

**Gen Y and Conflict Resolution: Training Our Next Generation Police  
Leaders**

**by**

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**April, 2011**

**COMMAND COLLEGE CLASS 48**

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.

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## **The Succession of Generation Y in Policing**

Early one morning a resident of your community desires police services. She calls the police dispatch number prominently displayed on her video phone. Glowing on her telephone screen is the avatar of a female police officer, because our resident's demographic profile shows her to be more trusting of a woman. The soothing voice from the speaker thanks her for her call.

The avatar asks if there is anything she can help with. As our citizen begins to explain her problem, the avatar interrupts by saying, "You can speak directly to me, asking any questions or making any statements." She then pauses, blinking her digitally controlled eyes. As our citizen, now a bit annoyed, again tries to state her problem, the avatar interrupts again and says. "I'm sorry, can you repeat that?" Now, more than a little annoyed, our citizen flatly states, "send the police." Frustrated with the technology, she refuses to answer on repeated call-backs.

Hearing a familiar humming sound from outside, she looks out to see an Electronic Interfacing Iris (or "eyes" as they are commonly called on the street), hovering outside her window. She knows these drones are used by the police in high risk situations; but she is tired of all the automation so she closes her blinds. Seconds later she hears a loud knock on the door. Sighing heavily, she opens it to see the latest thing in police technology, a fully armored, remote controlled Autocop stationed on her doorstep. Standing just under seven feet tall, fully armed with an array of weaponry, it squawks in its metallic voice, "MAY I BE OF SERVICE?" She sees her neighbors being hurried from their homes in evacuation, and she quietly says, "My 12 year old daughter won't go to school. Will you make her?" Scanning behind the resident, the Autocop sees a scared 12 year old girl, tears rolling down her cheeks, hiding under the kitchen table.

Suddenly, an unseen voice commands, "Stand down." "STANDING DOWN" booms the Autocop in reply and it immediately backs out of the doorway. From around the corner of the house, a police officer strides out into view. Looking young enough to be in high school he shouts at the citizen, "Aw, geeze lady, what'ja wanna go an' do that for? I put us on full tactical alert after your phone call!" She begins to speak, when he holds up his hand, and says "I gotta text my cover units that its code-4," as his fingers zing across his cell phone. Disgruntled sighs spill out of the darkness as previously unseen cell phones light up the night receiving the text; and heavily armed officers appear out of the shadows, walking away banging on their cell phones.

Addressing the citizen, the young officer says, "So, your daughter doesn't wanna go to school, huh?" "No, she..." begins the citizen. "I'll just talk to her." he says as he strides right past her. Kneeling next to the table, he asks the child what's wrong. "Well, my friend, Tony, Facebooked me that he's mad at me for texting James and doesn't want to tweet me anymore. So I emailed my friend Jamie, who MySpaced Tony who texted James to leave me alone." "I asked her why she didn't just call Tony" interjected the citizen. "Call him?" the child and officer say in unison, and both chuckle at the thought. "See what I'm dealing with" the girl snorts. "I see" he says, "Look, just text Tony that you removed James from your Facebook friends and everything will be all right" says the lieutenant. "Okay" she replies, fingers already flying on her cell phone. Within seconds her phone beeps and her face brightens. "Oh, thank-you, you're so smart" the young girl says, hugging the embarrassed officer. "You're welcome," he replies, "Now hurry so you're not late for school" he calls after her, but she's already bounding out of the house

with her backpack. “Call him” the officer chuckles as he walks out of the house, leaving the dumbfounded citizen scratching her head.

Is this the future of police services? Is the generation gap so large that the new police officers being hired today, however technologically savvy, are out of sync from the aging population they will be policing? How is this new communication style of Generation Y, founded on texting, tweeting and being limited to 160 characters per communication, affecting effective communication with an aging population? And with incoming Generation Z, or “The Net Generation” (Wikipedia) being raised on the iPhone and iPad, you have immediate gratification meets the Jetsons. They’re communication style of quick, fast, to the point, using limited vocabulary and sentences are completely normal to them; but may seem rude and disinterested to others. How will the overabundance of electronic communication affect their social development, especially in the field of interpersonal communication and conflict resolution?

#### Success and Boredom

The challenge of integrating Generation Y into the field of law enforcement, and the increasingly easy access to technological advances in policing could serve as the perfect storm for officers who may be poorly equipped for the personal interactions critical to successful law enforcement strategies. According to DeLord (2003), integrating this generation into a culture of Law Enforcement will be challenging in a career that, for the most part, is boring, long hours, and hard work.

With Generation Y’s instinctive integration of technology into their lives, their societal norms have changed dramatically from the generations preceding them. As these new norms become concreted into their culture, the distance between generations grows

from a valley to a chasm. Will the continued advances in police technology further widen that gap?

### Social Networking's Impact

With most electronic social networking, one has no immediate interpersonal response from their audience, which can impede an individual's ability to interact with others and develop conflict resolution skills. According to Coates (2007), "Having spent a large percentage of time in structured activities, they are accustomed to having a lot of adult supervision. Thus, they may have poor conflict resolution skills" (p.2) Lower (2008), explains it, "Because Generation Y grew up in a technology-rich world, it may come up short in interpersonal skills" (p.3) Is there something we can do now to prevent a culture of police officers far removed from the majority of the population they serve?

### Who is Generation Y?

Dictionary.Com defines Generation Y as, "[youth] born from 1980 onward, brought up using digital technology and mass media,; the children of Baby Boomers..." Wikipedia shows that Generation Y was at that optimum pre-teen age at the birth of the PlayStation video gaming system in 1994. According to Williams (2008), Generation Y grew up with graduations from almost every grade and trophies for just showing up. They multi-tasked sports and music lessons and tutors, all before the age of seven; and as Coates states, "This generation can easily manage to listen to music, work on the computer and watch television at the same time" (p.2). They have seen the collapse of entire retirement systems, and Dolezalek (2007) says, "They're always preparing themselves for the next job because they know their current job could become their former job at any time."

This is the first generation that did not need to *learn* how to use a PC, they were born with it. They are the first generation to have instantaneous information at their fingertips via their cell phones, or as Williams (2008) put it, “Having had the Internet most of their lives, they are used to having knowledge at their fingertips at all times (p. 3). One general consensus of researchers of norms and differences of Generation Y is their underdeveloped social and communication skills due to the overabundance of electronic social networking.

In their book, “Y’s UP”, Authors, James J. Simon and Niccole D. Simon discuss how Generation Y can improve their chances of landing a job in today’s job market. In the interview on KCBS radio, in June, 2010, the authors outlined two areas of deficiencies they saw in Generation Y. In their job interviewing skills, they noted a lack of eye contact (as they are not accustomed to speaking to real people) and their short, one word answers (as is used in texting and instant messaging). In their writing skills, they noted a deficiency in spelling, grammar and sentence structure; areas not necessary in social electronic communication. The authors specifically blamed electronic social networking as the root of these problems.

In the article, “Navigating the Generation Gap” (2008), Dave Williams writes: “Much of whom we are is shaped by events that occur in the first 20 years of our lives. Millennial’s [Generation Y] were raised by Baby Boomers who tried to be involved parents and do everything for their children. This resulted in a generation used to a heavily scheduled life, but also requiring outside assistance to meet its demands. Shunning competition and the need for winners and losers in life, Boomers lobbied for something less stressful for their children: They

eliminated things like honor rolls at school and added awards for many types of accomplishments. Some feel this has watered down the drive of the Millennial generation, making them overly sensitive to the results-oriented work environment” (p.1)

This “results-oriented work environment” includes showing up to work on time, dressing and acting professionally, and respecting your superiors; all traits that traditional management structures would feel are worth striving for. According to Stine (2008), Generation Y does not share the same values, “They may show up to work 10 or 15 minutes late, and leave a little early at the end of the day... Most of the time these aren’t egregious violations” (p.4).

Ronald G. DeLord (2003) writes, “The real underlying problem is that law enforcement agencies are selling a product few young people are buying...”(pg 3). It is not just the job requirements, but the culture and hierarchy are also making it difficult for Law Enforcement to retain Generation Y applicants. DeLord outlines “One of the greatest impediments articulated by Generation Y applicants about a law enforcement career is the lack of flexibility in seeking new jobs and challenges” (p. 10).

Certainly, there are advantages Gen Y possess to help them address their areas of need. This is the generation that excels at efficiency. They understand how to integrate technology into their daily lives for a better, faster result. In short, they are built for tomorrow. With their seamless integration of technology into their lives, and the information at their fingertips; they can find information and answers almost instantaneously. They have a network of coworkers and friends they will not hesitate to

contact to find some information that eludes them, and Dolezalek (2007), says they have embraced the concept of learning by trial and error, or failing forward.

By embracing this generation and all they can do with technology, and optimizing their skills and abilities in video and electronic training, we can help them lead law enforcement into a more efficient, productive future. To help this progression, some recommendations from a wide variety of published works on Generation Y include:

- **Real Time Feedback:** Having been raised with instant information and communication, Generation Y expects immediate feedback. Having mechanisms in place to provide continual feedback will be interpreted as interest in and appreciation of work well done (Steiner)
- **Teach Them Technologically:** Seminars and classroom presentations are not the best way to educate generation y. To appeal to their hard wired interest in technological communications, use venues such as podcasts, cell phones, laptops, and iPods (Steiner).
- **Provide Lateral Movement inside the Police Profession and Outside to Private Sector:** Millennials look at career paths very differently than previous generations. For them, job change is essential because it is the best way they can get the skills they need to succeed. This is important to know because these generations are more comfortable jumping ship to meet their needs than sticking it out with an organization that may not provide it (Williams, 2008). Adopting minimum uniform national professional standards for law enforcement officers at all levels would

remove one of the greatest impediments for this lateral movement  
(DeLord, 2003)

- Create Models that Change the Policies and Culture that Impede Diversity:  
Very few agencies have made the changes to their policies and practices to make the profession more appealing to generation Y. Collective bargaining contracts with unions; and management incorporating modern work rules that would attract generation y should be researched and developed (DeLord, 2003).

### Conclusion

Technology is the future, and this generation was built on it. They multitask like no others have before, and are comfortable with the evolution of technology integrated seamlessly into their lives (Managing the Millennials: Part 1). They believe in service and ecology and are willing to sacrifice for it. They have instant information at their fingertips, and are comfortable with its applications. Appealing to their “instant” lifestyles and need for positive reinforcement will pose obstacles, but the rewards for success will be great. What is needed is a transformation from the law enforcement culture that promotes the individual fitting in, instead of capitalizing on their individuality. What is needed is an informed customer who can see the benefits of more choices in the services provided by their law enforcement agency.

This generation presents many challenges to the culture and institution of Law Enforcement. They challenge its traditions and values. They challenge its very being, and are not satisfied with the usual answers. They ask why write a report when you can type

it? They ask why type a report when you can dictate it? They ask why tend to the symptom when you can solve the problem?

This is Generation Y, and aptly named they are, “If they don’t understand the “whys” behind what they’re doing they will struggle to commit” (Navigating the Generation Gap). They are challenging our traditions, ideals, and beliefs; but, along with those challenges, they also ask “Why Not?” And therein lies their brilliance.

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