

Supervising the New Millennial Police Officer

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Back In the Day

Starting a career in the mid-1990s, cell phone and computers were not an everyday thing. There certainly weren't smart phone and I-pads, there wasn't Facebook or Twitter. It was a time of "Kick-Ass and Take Names". It was a time of doing what you were told and not asking why. It was also a time of everyone not getting a participation trophy just because we showed up for work. I had no idea twenty years later I would be a supervisor trying to figure how to deal with something called a Millennial. Twenty years later, I have to ask a twenty-something how to do a report because I don't understand the computer system. I can only imagine it's just as frustrating as a young officer when they always hear "Back in the Day" or "Let Me Tell You How I Used to Do It". It seems like I rolled my eyes a few times when I heard my boss say the same thing. One thing is for certain, things are changing and I am not sure how to change with it.

While trying to figure out what a Millennial is, I discovered two sociologists, William Strauss and Neil Howe, are credited with inventing the term. In 1987, Strauss and Howe, in their groundbreaking work, "Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069, wrote that a millennial is anyone born after 1982. Strauss and Howe, and other subsequent sociologists, believe that millennials have certain traits such as over-confidence, an over emphasis on tolerance and inclusion, narcissism, over-reliance on technology and having very liberal attitudes towards social and cultural norms. (The Police Officer Idiots Guide to Dealing with Millennials, by William Gage, March 20, 2016).

Over the past five years I have been met with obstacles that I never knew could or would exist. I thought everything in my patrol car would be computerized or touch screen. I never could image

tickets would be computer generated and not hand written. But most of all I never could imagine I would be dealing with a new generation of police officers that will make you want to pull your hair out.

Back in the day, it seemed like most people were looking for a job in law enforcement because they wanted a long term career with a decent pay check every two weeks and if we could make a difference in someone's life, well that was a bonus. Now according to Matt Gusior, when millennials consider a job, they're not necessarily looking for a long-term career. Surveys have

found that millennials care more about doing work they find meaningful than having a large paycheck. They want their workplace to be social and fun and their work to have a



positive impact on the world. Instead of focusing on the salary and long-term benefits of police work, they should emphasize how police officers make a difference in communities. Instead of talking about the long-term commitment of a career in law enforcement, they should highlight the fun and purposeful aspects of the job. (Millennials in Law Enforcement by Matt Gusior April 6, 2017)

Over my career as a law enforcement officer, I have seen fewer and fewer new officers stay in law enforcement for an entire career. I have also noticed a trend of officers jumping from one department to another in what appears to be hopes of fast advancement. In my opinion it seems many of the Millennial Officers expect quick advancement up the chain of command or seem to expect constant praise for something done right. I



blame this on today's society. It appears the participation trophy has backfired and now a new generation of people expect something for nothing. I also blame it on today's parents, (including myself). I've often heard them referred to as "Helicopter Parents". It's the type of parent who hovers over their child to make sure they are ok and always gets what they want, instead of letting their child grow up and learn the hard knocks of life.

Once hired, Millennials need to be trained and retained. Loyalty to the department is not automatic with this generation. They will quickly leave if not satisfied or motivated with their position in the department. Technology is highly important to the Millennials. Millennial officers will not stay long for police departments that are still hand writing reports. The Millennials grew up with the internet, iPods, cell phones, text messaging, social web sites, and now "Twitter," just to name a few. All of these examples are the life and blood of the Millennials generation, and some find it extremely difficult to function without the use of technology (Stefaniak & Vetter, 2007).

Recruiting the Millennial Police Officer

To attract millennial recruits, law enforcement agencies need to meet them where they are.

Millennials are extremely tech savvy and do a lot of their communication through social media.

Ninety percent of people aged 18 to 29 use social media, and one-third say that social media is their preferred method of communicating with businesses.



Social media has often shone a negative light on police. But engaging on social media can allow your agency to highlight positive things your officers do. A robust social media presence can make your agency more relatable and help you connect with potential recruits. Your agency should use social media to give your followers a glimpse inside police work, share positive stories, and advertise job openings.

Along with social media use, it's important for your department to have an up-to-date website.

Make it easy for potential recruits to learn about your department and apply for jobs online.

(Millennials in Law Enforcement, Matt Gusior April 6, 2017)

Another method in recruiting new officers is simply through the word of mouth. Most officers I know became officers because of someone they knew. When speaking to the potential recruit, focus on the items they care most about. Over my career, I have never had a subject speak to me about a job in law enforcement and ask what the pay is. The things that are asked about the most is: how fun is it, is there excitement and do I get to help people. As I speak to the millennial police in my own department, I don't hear much complaining about low pay like some of the older officers do. I don't even hear them talking about preparing for retirement. I guess that seems too far away. The comments I hear from the millennial officer is the excitement they had today or how they got to help someone.

Training the Rookies

I believe Millennials use the internet as their primary source for news and information, something I have hardly ever done. I truly don't know if they watch the nightly news. This means millennials may absorb information better through online training than traditional classroom training. However, I believe they are missing out on the face to face interaction by not sitting in a classroom, something most millennials struggle with.



Online training lets officers watch training videos and study PowerPoint presentations on their own time. Of course, hands-on, scenario-based training is also essential. When creating in-person training programs, law enforcement agencies should keep in mind that millennials like to collaborate and work in groups. Millennials are motivated by feedback, so instructors should point out things they've done well and advise them on how to improve in weak areas.

(Millennials in Law Enforcement, Matt Gusior April 6, 2017)

Six Principals for Managing Millennials

During my reach I discovered Six Principals for Managing Millennials (Chad Halvorson, People Management April 20, 2015)

1. Work in Groups

Millennials have a reputation for “crowdsourcing” and they often do tend to want to work in groups. But don't let that make you think that they are unable to make decisions on their own. While they value the input of a diverse group, they are still able to make decisions at work without the constant input of others.

Quite often I may asked officers under my command to spread out, cover other areas of the post and I continue to see younger officers working in close proximity of each other and most of the older officers covering a run by themselves. I see pros and cons to both situations. I'm glad to see my officers work together because obviously there is safety in numbers, however; it's hard to cover a large patrol area when the officers are working in the same area.

2. Adept at Using Technology

Millennial employees stand out for having skill with technology. Not only are they adept at using technology, but they prefer it. No other generation has grown up steeped in technology like the Millennials have, and so what is seen as optional or gadgetry for older generations is a natural and required for Millennials

When I began my career, there were no in-car computers, no computer generated citations.

Today technology has taken over law enforcement and it's the millennials who are leading the way in that field. I cannot recall the last time I saw a millennial police without a smart phone in his hand or not sitting behind a computer. Whether I like it or not, technology has made the job easier.

3. Desire Regular Feedback

Millennials have a different "social mindset", they want that feedback often, and they want it right now. This level of feedback meets their need to always be learning and growing, but there is another reason why they desire more frequent (and sometimes instant project-based feedback):

they grew up with the internet and social media, and are more familiar with instant feedback than previous generations.

I have noticed on several occasions younger officers seeking praise and approval on a regular bases. In the past, the mindset seemed to be “Make your Mistakes and we will Fix Them Later”. That seems to have come to an end. Many times I have gotten calls from the younger officers asking questions because they are afraid of making mistakes. It’s hard to explain to a young officer, you are going to make mistakes, you are going to screw up. Don’t be afraid to make a decision, it’s going to be ok.

4. They Are Motivated Differently

Millennials are motivated by a sense of progress, the opportunity to be creative, and a sense that what they are doing matters.

While they may eschew, to some degree, traditional hierarchies, you can create mid-level job titles to motivate millennial workers. Much like the different colored belts in martial arts, instead of the traditional white, brown, and black, these smaller levels show that improvement, though incremental, is happening. It shows your millennial workers that career progress is taking place.

Do not see much difference today than the way it was twenty years ago. I have always wanted what I do as a police officer to matter. Some people may be motivated a little different, one may be motivated by making narcotic arrest and another by the number of DWI arrests you may make in a month. At the end of the day whether you are a millennial or a veteran officer, I feel like we are motivated by the same common goal, making the world a safer place.

5. Give Back To the Community

Millennials are concerned about giving back to the community. A 2010 study by Pew Research Center found that Millennials were more concerned with helping people in need than they were



with getting a high salary. If you hope to attract and inspire millennials, you must offer them more than the chance to earn a buck. You need to show that them their work matters in the scheme of something larger than themselves.

Honestly twenty years ago, I was not concerned about giving back to the community or was I concerned about being a part of the community. As time has gone by I have caught myself becoming more and more community involved and encourage my officers, young and old, to do the same thing. At the same time, I have to warn the younger officers to stay guarded at times and getting too close to the community can at times cause problems when it comes to enforcing the law. (Pew Research Center, 2010)

6. Offer Flexibility

Millennials prefer more flexibility in how they do their job as well as time (and acceptance) to pursue their own personal projects. This doesn't simply translate into a 9-5 job that they can do at home; they still prefer that in-person communication. Instead, it means taking a new look at how a work day is composed.

This tends to be the toughest field to deal with when it comes to millennials in law enforcement. Unfortunately there is not a lot of flex ability. It gets very frustrating when a millennial officer is giving an order on how, when or where something is to be done and they don't want to do it that way. They want the "Flexibility" to do it their way.

Retaining the Millennial Officer

Now that we have learned how to recruit, train and manage the Millennial Officer, how do we keep them? As mentioned earlier in the report, during my career, I have seen fewer and fewer officers stay in law enforcement to finish their careers. I have truly been one to believe if law enforcement was in your blood, you can't walk away from it. Six things come to mind when referring to retaining Millennia Officers.

1. Understand Millennials learn from questioning.

Trust me when I say we never asked a supervisor why we were doing something back in the day and the answer of "Because I said so" is a thing of the past. Though I would never imagined asking my sergeant WHY, it's a daily question in today's law enforcement. As a supervisor, I have had to learn to bite my tongue. Not to compare a police officer to a child but the best way for a child to learn anything is to ask questions. And more often than not, when I am advised of something by my chain of command, I catch myself asking "WHY".

2. Utilize their Strengths

It is common knowledge Millennials have much more experience with technology than the old timers. On many occasions I have had to ask a younger officer how to type a report. Twenty years ago the thought of having a computer in your patrol car was unheard of. And I am literally amazed at the proficiency at which the younger officers can use them. Encourage your officers to use these skills. If they can find an easier way, trust me, I'm all for it.

3. Follow through on Promises

I've learned over the years, don't give promises you can't keep. Not following through with



promises will cause dissension and distrust. Good employees will not want to stick around. As a front line supervisor, I am the one the patrol come to for their wants and needs. I've learned it's hard to tell someone no, and I don't ever make promises I can't keep. If I've said it once, I've said it a million times, "I can't Promises, but I will Dang Sure Try".

4. Receive feedback humbly

No one likes to receive criticism. Especially when you are a war torn officer who has been around the block a million times. Receiving criticism can be a hard pill to take, coming from a young officer who may actually have a better way of doing thing. I've mentioned many times in this report, Millennials have a much better grasp on technology than I do, so when they come to me with a better way of doing things, I have learned to pay attention.

5. Train Officers regularly and thoroughly

The best way to make your department more efficient is through training. I have noticed over the years officers seem to feel more wanted and important after they have been trained in a specialty field. The number one of resource in any department is the people. Why would we not want to invest in them? Whether it is extra training in Drug Recognition or DWI, you are only helping your department by getting the officers the training and making them feel more appreciated and wanted at the same time.

6. Praise in public, rebuke in private

Looking back over my career, I can remember working for some pretty hard supervisors. The type of supervisor who didn't care about your feelings or what they made you look like in front of others. Unfortunately, this can be one of the hardest areas to control. On any given day tempers can rise in law enforcement. As I get a little older, I've had to learn when to bite my tongue and deal with a situation at a later date. At that same time, I've learned to give praise as often as I can. Everyone wants to be praised and it's only human nature to want other people around when it's happening. Praise your young officers as often as you can and do your best to make sure other people see it, not for your benefit but for the officers.

7. Offer personal development opportunities

The more opportunities you give a young officer, the more likely they are to stick around. No one wants to feel like they are in a dead end job doing the same thing every day for the next twenty to thirty years.

Encourage your young officers to take on special roles in your department. People are known to strive for responsibility. Also

encourage your officers to advance in the chain of command, after all someone is eventually going to have to take your place.



The Interview

During my research, I had the opportunity to interview one of my department's millennial



officers. I will refer to this subject as Trooper Y. I had a predetermined list of questions for Trooper Y and was pretty

surprised to see several of his answers matched the information I had discovered during my research.

1. What can of Legacy do you want to leave on your law enforcement career?

I want to be remembered by how good I was to other people, public and other law enforcement. I just want to leave a good impression on other people. (Trooper Y)

2. What do you want to get out of your career?

I want the satisfaction of knowing I made a difference in public safety. I want to go home at the end of the day knowing I accomplished something and made a difference or saved someone's life. (Trooper Y)

3. How hard are you willing to work to obtain your goals?

I plan on going out and working as hard as I can each day. You won't reach your goals if you don't strive for them. (Trooper Y)

4. How much do you depend on technology?

I depend on technology a 100%, because that's all I know. I've never hand written a citation or done a traffic accident by hand. I could probably do my job without a computer, it would just take me a little while to figure it out. (Trooper Y)

5. What do you want out of a supervisor?

I want someone who will give constructive criticism and tell me what I have done wrong but then helps me correct it. I want someone who will lead by example. I don't want a "Do as I say and not as I Do" type of person. (Trooper Y)

6. Would you rather have a supervisor or mentor?

I would rather have a mentor, someone I can call and ask questions. I like having a professional and personal relationship with my boss, someone I can go to with personal problems as well. (Trooper Y)

I Don't Want a Boss

After speaking to Trooper Y, I realized he never spoke to me about wanting higher pay or better benefits. He really did want to feel needed and feel like he was helping his fellow man. I'm sure that's what we all want, especially if you go into law enforcement or any other first responder field. But, the biggest thing I noticed about Trooper Y is the fact he wanted a mentor instead of a boss. So, how do we be the boss of someone who doesn't want a boss? The first line supervisors of the police department need to lead by example and practice management by walking around. The first line supervisor needs to challenge the Millennials with tasks that are important and

explain the reason behind the task. The Millennials will meet their goals. It is very important that the supervisor have a hand in guiding the Millennials to a special place in the department.

Millennials have worked in groups their entire lives. When possible, they should be allowed to work in teams. Team members of the same shift work out signals, phrases, eye, and hand signs to quickly let the other know about any situation with very little actual conversation. As the team builds, work turns into fun. Fun keeps them coming back the next day. Departments that fail to understand the characteristics of the Millennials will be unable to hire top quality new officers or retain new technologically advanced officers. Departments need to establish a mentoring program in their departments. The International Association of Chiefs of Police stated that the three goals of mentoring are: “1) to promote professional growth, 2) inspire personal motivation, and 3) enhance effectiveness of police service” (Sprafka & Kranda, 2000, p. 3).

Conclusion

After doing my research, I hoped to find that one magic solution that would fix the generational gap between the “Old Timers’ and the new Millennia Police Officer. The one thing I do know for sure, is that the millennials are here and we need to find a better way to work together. I will admit over the last five years as a first line supervisor, I have tried to supervise my “guys” the way I was twenty years ago. I



can tell you, that doesn't work. The days of yelling and screaming to get good quality work out of your subordinates is over.

The first step in solving this problem would be educating the command staff with the characteristics of the Millennials. I believe this needs to happen shortly after a new front line supervisor has been promoted and not five years down the line, like I was. The front line supervisor needs to learn to be more of a mentor than a boss. I have learned it is easier to leave the bossing to the people further up the chain anyway.

However; I also believe the Millennial Officer had much to learn from the veterans of their department. This is a dangerous world we live in and trying to find the good in every person we deal with is not always a successful story. As we "Old Farts" try to become kinder gentler people, I also believe the Millennial Officers should peel off a few layers of bubble wrap. Parents and society have wrapped our children with too many layers of bubble wrap in case they get knocked down. The problem with that is once you get knocked down, you can't stand back up because of too many layers holding you down.

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