

Generational Conflict :
**Law Enforcement Needs Mandated Multi-Generational Workforce
Awareness Training**

By

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES 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 journal 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 Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Generational Conflict :

Law Enforcement Needs Mandated Multi-Generational Workforce Awareness Training

“What’s wrong with the new employees in the workplace today? Where is the work ethic, commitment to duty and sense of service? Today when you work with employees from the new generation, it’s “all about me and what I’m entitled to.” At the same time, they may be asking, “What’s with the old guys, why do they volunteer time to the department and not get paid for it? Why do it that way, isn’t that method outdated? Who cares about tradition? This is a new generation, step into the new millennium dude”. Any of these phrases sound familiar in the back offices and hallways of your department? No need for alarm, we are all in the same boat.

Even in the time of Aristotle, adults complained about the younger generation’s lack of motivation and disrespect for their elders, fearing that youth would fall in their work life from a lack of “loyalty.” To the present day, each succeeding generation seems to lament about the next.¹ According to recently-published research, America is “...rapidly approaching a crisis in its workforce, triggered by the convergence of two demographic trends: The growing number of Baby Boomers in the population and the much smaller number of younger people who follow behind them (Generation X)”.²

¹ Bob Harrison; “Gamers, Millennials, and Generation Next: Implications for Policing.” The Police Chief, vol. 74, no. 10, October 2007. http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=1312&issue_id=102007

Western society is currently experiencing the largest demographic shift since members of minority groups and women began entering the workforce in large numbers several decades ago. With four generations influencing and representing the U.S. workforce, companies must analyze how a multi-generational staff can work together effectively given their differences in values and life experiences.

Law enforcement is certainly one of the many industries already faced with this challenge. Administrators must prepare to address the nuances of multi-generational employees in our academies and departments. The feat could prove delicate given the variety of generational perspectives and perceptions of one another's respective core values. One may ponder what to do? Perhaps the time has arrived to seriously consider the implementation of a training curriculum to address multi-generational workforce awareness and diversity in today's public safety work environment.

Expectations of a Diverse Workforce

While issues between generations can be positive, it is the negative experiences that can cause people to expend time, energy, and emotional resources.³ A common term in society used to identify relational differences among the generations is the "generation gap." The term references how older and younger generations have different interests and communication styles, and at any one moment in time, assumes the gap will narrow as the younger generation grows older and more experienced. According to Brad Sago, DBA, a published author from Anderson University, the term generation gap is no longer

² Young, Mary B. Ph.D.; "The Aging and Retiring Government Workforce – How Serious is the Challenge? What Are Jurisdictions Doing About It?" Center for Organizational Research, a Division of Linkage, Inc.; 2003; page 3. http://www.cps.ca.gov/AboutUs/documents/CPS_AgeBubble_FullReport.pdf

³ Brad Sago, DBA, Anderson University; Executive Update Feature: "Uncommon Threads: Mending the Generation Gap at Work. July 2000. <http://www.asaecenter.org/PublicationsResources/articledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=13100>

an accurate reflection of the generational landscape and has been replaced by the term ‘generational replication.’⁴ Sabo suggests emerging generations no longer grow up to mirror their parent’s generation but evolve and develop within their own generational life cycle.⁵

Presently, policies are in place across the country addressing work environment conduct deemed inappropriate in federal, state, county and municipal institutions. Those mandates unfortunately come at the expense of taxpayer dollars, and many individuals lose their jobs due to ignorance or just common stupidity.⁶ As a result of civil liability, today, law enforcement departments across the state administer and participate in mandated training addressing sexual harassment, discrimination, and cultural diversity. The majority of agencies currently operate under a ‘preventative education’ mindset, maintaining accurate records of training presented to their employees.

The author conducted an informal poll of twenty-one California police managers attending an advanced training course. The poll revealed, by an overwhelming majority, that agencies administer mandated harassment, discrimination and diversity training either on an annual or bi-annual basis. The majority of agencies also reviewed policies concerning workplace harassment & discrimination during the administration of annual performance evaluations for each employee. Phillip Sinco, City Attorney in Santa Maria, CA, supported reviewing harassment/discrimination policies at annual evaluations and encouraged bi-annual diversity training. He suggested it would be in the interests of the many city departments to address these issues quarterly, amongst personnel during department meetings and briefings.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Multiple generations clashing within the workforce can cause many of the problems associated with more traditional differences of gender and ethnicity. In today's society we are only now beginning to understand the implications of the generationally-diverse workforce and what constitutes harassment. The challenge may come from interactions with your boss, an employee, co-worker, client, or even a vendor. Betsy Barbieux, author of, "*The Multi-Generational Workplace*," offers two examples of generational workplace conflicts:

Ned is the owner of a management company that serves several condo hotels. He's having a conversation with a former employee, a housekeeper who didn't show up for work one day, but has returned a week later for her paycheck. In a loud demanding tone, we hear, "You Will give me my paycheck NOW. The labor relations lady said you would and I've brought Sgt. Segal with me to make sure I get it TODAY! And my attorney says we'll sue you if you don't." Ned, who has never backed away from a threat, calmly says "I'm not sure who told you what, but your paycheck won't be available for another week." He adds, "But you won't get it then unless you turn in your apron. Did the labor relations lady' tell you that?" He continues, "And since you've already contacted your attorney, I'm not supposed to talk to you. So here is the name of mine, we'll just let our attorneys work it out."⁷

The second scenario offers this perspective: Here's a quick look at an applicant for a member services position at a large homeowners' association in an affluent area. Staff at this upscale property dresses in a "uniform" during season—navy blazer, tan pants or skirt, etc. The applicant, female, late 20's, is here for her third interview. Her credentials and experience are good and she speaks well. However, there is an

⁷ Betsy Barbieux, "The Multi-Generational Workplace"; <http://www.nsacentralflorida.com/Articles/Multigenerationalwp.pdf>

irreconcilable difference between the person described in the application whose references have all been excellent and the applicant sitting in front of you. What you see a young lady with sleek black hair pulled back in an unstructured knot with long bangs hanging in her eyes, heavy black eyeliner and mascara, spaghetti-thin straps on her tight black, metallic tank top that falls short of the top of her pants. Her Capri spandex jeans reveal too much skin when she sits and the top of a tattoo on her backside. Her high heeled sandals show off black toe nail polish. Her fingers are decorated with silver rings that match the multiple pendant necklaces around her neck and which also, you now realize for the first time, match her tongue ring.⁸

The two scenarios represent challenges to the present day manager to deal with generational issues in the work environment. The first scenario looks at generational 'entitlement' as being a stumbling bloc towards effective business, while the other addresses generational 'core values' and how they can lead to prejudice. Greg Hammill, author of, "*Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees*," says, "Think of the last time you heard comments like these in the workplace... You're right, but I'm the boss! Just do your job! I remember when. What do you mean the kid wants a promotion after six months on the job! No!"⁹ Hammill challenges the reader by asking how they would react. Were they offended? Did they understand, or not understand, why someone would say these words? Hammill proposes the words and ones reaction, as well as the reaction of others, reflect generational differences and conflict in the workplace.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Greg Hammill, "Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees" FDU Magazine, 2005, <http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/05ws/generations.htm>

¹⁰ Ibid.

What Generations Reveal

Law enforcement agencies are creating and driving diversity within their own workforces. Many of the former employees brought back in part-time or limited duty positions are well versed regarding complaints and issues resulting from harassment and discrimination in the workforce. Likewise, the volunteers and civilian personnel often come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Many of these individuals are also educated regarding rules of engagement dealing with workplace harassment and discrimination.

According to Hammill, none of the generational groups, especially in the law enforcement community, seems willing to take the time to understand one another's core value system. There is a plethora of information available documenting the variances between the four generations in today's workforce dating back to the early 1990's. Claire Raines, a recognized expert in the field of generations writes in her book, *Generations at Work*: "A generation is defined by common tastes, attitudes, and experiences; a generational cohort is a product of its times and tastes. Particularly telling are a generation's defining moments: events that capture the attention and emotions of thousands...if not millions... of individuals at a formative stage in their lives. An old adage holds that, "People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents."¹¹

Bob Harrison, another recognized expert in the field of generations and a retired Chief of Police from Vacaville, CA., makes the following assertion from his article,

¹¹ Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, Bob Filipczak; "Generations At Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace"; 2000 Copyright performance Research Associates, Inc.

“*Gamers, Millennials, and Generation Next: Implications for Policing.*” He notes that “A recent survey of adults aged 18-25, labeled generation next, revealed some interesting perspectives regarding those now entering the workplace. More than 9 in 10 are satisfied with their relationship with their parents. Eight in ten are satisfied with the work they do and with their standard of living. Approximately 84 percent recognized their educational opportunities are better than twenty years ago. Their heroes are often persons with whom they have had personal contact (a teacher or mentor); only 14 percent cite famous persons as heroes, while only 8 percent say that their heroes are politicians. About 85 percent say they probably want to get married. Almost 90 percent use the internet. More than half send text messages daily. About 54 percent use social-networking sites, and almost half have created a profile. Seven in ten say that technology makes them new friends. More than half have gotten a tattoo, had a body piercing, or have dyed their hair a nontraditional color.”¹² These comments are reflective of the literature on the topic, and exemplify some of the potential issues when one generation collides with others. Before we note possible solutions, though, let’s briefly highlight who these generations are.

TRADITIONALISTS

Born prior to the end of World War II (1925 – 1945), this group is also referred to as Matures, Veterans, or the Silent Generation, range in age from 60 to 80 years. Their core values of hard work, honesty and dedication became America’s values. According to Laura Bernstein co-author of, “*Generations: Harnessing the Potential of the*

¹² Bob Harrison; “Gamers, Millennials, and Generation Next: Implications for Policing.” *The Police Chief*, vol. 74, no. 10, October 2007. http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=1312&issue_id=102007

Multigenerational Workforce,” they revere authority and seniority, and believe “in paying your dues.”¹³

BABY BOOMERS

Born between 1946 and 1964, this generation has reshaped American society since its inception, ranging in ages from 41 to 59. Baby Boomers are often referred to as the “Me” generation and experienced social “firsts” of desegregation and integration, at a time of economic prosperity that fostered a sense of individualism and entitlement. In addition, there were other significant political and cultural changes in American society during this period. As employees, work is a high priority for Baby Boomers that often translates into long work days. Bernstein says they currently dominate the ranks of senior management in organizations and positions of power in established political institutions.¹⁴

GENERATION X

Born between 1965 to 1980 and ranging in ages from 28 to 40, Generation X from a core value perspective are characterized as being fun, skeptical and informal. Generation X prefers structure and direction in the work environment. They are knowledgeable workers who are adept at multi-tasking, are self-reliant, and influenced by technology and raised in a more racially and ethnically diverse society. According to Greg Hammill, author of *Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees*, Generation Xers’ are motivated by independence, and doing things their way. They are

¹³ Laura Bernstein, Debra and Ben Alexander, “Generations: Harnessing the Potential of the Multigenerational Workforce,” Visionpoint Perspective, page. 3, <http://www.Visionpoint.com/assets/articles/generations%20perspective%20012506.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

good at consensus building and delegation, and are likely to share power and responsibility.

GENERATION Y

Born in 1978 or the years after, this generation is also labeled as Gen-Next, Nexters, Millennials, the Digital or Net Generation, and the Mosaic Generation. Currently in their early twenties and younger, Generation Y as a group are more diverse and globally oriented; possessing more knowledge of computers and technology than any preceding generation. Generation Y is adept at multi-tasking and utilizing multimedia. Many have a free-agent mindset approach to work and view their career as an opportunity to contribute to a greater good. They prefer a casual relationship with their manager, and expect to be treated as an equal. They view a leader as a guide and mentor, not an authoritarian.

They are not defined by their jobs and their loyalty lies with people instead of organizations. They are more inspired by mentoring, working flexible hours and the feeling of getting ahead than by traditional rewards. This particular group is projected to have an equally distinct impact on society and the workforce equivalent to that of the Baby Boomers.¹⁵

The descriptive traits of the generations are summaries from research in the field spanning the last two decades. 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

¹⁵ Ibid.

away. It is a problem based in economics, demographics, and world views that must be confronted to be solved.¹⁶

Training Curriculum Development

In theory, it is only a matter of time before clashes amongst the generations in the workforce could result in civil liability. Law enforcement employees representing the various generations would be well served to have a fundamental understanding of the core values embraced by their co-workers from other generations. It could be the catalyst to facilitate more open communication amongst personnel from various generational backgrounds by dispelling preconceived biases. In turn, the organization benefits because in theory, everyone has a fundamental understanding of one another's core values. Elimination of generational biases would allow for more effective sharing of skills between each generation that would in turn elevate the overall efficiency of the agency. The question arises, how and what would be the best method toward achieving this objective? Would training be universally accepted in the law enforcement community on a statewide basis? -

The role of the police officer can not be minimized, and in these days when the complexities of human relations have been greatly increased and tensions are encountered beyond those known in former years, it is essential that the police officer have the finest training possible. The time has arrived for serious consideration for law enforcement to address multi-generational diversity in the workforce.

As previously noted, Claire Raines is a recognized expert in the field of multiple generations in today's workforce. She is CEO and founder of Claire Raines Associates, a

¹⁶ Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, Bob Filipczak; "Generations At Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace"; 2000 Copyright performance Research Associates, Inc.

consulting and training firm that educates and trains leaders from business organizations how to successfully recognize, and incorporate the talents of multiple generations in their workforces. In her lectures around the country and training seminars, Raines shows organizations how to create competitive advantages by building work cultures that recognize and appreciate a variety of perspectives, styles and opinions where differences are sought out, valued, respected, and utilized. According to Rains, this requires an understanding of the four distinct generations working side-by-side today in the workforce. Some of the clientele to utilize Raines expertise include U.S. Army, Kellogg, Shell Oil, Westinghouse, U.S. Department of Commerce and Society for Human Resource Management to name a few.

Leadership in the private sector has recognized the need for multi-generational training, and Raines is one of many who have responded to the challenge. Governmental entities and law enforcement, though, can be slow to respond to change. Often, change is brought about through reaction to an event that forges the way for an entity to change, i.e. Rodney King. Strategy development for the creation and statewide mandating of a law enforcement training to address generations should involve people like Raines, and others from various disciplines who can offer different perspectives.

In 2008, a committee formed by the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) gathered harassment and workplace discrimination input from college and university academia professionals, corporate professionals and personnel representing the multi-generational law enforcement community. As the agency responsible for the oversight and training of all peace officers in the State, POST would be a natural entity to manage the implementation of training development on a statewide

basis. POST need not reinvent the wheel, and merely could utilize their Commission to review existing training programs such as ones offered by Raines and others. The training could be adapted for use by police, and even military police and private sector entities having law enforcement applications.

Benefits of Training to Law Enforcement

From the law enforcement perspective, the FBI has recognized the need to harmonize the work environment through customization, to take full advantage of the skill set of emerging new generational employees. In its periodical Homeland Security, 2015: A Series of Working Papers from the Futures Working Group Vol. 2, the FBI projects training developments needed to address the strengths of future academy recruits. Simultaneously, the FBI recognizes the need for established agents to receive customized training to help them better teach and interact with new bureau recruits.

Law enforcement administrative staff, supervisory and line positions occupied by Traditionalists and Baby Boomers would benefit by understanding the nuances of the newer generational officers entering the workforce. Conversely, Generation X and Millennial recruit trainees and officers benefit by having a better understanding of why Traditionalist and Baby Boomer co-workers behave the way they do.

With the development of a specific training program to address generational issues, law enforcement agencies would have the opportunity to send selected staff to POST approved train the trainer courses, addressing multi-generational workforce diversity. These individuals would be representative of the generational makeup of the agency, and could facilitate agency training on an annual or bi-annual basis. Additionally,

this group would be available to chair an agency committee that could address and mediate relational differences arising within the agency.

Certainly, the work to create and deliver training sufficient to address the variety of generational issues in our workforce could be daunting. One might ask why “all the fuss” is necessary. It is important, therefore, to consider what our alternatives without training might be.

A future without Generational Training

Much like sexual harassment and discrimination laws currently in effect at federal and state levels, all that could be needed to trigger a complaint is for an individual to be denied a promotional opportunity; or as simply as constantly being labeled “having no work ethic” by an employee or employer, based on preconceived “generational gap perceptions.” Not every situation leads to a libelous action or response. Many complaints, though, could lead to letters of reprimand or loss of wages through unpaid days off, or the creation of tension and lack of harmony in the work environment. Potentially, failure to develop training curriculum addressing multi-generational workforce awareness and diversity could subject law enforcement departments and their administrators to future civil liability resulting from negative confrontations and clashes amongst employees in the workforce.

To do nothing can foster a work environment of non-communication amongst generational employees and non trust. It would do nothing to educate the employees regarding their relational differences and generational core values. Thus, one could have an ineffective organization filled with untapped potential. If an individual is opportunistic, it would not be difficult for them to take advantage of adverse comments

from a younger employee in the work environment due to ignorance or a lack of training. Additionally more agencies are augmenting their respective workforces with volunteer programs that utilize individuals from a variety of generational core values. According to Greg Hammill, director of student programs at Silberman College of Business, traditionalists and boomers are not listening to and respecting their younger counterparts. Conversely Generation X and the Millennial's are certainly wishing their older counterparts would move out of the way, shut up and stay 'retired'.¹⁷ If left untended, even the best plans and strategies to protect one's community can go astray with the level of internal strife caused by clashes of the generations.

Conversely, development of a training curriculum addressing multi-generational workforce diversity and awareness could go a long way toward employees understanding each other to create a more effective, successful workplace. In an era where agencies and businesses are looking for innovative ways to conduct business more efficiently, a pre-emptive move to address a generationally-diverse workforce would be to educate it about one another. With enlightenment comes understanding, and understanding fosters an environment of communication and empowerment, which leads to innovation and organizational harmony.

Conclusion

Multi-generational awareness training for law enforcement can be applicable to multiple facets within an agency to improve social environments and minimize potential complaints. Science continues to develop and advance, and the human lifespan has greatly increased. People are living longer and remaining longer in the workforce for a

¹⁷ Greg Hammill, "Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees" FDU Magazine, 2005, <http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/05ws/generations.htm>

variety of reasons. The multi-generational workforce is here to stay and it is time for law enforcement to evolve with it. Developing and adopting a training curriculum addressing multi-generational diversity in the workplace before someone gets sued. As Gordon Graham would put it, “If it’s predictable, it’s preventable.”¹⁸ We now know the predictions; what steps will we take to prevent?

¹⁸ Gordon Graham, “Gordon Graham’s Personal and Company Philosophy” 1980, Graham Research Consultants 2005. <http://www.gordongraham.com/philosophy.html>