

“Kids These Days”

Communicating With and Supervising Generation Y

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HERE THEY COME! By the year 2020, most police officers will be members of the generation (Henchey, 2014). The face of law enforcement is going to change and be quite different than what we know today. This will be largely due to the influx of Generation Y. What does this mean for the law enforcement profession? Law enforcement is a profession that has traditionally been administered in a para-military manner. Police agencies typically defer decision making to those of a higher rank in a top-down management style.

Given the norms and perspectives of those now entering our agencies, the “usual” way may no longer be enough. Obedience, loyalty and seniority may mean something entirely different to Generation Y. Open communication, teamwork and input from each member of the team may become the hallmark of those organizations that will succeed in the coming decade (Riddle, 2007).

So how do we communicate with and supervise Generation Y? To answer this question we must first attempt to understand them better. Supervisors should be able to effectively communicate with the subordinates. It is our responsibility to educate ourselves, so that we as administrators are able to motivate this upcoming group of employees in order to extract the maximum productivity from them.

What is Generation Y

Generation Y is also called the Millennial generation, as well as, the Why generation. They were born between 1980 and 2002.

The Greatest Generation was critical of Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers struggled to understand Generation X. Now, everyone is perplexed by the Millennials. Here is a sampling of comments about the newest members of the workforce (FedEx, 2011).

- “They need instant gratification. They have been paid to clean their rooms, for good report cards and for household chores, and they generally don’t want to do anything without reward”.
- “They are dedicated like boomers, but they won’t die on the sword for their jobs”.
- “They don’t have definite views about how the world should be ordered. They are open to some disorder. The challenges are their fierce independence and occasional lack of respect for those who have more experience”.
- “They have a sense of entitlement. A lot of them have grown up thinking they are above average and special. Most of the employees from previous generations believe that in this economy, be happy you have a job”.

Are these generalizations true? Sort of, accidents of history shape each generation. Among those shaping Generation Y are rapid globalization, immediate information access, quick invention and quicker obsolescence. For them the world is a small and interconnected place where instantaneous response is a given. Gen Ys had deeply involved parents. As a result, they are confident and independent. They grew up in a more diverse world and are comfortable with difference (Tulgan, 2009). A popular philosophy during their upbringing has been that “everyone is a winner” and “you get a trophy just for participating”.

Parents of Millennials have gone over the top in supporting and protecting them. A values driven and character curriculum has been developed by educational institutes to enhance the civility and ethics of Millennials. Gen Yers have been constantly reminded of how special they are. As a result, this group possesses a high degree of self-esteem. In school, trying was given greater weight than actually getting it right. This combination of self-esteem and receiving kudos for effort over accomplishment has manifested itself in this generation's having a difficult time accepting and applying lessons learned from constructive criticism. (Henchey, 2014)

Generation Y is the most high maintenance workforce generation in history. However, it has the potential to be the highest performing workforce in history (Tulgan, 2013). Common myths about Generation Y in the workplace (Tulgan, 2013):

- Myth: They are disloyal and can't make real commitments to employers.
- Myth: They won't do the grunt work.
- Myth: They have short attention spans.
- Myth: They want the top job on day one.
- Myth: They need work to be fun.
- Myth: They want to be left alone.
- Myth: They want managers to do their work for them.
- Myth: They don't care about climbing the proverbial career ladder.
- Myth: Money doesn't matter to them.
- Myth: Money is the only thing that matters.

- Myth: They don't respect their elders.
- Myth: They only want to learn from computers.
- Myth: It's impossible to turn them into long-term employees.

According to Bruce Tulgan of Rainmaker Thinking, Y's will generally bring the following norms into the workplace:

- **High Expectations of self:** They aim to work faster and better than other workers.
- **High Expectations of employers:** They want fair and direct managers who are highly engaged in their professional development.
- **Ongoing learning:** They seek out creative challenges and view colleagues as vast resources from whom to gain knowledge.
- **Immediate responsibility:** They want to make an important impact on day one.
- **Goal-oriented:** They want small goals with tight deadlines so they can build up ownership of tasks.

Communicating With Generation Y

How does one develop a strategy for communications that will bring together people from all generations? The Center for Generational Kinetics published 5 rules for communication with Gen Y (genhq, 2013).

1. **Tell them to read the whole email.** It is common for only the subject line to be read. Importance is gauged at a glance, if the email doesn't require a response, it may not be opened. In fact, writing in the subject line "read this entire email" has become an effective way to influence their attention.
2. **The pointier the bullet, the better.** After the email is opened, quick bullets are looked for. Millennials will try to determine the content of an entire message from the first couple of bullet points. Never put critical instructions at the end of a paragraph.
3. **If your emails only have a subject line, you are actually sending a text message.** Switch devices, you will get a much quicker response when you use Gen Ys favorite communication method. This also works with short one or two line emails.
4. **If your meetings require no decisions or discussion, you are actually sending emails.** Generation Y wants to call a meeting only if a decision must be discussed by a group. This is contradictory to previous generations that call meetings just in case something worth discussing comes up.
5. **A phone call is almost an invasion of privacy.** Gen Yers feel that texting is far less invasive than a phone call. Additionally, they feel that casual interactions like scheduling and quick questions should be left up to text messaging.

Baby Boomers and Gen Xers met text messaging and emails as adults. Millennials met this technology on the playground and have grown up with it. Communication devices are viewed as productivity tools by the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Generation Y sees them as recreational items that are constantly available to them. As a result, Generation Y prefers informal instead of formal, convenient over the thorough and impersonal rather than personal.

Assisting employees to be more effective and efficient in the workplace starts with understanding them. A stronger, more efficient relationship with your Gen Y

employee may be just a text message away. Or perhaps at least a faster response time to the voice mails you have been leaving (genhq, 2013).

Supervising Generation Y

An important first step in the supervision of employees from Generation Y is to show them that you care. Their upbringing has taught them to expect leaders that are involved. They see supervisors as authority figures engaged in helping them. Establishing a working relationship, as well as, an open line of communication to provide feedback with the Y will prove beneficial. Often stereotyped as being fragile, Millennials are actually quite tough, provided they feel supported rather than blindsided by feedback on performance. The United States Marine Corps has succeeded in working with Gen Ys by providing constant evaluation. Operating like a coach or teacher has proved effective, as has pairing them with a mentor. These styles of leadership have shown quick resolution of problems and high performance (Tulgan, 2009).

A high level of importance should be given to the establishment of boundaries and structure. Members of Generation Y are accustomed to rules and schedules, participating in organized activities since childhood has prepared them for that. The supervisor should decide exactly what is important, spell it out clearly and teach them what matters to you. Let the Ys know where the standard operating procedures must be followed exactly and where they can be creative (Tulgan, 2009).

As a result of frequent testing throughout all stages of their education the Millennials expect quick and direct feedback. Gen Yers believe that they can't depend on vague promises. They want to know in specific detail how they are doing so that quick corrections can be made. Establish a way to "keep score" from the onset. Recruit them to help establish this protocol, which is subject to your approval, of course. Have regular conversations with them and invent a self-monitoring system for their use. Set basic solid standards for the employees that detail specifically what is absolutely essential to accomplish the mission (Tulgan, 2009).

The new workforce may appear to have some unrealistic expectations, and employers certainly can't completely alter their operations to appease the younger generation. If agencies don't make at least a few changes, it will be difficult to recruit or more importantly retain Millennials. This could deprive the departments of a generation of productive and valuable workers (tdshou, 2012).

TDS workforce performance solutions note the following steps to help employers prepare for the future workforce:

- **Be aware of gaps:** Identify if generational differences are impeding productivity.
- **Prepare leadership:** Teach supervisors how to better engage and manage the next generation.
- **Think team:** To assist in motivating Millennials, look at the team's cohesiveness and achievements instead of individual goals.
- **Be flexible:** Allowing more flexibility when possible.

- **Provide mentoring:** Train Millennials at being more adept at individual innovation.
- **Motivate:** Millennials need to know how their job makes a difference and why it is of value to the agency.
- **Speak their language:** Find creative ways to deliver training and other information to younger workers. Meet them where they are with technology, more hands-on, team-oriented training that get them up to speed quicker.

Conclusion

About 80 million Millennials began entering the workforce five years ago and they are here to stay. It is the supervisor's job to get the most out of them at work. Millennials have different priorities and values than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. This doesn't need to turn into a battle over principles, but should be approached as a management challenge.

The responsibility of the supervisor is to help make sure Gen Ys not only "get it" but "get it all". Some examples of this are (supervising millennials, unknown):

- Offer options to collect and view information.
- Ask for email or text message confirmations.
- Utilize technology.
- Stay in constant communication.
- Ask for frequent updates.

With these tactics, the supervisor will learn of any gaps before it is too late, and will have an opportunity to provide informal mentoring as it is needed. You will also be providing the immediacy that Millennials like and are used to (supervising millennials, unknown).

Ys are developing a reputation for being “know it alls”. This is not necessarily being arrogant; they are somewhat hard-wired that way. They actually do know a lot. It is not uncommon for them to come to a supervisor with not only a problem but also a possible solution.

Gen Yers respect authority, but respect credibility more. A few ideas for establishing credibility are listed below (supervising millennials, unknown):

- Pitching in.
- Sharing experiences, especially what you have learned from your mistakes.
- Not resting on your “years of service” as your ticket to power.
- Informal opposed to formal mentoring.
- Be consistent with stated values and work ethics.

Overall, when working with those from Generation Y, forget about engaging in a power struggle. They know you are in charge. More can be accomplished for your agency by learning how to communicate and supervise this generation. Millennials are an enormously optimistic, educated, and energetic group of people (supervising millennials, unknown).

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