation: born 1945 and before, Baby Boomers: born 1946 to 1964, Generation X: born 1965 to 1976, Millennials or Gen Y: born 1977 to 1995 and Gen Z, IGen, or Centennials: born 1996 and later (Center for Generational Kinetics, n.d.).

Each generation of people is unique because of the way they were raised during their time period, their values, their motivations, and their communication style. Generational culture influences what people consider acceptable communication styles (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Traditionalists (also known as the Silent Generation) are known to be hardworking, loyal employees, and they respect authority (Kane, 2017a). Traditionalists keep their thoughts to themselves and believe people have to earn what they want. Traditionalists are known to stay with the same employer their entire careers. Baby Boomers are extremely hardworking, motivated by position, independent, goal-oriented, and competitive (Kane, 2017b). Baby Boomers are not afraid of a challenge or a fight. Generation X is individualistic, technologically adept, resourceful, self-sufficient, and value freedom and responsibility in the workplace (Kane,

2017c). Generation X grew up with computers and other electronic devices and is known to have a better education than Baby Boomers. Millennials (also known as Generation Y) is family-centric, achievement-oriented, and prefers email or text message communication (Kane, 2017d). Generation Y is very capable when it comes to technology and relies on technology daily. Generation Y grew up being told they could be anything they wanted to be and were fiercely protected by their parents.

These are just a few differences in the four generations in law enforcement today that explain why there are communication barriers. These differences do not only apply to law enforcement. Each generation has their own set of values, beliefs, and communication styles in a variety of professions. Understanding each generation is critical to effective communication in law enforcement. Police departments should recognize that the trainers still need training and so do the rest of the police department. Historically, if a police agency recognized the need for training in firearms, an officer would be sent to firearms instructor school to receive an instructor certification through an authorized training provider approved by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE). The firearms instructor certification would allow the officer to return to his or her respective agency and train other officers in the fundamentals of firearms that would meet TCOLE standards. The firearms instructor would have the responsibility of training officers in a variety of firearms skills and continue to challenge officers with new skills and training that are current with today's issues pertaining to safety, fundamentals, proficiency, scenarios, target recognition, and deadly force (TCOLE course #2222, 2012). Texas Administrative Code for public safety states for other training providers that a police department can follow TCOLE rules in making an

assessment for training to meet the police department's needs. If TCOLE approves the training, training will be authorized and credit hours will be awarded to the requesting agency and an instructor outline must be provided to TCOLE on the training being conducted within that agency (TCOLE Title 37, Part 7, Chapter 215, Rule §215.5, 2014).

This is an example of a system already setup to meet the needs for training. If an agency needs a defensive tactics instructor, the agency would send an officer to receive an instructor certification for that particular training. Currently within the law enforcement profession, especially among hiring boards, departments are recognizing a need for training in communicating more effectively in a workforce that employs multiple generations. By understanding the cultural differences that affect communication, instructors would have the skills necessary to communicate their message clearly and with consistency, which would allow police departments to reach their training objectives more effectively while maintaining core principles and values. Instructors must first understand who they are teaching so that they can understand how to teach. Training on the generational differences that affect communication must be implemented within police organizations to avoid workplace barriers and other obstacles that could spell disaster for an organization. A search on Google using the keywords multigenerational workforce training resulted in 236,000 results. Information and education is available on the communication differences within the multiple generations in the workforce.

Communication barriers did not just happen overnight. Communication barriers and the inability to effectively communicate has been a historical problem. This is why police departments should implement training on effective communication within a

multigenerational workforce. Another benefit to the training is the potential to train our future leaders up to positions where the communication problem will have already been addressed. Once the generational communication training is developed, it only needs to be modified to evolve and adapt with future generations who will be joining the workforce. The multigenerational communication training would be a living, breathing curriculum which would allow for necessary changes as law enforcement officers and trainers adapt to future generations communication styles.

POSITION

With four generational groups in law enforcement, one of the known barriers is effective communication. Police officers must be trained in multigenerational differences to help them improve communication, avoid assumptions, and reduce stress (Freifeld, 2013). A police instructor's job is to train officers, recommend training, improve and modify training, and keep the department apprised in newly developed training. A trainer will also recommend remedial training for those officers needing a little extra help in one area or another. Recognizing the problem or potential problem and then developing a solution is critical to prevent organizational turmoil. An agency must decide how much training is needed to improve their communication among the multiple generations and then be consistent with the training once provided to their officers.

Trainers should recommend and develop a training curriculum that could educate officers in the differences in multigenerational cultures. Understanding communication differences within the police organization could improve the work environment and possibly increase department morale if each officer knows how to address the person

he or she is communicating with. Factors like culture, gender, motivation, and values also have an effect on communication. Workplace communication is complicated; it is a work in progress (Greene, 2009). Workforces need to understand the cultural differences in the four generations in the workforce and welcome generational differences (Freifeld, 2013). Again, this is why the need for additional training in communication is necessary. The training would help officers understand generational differences, including their own. Agency administrators must prepare to address the differences of multi-generational employees in the workforce because they are already here (Greene, 2009).

As a department leader, the decision rests on administrators to recognize and give guidance on circumstances that could potentially have a negative impact on the department. Like many foreseeable incidents, knowing that action will need to be taken at a later date and developing a plan of action in preparation for that incident, an agency can prepare to mediate through education. Four generations of values, principals, and beliefs cannot be changed. What must change is how officers are communicating. Without generational training and failing to address multigenerational workforce awareness, police departments and their administrators could be subject to civil liability. (Greene, 2009). If a message is not delivered effectively, the sense of urgency can change within the message as well. Training needs to include how to deliver messages to multiple generations.

Supervisors that understand the generational nuances can modify their communication styles in order to motivate and engage all four generations (n-gen, n.d.). If one of the generational groups loses interest in what is being explained because the

speaker is unable to capture his or her attention, the speaker's training objective or message will be lost. This goes the same when it comes to communicating with anyone outside of the department. This is why it is critical to understand the generational differences will not change; they must be understood. What must change is the method in which the message is delivered.

Instructors must learn the generational differences within their audience. This does not apply to just instructors or trainers. Officers who do not carry the title of "instructor" have an important role as informal leaders too. Officers with experience must understand that they are being watched by lesser experienced officers. Veteran officers must project the desired qualities that are necessary for law enforcement in hopes that the lesser experienced officers recognize the qualities even if not spoken through words (Eldridge, 2012).

Preparing a department for this task will be challenging, but it will yield positive long term results. The time has come to seriously think about requiring a training curriculum to address multigenerational workforce education and diversity in today's public safety profession (Greene, 2009). Each individual in one of the four generations is motivated by something. It is up to instructors, administrators, and other leaders within the department to determine what the motivator is because that motivator will be the indicator to how to capture attention and also maintain it.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Some opponents feel that the word communication has become a buzzword; it is a result of miscommunication and that communication only works if two people want the same or have common interests (Inherent Flaws, 2017). Some opponents also have an

opinion that reflects there is no value in communication if two people do not want the same outcome. According to Oxford Living Dictionaries, definition for communication is the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium ("Communication," n.d.). Not only is there more than one way to communicate a message, it is an exchange of a message, not an agreement. Effective communication is necessary.

Knowing how to communicate is essential in the workplace and must be polished through training. Communication is important. The most important intangible tools one has are words. How one chooses to use those tools are in the form of communication (Ganesh, 2016). Nuances in communication can cause problems, and some may not understand how the problem started in the first place. Each generation has differences in communication styles. Police departments must recognize these communication differences and adapt with the changes.

Another thought is that the so-called generation gap is being greatly overreacted and generational differences do not really exist. Some feel the generational theory can easily be explained as a group of people defined by similar "values and life experience and are really just life-stage effects, traits or values one has in virtue of being a certain age" (Potter, 2009, para. 9). Each generation has their own values, communication styles, beliefs and motivations (Celeste, 2016). Understanding those values, beliefs, and motivations can help all of us communicate more effectively. Leaders should not try to change each generation's communication style. Instead, department leaders and administrators should make a collective effort to modify the way they communicate and keep up with the changes in trends, technology, and communication (Robertson, 2016).

As each generation grows older and passes into the next phase of life, their attitudes and behaviors mature, making new trends in the public mood (Howe and Strauss, 2007).

RECOMMENDATION

Effectively communicating to a multigenerational workforce has a vital role in the law enforcement profession. Whether it is the need to communicate through an incident report, in court, a traffic stop, or interviewing witnesses, it must be done effectively. Police officers cannot foresee who within the public will be making the next call for service. People of all age groups, who fall into multigenerational groups, expect to be heard, understood, and treated fairly when an officer arrives. It is important to understand that effective communication must be trained to law enforcement due to constant contact with the public. The police profession as a whole must understand the differences in generational cultures in order to effectively communicate their message to avoid confusion by a diverse group of trainees and within their own agency. This type of training could also enhance relations with the public as well as while networking with other police departments.

Although there are others who feel effective communication is not as critical in the workplace, how one raised and what was going on during that time influences how one communicates. Generational groups do have their own values, personalities, and communication style. Four generations of values, principals, and beliefs cannot be changed. Without generational training, "failure to develop a training curriculum addressing multigenerational workforce awareness and diversity could subject law enforcement departments and their administrators to future civil liability resulting from

negative clashes amongst employees in the workforce” (Greene, 2009, p. 15).

Additionally, “The time has arrived to seriously consider the implementation of a training curriculum to address multigenerational workforce awareness and diversity in today’s public safety environment” (Greene, 2009, p. 4).

By understanding the generational differences, there would be a better understanding of how to effectively communicate. Each generational group is very different from the other. The way potential candidates are hired must be carefully thought out along with training and retention; effective communication has a role in these areas. As noted, training must target an understanding of each generational group to help each generational group understand their own differences so they can effectively communicate with one another. Departments need to reevaluate their training programs and consider whether or not it meets a standard in effective communication. Every law enforcement agency should require their officers to attend training on effective communication in a multigenerational workforce, or hold their own in house training by simply documenting the training using a sign in sheet and making the training curriculum available to each shift. The training costs could prove to be nominal if compared to a payout on a law suit based on communication barriers, not to mention the loss of public trust.

A police department should mandate training in effective communication in multigenerational cultures and establish a curriculum approved by TCOLE. The training should include information on each generational group and include topics on time periods, values, personalities, traits, behaviors and motivators. Although there is opposition to the need for this type of training based on the beliefs of a few, the training

is overdue. Taking a closer look at current research which is free, could be a good platform for understanding generational differences and effective communication. Once there is an understanding of generational differences, a curriculum can be developed. As administrators, instructors or leaders, an individual must learn and understand the generational differences before teaching or training can be done. The training can be implemented during roll call and can be as short or as long as needed to meet the needs of each department. Completing the training during regular duty hours will negate the overtime issues and saving the department money while reaching the objective of training officers

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