

HERE COMES GENERATION Y

Article

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The face of law enforcement has changed dramatically over the last several decades. Race, religion and gender are no longer barriers to a career in law enforcement. Although positive changes have occurred, there is always resistance to change in organizations steeped in tradition and culture.

Cultural diversity was the politically correct topic to study in law enforcement training courses during the 1990s. Learning to accept the differences in others and understanding other cultures was the key to helping officers work well together.

Merriam-Webster defines diversity as "...the condition of being different."ⁱ Race and gender are obvious differences as opposed to religion, which would require someone to proclaim their religion through a statement or through their practices.

Generational issues are a singular cultural distinction not part of early diversity training. Generational diversity refers to the differences that exist among people born in different eras. Older workers and newer, younger employees are expected to work well together even though there are differences in how they view not only the job, but the world itself. Organizations make faulty cultural assumptions when it is assumed that those from different generations assimilate in a similar fashion.

Currently, there are four identified generations in the workplace. They are the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Traditionalists applies to the generation born prior to 1946. Baby Boomer applies to over 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964. Generation X applies to approximately 44 million people born between 1965 and 1981.ⁱⁱ Generation Y is comprised of 29 million people born between 1982 and 2000. They are the children of Baby Boomers and the siblings of Generation

X.ⁱⁱⁱ The current workplace is primarily made up of two generations of employees. These are the Baby Boomers and Generation X.

The workplace of the next twenty to thirty years will be made up primarily of three generations, those known as the Baby Boomers, Generation X and the newest generation, Generation Y. Baby Boomers and Generation X employees are well entrenched in the workplace, while the oldest Generation Y members have only recently begun to enter the job market.

Organizations can gain a competitive edge in recruiting, retaining, managing and motivating the best and brightest by understanding the different generations.^{iv} How well these three generations successfully assimilate will depend on an organization's ability to prepare by learning about the current generational cultures and potential conflicts brought about by the hiring of the newest generation of workers.

In their book, "Generations At Work ," Zemke, Raines and Filipczak state:

There is a growing realization that the gulf of misunderstanding and resentment between older, not so old, and younger employees in the workplace is growing and problematic. It is a rift that will not heal itself or just go away, as so many organizations—those even aware of it—fervently hope. It is a problem based in economics, demographics, and world views that must be confronted to be solved.^v

The above statement from the listed book was published in 2000. The oldest Generation Y members were just turning 18 years old and likely not yet in the workplace.

The increase in life expectancy and a higher cost of living means more elderly people are staying in the workplace longer. This can lead to as many as four different generations working at the same place at the same time. These employees have different values, experiences, work styles and attitudes, which can lead to misunderstandings and frustrations.^{vi}

The newest generation, Generation Y, has only recently started to enter the workplace and to coexist with other generations of workers already in the organization. An organization's understanding of generational issues will help determine how efficient that organization will be in the future. Cultural issues with respect to race, religion and gender continue to be monitored. Getting employees to respect each other based on their respective generation also needs to be addressed and monitored.

Here are a few demographic insights into Generation Y:

- 1 in 3 is not Caucasian
- 2 in 4 come from a single-parent home
- 4 in 5 have working mother, and
- More than 2% have one or both parents incarcerated.^{vii}

Understanding Generation Y is important, but what an organization does with the knowledge is even more important. Understanding where they come from and helping them fit into an organization are keys to success.

The future workplace will change dramatically as Baby Boomers and Generation X move into leadership positions and Generation Y enters the workplace. Baby Boomers are said to have a sense of duty, commitment, obedience, and the idea that any position accepted would be for the long term.^{viii} Generation X employees question work issues, work conditions and management techniques. They will skip over the chain of command, question openly why certain things are done, and want to actively participate in decisions that years ago were made only by management.^{ix} Generation Y employees want to be challenged and treated respectfully. They want to work in friendly environments, and they want to have flexible schedules. They want to be paid well and they want to work with positive people.^x

Each generation has their own unique value system and they are motivated in different ways. These employees must also be rewarded or praised in different ways. With three generations in the workplace, leaders need a balanced approach to leading and managing. Meeting the needs and expectations of employees from three different eras will challenge leaders to fully understand those under their command.

Law enforcement is a tradition-heavy organization that is resistant to changing the organizational culture to meet the demands of employees. Law enforcement has traditionally expected individual employees to change their behavior to meet the needs of the organization. The fact is that Traditionalists are leaving the workplace, having put in decades of hard work and looking forward to a well-earned retirement. The youngest of the Baby Boomers have about two decades before they retire. Generation X is settled into the workplace and Generation Y is just entering. The effective leader or manager will know not only the individual characteristics of each generation, but also how to make these employees from different eras work well together.

Claire Raines, in an article titled, "Diversity and Generations," suggests organizations have a Generational Awareness week. Employers could post icons and photos that represent the generations. Displays could include slang and popular expressions. Music that was popular in each generation's formative era could be played.^{xi}

Raines also suggests that employers do a generational diversity audit for their organization. Knowing what percentage of your workforce is from each generation will help formulate a plan of action.^{xii}

One strategy an organization should consider is to open the lines of communication department-wide and begin talking about generational diversity in the

workplace. Employees representing each generation can talk about their views and how these views were shaped. Employees can be provided with literature addressing each of the individual generations in the workplace so that there is some understanding of the differences that exist. Employees should be encouraged to talk about things they have in common with members of other generations as well as the differences.

Another strategy is the development of a comprehensive training plan addressing generational diversity in the workplace. Employees are often resistant to change for fear of the unknown. A training plan, which addresses the similarities and the differences between the respective generations, will go a long way towards helping employees understand each other.

Before an organization can retain, motivate and lead this generation, it must first be able to recruit them into the field of law enforcement. The largest generation is the Baby Boomers and many of them are preparing for retirement. Agencies will need Generation Y to fill the many vacant positions that will surely come open within the next several years.

Many of these positions are going unfilled because of the relatively low pay when compared to many other jobs in the private sector. Departments that years ago were overwhelmed with applicants are now finding it hard to get recruits, and sometimes harder to keep them.^{xiii}

The largest group in the current labor pool is Generation Y and, while each department faces its own problems, one thing is clearly evident: Law enforcement agencies nationwide are going to have to find new and increasingly more innovative ways not only to attract recruits, but also to retain them.^{xiv}

Another issue will be the educating and training of the future police officer. In an article published in January 2004, Michael Buerger states, “The future will create new training needs not currently standard in either college programs or police training academies.”^{xv}

Buerger advocates an interdisciplinary approach utilizing both formal education and traditional police instruction methods. The idea is to use the academic environment to teach the thornier social lessons so difficult to approach in police training settings.^{xvi} Buerger goes on to state that the exploration of new ideas occurs over a longer time and requires a different level of engagement than an 8-hour in-service training session.^{xvii}

Generation Y wants to be challenged and they will want the most updated training available. They grew up with technology as their toys and as a result they are very computer literate. This group will be comfortable with on-line training, searching the web and distance learning.

The generation employees belong to is one of the many differences each may have with their coworkers. Those differences can cause stress, discomfort, conflict, and frustration. They can also become a source for creativity and productivity.^{xviii}

As organizations prepare for the arrival of Generation Y into the workplace, there are some reasons to remain optimistic. In an article by Raines, she finds this new generation to be confident, hopeful, goal and achievement oriented, civic minded, and inclusive.^{xix}

Employees stay at jobs that offer, among other things, job satisfaction. Learning about Generation Y and what motivates them will help organizations recruit and retain these valued employees.

Preparing for the future workplace and learning how to get the different generations to work well together will be the key to success for any organization. Maintaining an acceptable level of productivity and ensuring job satisfaction are two key points for organizations to address. These two points go hand in hand.

The time to prepare is now, not when the workplace is filled with the three or four generations that will make up the coming workplace. Educating current employees about what to expect from the new generation and then socializing the new generation into the workplace will ensure a smooth transition from a Baby Boomer/Generation X workplace to a workplace that incorporates Generation Y. The end result will likely be that employees who are happy in the workplace will be more productive.

Generation Y employees will begin to enter the workplace, and they will be working with Baby Boomers and Generation X employees. How well these members of different generations interact depends on the level of preparation done by the leaders of the organization. Leaders can choose to do nothing and hope things work themselves out in a positive manner or they can confront the challenge and develop a realistic plan that addresses the issue head on.

Employees work because they need to fill their basic needs. These include providing shelter and food for themselves or their families. Employees will stay at an organization when they feel some degree of job satisfaction. Employees are most productive at an organization that makes them feel as if they are a part of that organization.

With this information at hand, organizations should make every attempt to make their employees feel they are part of the organization. This requires that an organization

make an effort to get to know the characteristics of the various generations in the workplace, to respect the differences and to incorporate them into the organization.

Diversity in all its forms should be welcomed and displayed to the community since the employees come from the community. An organization that strives to get its employees to understand each other will be rewarded with a cohesive group of employees who will become a content and productive work force.

Death and taxes are said to be the only sure things. Add to this list the fact that the newest generation of employees is entering the workplace and organizations need to gain an understanding of the differences between the various generations.

The generational workplace of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y requires study now so that leaders are prepared for the challenges of building a cohesive work unit. Generational diversity will impact productivity in the workplace; whether it is a negative or positive impact depends on how prepared an agency is for the introduction of current employees into management positions and the arrival of a new generation of workers. The future workplace cannot be compared to the current workplace because of the extreme changes in technology and the changes in the social and political environment. The coming workplace will have new leaders, primarily Generation X, and a new workforce in Generation Y.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁱ Merriam-Webster, The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, (Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1989), 225.
- ⁱⁱ Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, BridgeWorks Presents...Managing Across the Generational Divide, (New York: BridgeWorks, 2002), Handout.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Irv Gamal, "Understanding and Leading Generation Y." Handout, February 2003
- ^{iv} Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, BridgeWorks Presents...Managing Across the Generational Divide, (New York: BridgeWorks, 2002), Handout.
- ^v Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak, Generations At Work, (New York: AMACOM, 2000), 1.
- ^{vi} Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, BridgeWorks Presents...Managing Across the Generational Divide, (New York: BridgeWorks, 2002), Handout.
- ^{vii} Eric Chester, "The Aliens Have Landed." <http://www.generationwhy.com>.
- ^{viii} Troy Mineard, "Recruiting and Retaining Gen-X Officers.", Law and Order July 2003. 94-95
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Claire Raines, "Managing Millenials." <http://www.generationsatwork.com>. 2002.
- ^{xi} Claire Raines, "Diversity and Generations." <http://www.generationsatwork.com> 2002.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} Shelly Feuer Domash, "Who Wants This Job?", Police May 2002. 35.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} Michael Buerger, "Educating and Training the Future Police Officer", FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. January 2004. 26-32
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Claire Raines, "Diversity and Generations". <http://www.generationsatwork.com>. 2002.
- ^{xix} Claire Raines, "Managing Millenials". <http://www.generationsatwork.com>. 2002

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