

**The New Silent Generation of Police Officers
Preparing for the Next Generation**

**By
Damon D. Gilmore
California Highway Patrol**

April, 2012

Command College Class 50

The Command College Futures Professional Article is a study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is not to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining, and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the professional article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

© Copyright 2012

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training

The New Silent Generation of Police Officers

Preparing for the Next Generation

Policing in America has drastically changed over the last century. Every generation of law enforcement officers have left their mark; some of these milestones are positive and innovative, while other historical events have tarnished the badge and the image of the entire law enforcement community. The future of law enforcement will one day be in the hands of the New Silent Generation; people born from 2001 to 2020. This study works to surface the motivations and desires of the New Silent Generation and how they will influence police operations as they begin to enter the workplace in the 2020's.

It is always important to utilize a generations (or individual) strengths and develop and improve upon their challenges. We will first discuss the concept of generational cycles and how these cycles form a foundation from which to act. Using that concept, we will then assess the New Silent Generation's strengths and challenges, along with a few suggestions to help enhance the outcomes of the challenges they present, and also how we can best utilize their strengths.

Understanding Generations

As former President Ronald Reagan said, "While I take inspiration from the past, like most Americans, I live for the future." When pondering the future, though, it is important to consider the past. This is especially true in law enforcement, where society's expectations have changed considerably in the recent past. Affirmative action and equal opportunity hiring practices became a priority in the 1980's and 1990's. In law enforcement, the goal was to attain a workforce that represented the cultural makeup of the community. While affirmative action was a relatively new practice in the early 1980's, law enforcement agencies had always been

comprised of multigenerational personnel. It is important to understand how each new generation will learn and work with prior generations. This issue presents challenges for managers and supervisors; however, not all challenges are necessarily adverse.

Each generation has different work habits, desires, and motivations. As a law enforcement supervisor or manager, it is imperative to understand cultural and generational differences when dealing with employees, citizens, and other community leaders. Each generation is shaped by the great events of their own American history, from wars to religious and societal upheavals, and other disasters and accomplishments of their generation and its predecessors.

The New Silent Generation has yet to enter their teens, but it is already possible to forecast their strengths and challenges, and to consider how these strengths and challenges will influence the police profession. The New Silent Generation (NSG) is technologically advanced and will have a strong work ethic. While there are concerns with the NSG's interpersonal communication skills and decision making abilities. This paper will expand upon these strengths and challenges in the following pages.

While it might appear impossible to forecast how NSGs will influence law enforcement, William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) indicate in their book titled, "Generations, The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069" that generational studies is simply, "A history of the future by narrating a recurring dynamic of generational behavior that seems to determine how and when we participate as individuals in social change – or social upheaval. We say, in effect, that the dynamic repeats itself." Using their framework, options to address the NSG's issues will be presented. First, we will explore the theory of the generational cycles to allow the reader to see

where they may “fit” and how their perspectives can be utilized to work more effectively with NSGs as they enter to workplace.

Strauss and Howe (1991) contend there are four generational cycles that repeat in sequence, with each cycle lasting approximately 20 years. Generations that come of age as *young adults* during a Crisis (an era in which America’s institutional life is destroyed and rebuilt in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s survival) or an Awakening (an era when institutions are attacked in the name of personal and spiritual autonomy) directly absorb the lessons of that defining era, and carry these lessons forward in their attitudes and behaviors later in life. Strauss and Howe label these as *dominant* generations. Generations that grow up as *children* during a Crisis or Awakening take a dependent role during that defining era, which shapes their later attitudes and behaviors very differently. Strauss and Howe label these *recessive* generations. The four generational types, as later described by the same authors (Strauss and Howe, 1997) are as follows:

- ***Prophet*** generations (dominant) - are born after a crisis, during a time of rejuvenated community life and consensus around a new societal order. Prophets grow up as the increasingly indulged children of this post-Crisis era, come of age as self-absorbed young crusaders of an Awakening, focus on morals and principles in midlife, and emerge as elders guiding another Crisis. A living example of this generational cycle would be the Baby Boomers generation (Strauss & Howe, 1997).
- ***Nomad*** generations (recessive) are born during an Awakening, a time of social ideals and spiritual agendas, when young adults are passionately attacking the established institutional order. Nomads grow up as under-protected children during this Awakening, come of age as alienated, post-Awakening adults, become pragmatic midlife leaders

during a Crisis, and age into resilient post-Crisis elders. A living example of this generational cycle would be Generation X (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

- **Hero** generations (dominant) are born *after an Awakening*, during a time of individual pragmatism, self-reliance, and laissez faire. Heroes grow up as increasingly protected post-Awakening children, come of age as team-oriented young optimists during a Crisis, emerge as energetic, overly confident midlifers, and age into politically powerful elders attacked by another Awakening. A living example of this generational cycle would be the G. I. Generation and Generation Y (Strauss & Howe, 1997).
- **Artist** generations (recessive) are born *during a Crisis*, a time when great dangers cut down social and political complexity in favor of public consensus, aggressive institutions, and an ethic of personal sacrifice. Artists grow up overprotected by adults preoccupied with the Crisis, come of age as the socialized and conformist young adults of a post-Crisis world, break out as process-oriented midlife leaders during an Awakening, and age into thoughtful post-Awakening elders. A living example of this generational cycle would be the Silent Generation and New Silent Generation (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

According to the generational cycles, the NSG was born in the midst of a crisis. On the year the New Silent Generation cycle began, the U.S. experienced the beginning of the war on terror as both World Trade Center towers collapsed on September 11, 2001. Equally impressive, Strauss and Howe (1997) forecast NSG children would have overprotective Generation X parents; therefore, the NSG would eventually look back on their parent's actions as smothering overcorrection and will loosen their own parental authority accordingly. This is just one way the NSG demonstrates differences from their immediate predecessors; there are actually many more.

Understanding the New Silent Generation

German Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952, page 290) wrote, "Individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process" and a generational consciousness is formed. This involves the development of "collective mentalities that mirror a dominant view of the world, reflecting similar attitudes and values and providing a basis for shared action."

Strauss and Howe (1991, page 32) expanded on that theory. They believed a generation is shaped by an "age location" and that, "During childhood, and especially, during the coming-of-age experiences separating youth from adulthood, this age location produces what we call a 'peer personality' - a set of collective behavioral traits and attitudes that later expresses itself throughout a generation's lifecycle trajectory." This means that how children are raised affects how they later parent. How police officers are managed and led will affect how they manage and lead.

Based on the events in play during their early childhood development (9-11-01, technology innovation, the Internet's expansion, personal interactive computing, etc.) the NSG of law enforcement officers will also be technologically savvy, which can improve departmental efficiency. This technical competence will be one of the greatest influences the NSG of law enforcement officers will have on policing in California. They will also be able to access information more quickly via the numerous media and Internet outlets. The information sector is growing at twice the rate of all other jobs. Neuroscientist Gary Small speculates that the human brain, "Might be changing faster today than it has since the prehistoric discovery of tools." The next generation will be excellent at processing information (Trunk, 2009).

The NSG will be more committed than the previous generation and will have a stronger work ethic. This is directly correlated to the difficult economic times they experienced in their adolescent years with parents losing jobs or receiving large pay cuts. A stronger work ethic is definitely a positive for any law enforcement professional.

Generation Y (Hero Generation), the predecessor of the NSG, is a generation of tensions, where the children embraced technology in a way their parents' generation (Baby boomers) never could. The NSG contrasts with Generation Y in that it is the first generation to see parents and children embrace technology together. The results of this fundamental difference in the raising of children are still unknown, but children are being exposed to the virtual world at younger ages, and with much greater frequency (Schmidt, 2008). This new generation is being molded from the outset to be unique, with a focus on advanced second-hand interactive learning techniques. The results may be the NSG will be shaped by an environment that is heavy on stimuli, and weaker in interpersonal relationships.

A marked difference between Generation Y and the NSG is that members of the former remember life before the takeoff of mass technology, while the latter have been born completely within it. This generation has also been born completely into an era of postmodernism and globalization. Researcher Hugh Mackay believes the NSG is more indulged and anti-social than Generation Y (Schmidt, 2008). On the negative side, one of the greatest hurdles will be the potential lack of interpersonal communication skills. Because the New Silent Generation is technologically savvy, they interact less frequently with society through direct contact. The New Silent Generation prefers text messaging, instant messaging, and other forms of social media to communicate. By doing so, interpersonal communication skills suffer.

The second negative issue is the concern that the New Silent Generation could be lacking in decision-making abilities. A panel of experts was convened to study the issue in April 2011. Several of the panelists are parents of New Silent Generation children; they admitted to being overly protective of their kids. The panel believed most parents today are overprotective of their adolescent children because of terrorism and the lack of trust in society as a whole. This protective behavior can influence the New Silent Generation negatively by creating individuals who rely on others for decisions, which can cause a deficiency in decision-making abilities. All of these issues will be relevant to the policing organization of the future, since the NSG will comprise the vast bulk of their new hires as we enter the decade of the '20's.

Implications for the Future of Policing

Armed with this information, supervisors and managers in policing can entertain some potential solutions to prepare for the New Silent Generation of law enforcement officers. High selection standards are always desirable to any police agency. As the NSG cohort enters policing, additional selection standards should be implemented during the hiring process to assess decision-making abilities and interpersonal communication skills. An additional component to the psychological examination should work to uncover any deficient interpersonal communication skills. Background investigators can also be critical of substandard interpersonal communication skills in a candidate's employment history.

The expert panel unanimously agreed the New Silent Generation officer will positively influence law enforcement operations by creating innovative technological avenues to improve service and crime fighting/solving solutions to these agencies. It is important to recognize the New Silent Generation officer might not have the interpersonal skills of previous generations;

therefore, it is vital for supervisors and managers to anticipate this possibility and plan accordingly.

Training is one of the best solutions to any deficiency. While an agency can capitalize on a generations strengths, it must also plan to develop and improve upon the weaknesses. To address the issue, interpersonal communication skills, deficiencies should be recognized during the hiring process and addressed during the employee's police academy training. Additional interpersonal training could be offered at each law enforcement agency and incorporated into P.O.S.T. training requirements as well.

Generational training is also necessary for supervisors and managers. Dealing with multiple generations is a reality, and proactive training and preparation can go a long way toward transitioning the New Silent Generation of law enforcement officers into the workplace. P.O.S.T. requires an element of dealing with multi generations in supervisory and management promotional training courses. The information included in this study could be added to the course curriculum to inform supervisors and managers of the New Silent Generation of police professionals and how we can better develop the future of our profession.

Final Note

As we prepare for a new generation of police professionals to enter the workplace, a proactive approach to ensuring a smooth transition is prudent and important. Our current leaders must be vigilant in developing new and innovative ways to bring out the best in all current and future generations of law enforcement officers. By doing so, we will build upon the legacy and professionalism of our honorable profession.

References

- Mannheim, K. (1952). *Essay on the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt, L. (2008, July 15). Children of the Tech Revolution. *Parenting - Life and Style Home*, Retrieved on February 15, 2012, from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/07/15/1215887601694.html>
- Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations, the History of American's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (1997). *The Fourth Turning an American Prophecy*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (2008). *Millennials & K-12 Schools*. LifeCourse Associates. pp. 109–111
- Trunk, P. (2009, July 27). *What Generation Z will be like at work*, Retrieved on February 15, 2012, from <http://blog.penelopetrunk.com/2009/07/27/what-work-will-be-like-for-generation-z/>