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The Recruitment and Retention of an Evolving Workforce

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest personnel problems facing police agencies today is the recruitment and retention of quality officers. The purpose of this study is to determine what, if anything, police administrators can do to better attract quality people into the field of law enforcement, as well as retain them once they are hired. This study looks at this question from a sociological stand point by studying the characteristics of the people in the applicable age groups; officers under forty years old. These age groups are commonly referred to as Generation X and Generation Y, as opposed to the previous World War II Generation and Baby Boomers. The question this study asks is what must police agencies do to attract and retain officers in this age group?

Research methods included in this study consists of a review of pertinent literature, statistics and studies. This research revealed that there are some things that law enforcement administrators can do that might make their agencies more attractive to the younger officers and new recruits. The key to this is understanding some of the history and issues of these generations. These things include relaxing the rigidity of the paramilitary organizational structure to allow for the empowerment the officers and trusting them with responsibility. Another is to use team approaches in problem solving, and a big issue to consider is to provide personal growth opportunities for the officers.

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Introduction

Police agencies today have many different issues to deal with, but one of the greatest personnel issues facing police agencies today is the recruitment retention of quality officers. This problem is especially magnified in times of prosperity when the economy is good and unemployment rates are low. This study will concentrate on officers younger than forty years old, because that is the age group that is recruited and the most mobile. Sociologists break these people into two generations. They refer to the group born from 1963 to 1981, as "Generation X", or "Gen Xers." This group makes up 20% of the US Workforce and 32.4% of the public or non-profit workforce (Jurkiewicz, 2000). The younger group, born from 1978 to 1984, which is just beginning to enter the workforce, is commonly referred to as Generation Y (Tulgan, 2001). The question this study asks is what must police agencies do to attract and retain officers in this age group.

Police departments were founded on military models and have always been grounded in very traditional values. This has not posed a problem in the past because prior generations have conformed to and accepted these values, even if they did not agree with them. Generally speaking, people of Generation X and Generation Y have a different set of values than people of earlier generations. Things that have traditionally been important to prior generations are not as important to the younger workers. These workers tend to be more family oriented and appreciate, if not demand, their time off from work. They are very individualistic, they often ask why, and they do not automatically submit to

authority. Supervisors must prove themselves worthy of respect. For these reasons, among others, younger officers are not always accepted into the traditionally managed police organization. This causes many of them to become frustrated and leave. Many times this is at a great loss to the department.

The purpose of this study is to determine what, if anything, police administrators can do to better attract quality people into the field of law enforcement, as well as retain them once they are hired. Researchers in the business field have been studying the characteristics of Generation X for several years and now they are beginning to study Generation Y. Business researchers have studied and written about methods of managing these age groups and how to restructure organizations to better accommodate them.

Research methods included in this study will consist of a review of pertinent literature, statistics and studies. It is expected that this research will show that if police administrators are going to be successful in retaining quality officers under the age of forty years old, then management styles will have to change and organizational structures will have to be modified, becoming more flexible. If administrators refuse to change, then they will continue to battle the problem of high turnover rates.

Review of the Literature

To address the aforementioned generational differences in management, the characteristics of the groups that are being studied must be addressed. Bruce Tulgan, a Gen X'er himself, has written several books relating to this issue. In his books *Managing Generation X: How to bring out the best in young talent*,

(2000) and *The Manager's Pocket Guide to Generation X*, (1997) Tulgan discusses what motivates, and discourages employees in this age group, as well as some ways that they view the world.

In his *Manager's Pocket Guide to Generation X*, Tulgan (1997) explains that there are key historical issues that have shaped the characteristics of Gen X. He calls them the "4 'I's": institutions, independence, information, and immediacy. The impact of these issues on the Gen Xer's employment needs are great. For example, Generation Xers tend to not trust institutions; therefore it can appear that they are not loyal to their employer. Tulgan explains that this is a result of them growing up watching the Baby Boomers discrediting the major institutions such as faltering schools, corruption in government, corporate downsizing, and church scandals. Gen Xers have also seen the divorce rate increase drastically, resulting in a distrust of the family institution. Growing up watching these things caused this generation to become very cautious when entering into relationships, both personal and professional. Also, this generation does not believe in long term "dues paying" before promoting up the career ladder. Gen Xers are willing to work hard to earn their way up the ladder, but "they are not willing to pay dues in any way based on protocols of hierarchy or rites of initiation" (Tulgan, 2000, 136). They are skeptical of the traditional status quo and hierarchical relationships and do not automatically give their manager respect and loyalty. That respect has to be earned, usually through mutual benefit short-term relationships (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

There are many other reasons why members of the younger workforce required more non-traditional management. Gen Xers are very independent and self-reliant because they were the “latch key kids.” They are accustomed to solving problems on their own and taking care of themselves. They are often self-confident and can often be mistakenly labeled as arrogant (Tulgan, 1997). Gen Xers are also very comfortable with new information and technology. They grew up during the information revolution; therefore, they developed the ability to multi-task, focus on several things at once, as well as selectively eliminating unimportant information (Tulgan, 1997). Because they were raised in a culture where responses are given almost immediately and change is the only constant, Gen Xers tend to be flexible and acclimate well to change. Due to this, they often demand fast results and immediate feedback.

Gen Xers place high value on teamwork, the ability to learn new things, and flexibility (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Even though they are very independent, according to Tulgan (2000), Gen Xers thrive when working in teams where the team supports the individuals and where there is an open information environment where ideas are openly exchanged. Professional growth and the ability to learn are also very important to Gen Xers. They thrive when trust is placed in them to take on responsibility. Taking on responsibility gives them exposure to senior management and important clients which become learning experiences (Tulgan, 2000). Barb Cole-Gomolski (1998) cites a Gallup Survey showing that training is a major attraction for Gen X employees and they are more likely to stay with a company that has ongoing training for its employees.

Money is important to Gen Xers; however, they also greatly value their time off. Studies show that when asked what gives life the most meaning, 64% of workers now say leisure as opposed to 13% in 1960 (Jurkiewicz, 2000). For this reason one of the worst things a manager can do is to mismanage a Gen Xers time. They will work whatever is required to do the job, but as a rule they do not work for the sake of working.

As for Generation Y, the jury is still out. These are the young people who are just entering the work force. Applicable research is just beginning to develop. For the Generation Y, Bruce Tulgan and Dr. Carolyn Martin, address the same issue in their book *Managing Generation Y (2001)*, as Tulgan has done in his previous books and articles. Tulgan and Martin term people born from 1978 to 1984 as the Gen Yers. They describe them as the children of the Baby Boomers and the younger siblings of the Gen Xers. Gen Yers can be ascribed with “four positive characteristics: 1) confident, upbeat and full of self esteem, 2) education minded, 3) tolerant of others and 4) active in volunteerism.” (Tulgan and Martin, 2001) Though Gen Yers and Gen Xers have differences, they share many of the same characteristics. They are very independent and self reliant, they are very comfortable with new information and technology. They like teamwork; they are flexible and adapt well to change. They are both skeptical of institutions; do not automatically accept authority and they are constantly looking for opportunities.

Tuglan and Martin give fourteen suggestions for managing Gen Y. Based on the similarities between Gen Y and Gen X, these suggestions should work for the previous generation as well. The suggestions are “ 1) Provide challenging

work that really matters, 2) Balance clearly delegated assignments with freedom and flexibility, 3) Offer increasing responsibility as a reward for accomplishments, 4) Spend time getting to know staff members and their capabilities, 5) Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities, 6) Establish mentoring relationships, 7) Create a comfortable, low-stress environment, 8) Allow some flexibility in scheduling, 9) Focus on work, but be personable and have a sense of humor, 10) Balance the roles of boss and team player, 11) Treat employees as colleagues..., 12) Be respectful, and call forth respect in return, 13) Consistently provide constructive feedback, 14) Reward employees when they have done a good job” (Tulgan, 2001, 63).

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to determine what, if anything, police administrators can do to better attract quality people into the field of law enforcement, as well as retain them once they are hired. It is believed that since the values and ideas of the future workforce are changing with the entrance of younger workers, then police departments can improve their recruitment and retention efforts by following the business world and making some changes in their compensation, their management styles and their organizational structures and policies.

This study concentrated on officers under forty years old, because due to maximum age requirements at many agencies, that is the high end of the age of the officers that most effect agencies stability. Recruitment efforts in most agencies are probably aimed at a much younger age group. Once this group

was identified as the target group, a research of the literature was done about the characteristics of these generations. Though several sources were researched and used in this study, it appears that the majority of the research in the field has come from Bruce Tugan and Dr. Carolyn Martin of the Rainmaker Thinking, Inc. Many articles read referred to their research. Research was not necessarily done on police management or other topics. It is the author's intent to apply this research to police organizations in an attempt to assist agencies with practices that would make their departments more attractive to younger officers and recruits.

Findings

Today's workforce includes people from four different generations; World War II kids, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. Retiring are the younger World War II era people and the older Baby Boomers. This in turn places the seniority of the workforce with the younger Baby Boomers. Generation X is just beginning to take on management roles and Generation Y is just entering the workforce. By looking at the characteristics of the Generation X and Y workforce, as well as what motivates and discourages them, law enforcement administrators can change or structure their departments in such a way as to get the most of their employees.

Workers from Generations X and Y are very distrusting of institutions and authority. This comes from watching society's largest institutions fall as they grew up. They watched their parents being laid off from their long time jobs due to corporate downsizing. They also witnessed the weakening of the schools, the

church and even the family, as well as corruption within the government. Due to this, they do not have the sense of security from the institutions of society that other generations have had. They vote more independently, religious denominations are not as important to them, and they will change jobs or even careers if better opportunities arise. This in turn gives the perception that these employees are disloyal. It is not that they are disloyal, but that they take extra precaution to insure that they control their future, rather than trust it to someone else.

This is also why younger workers have a different view of “paying their dues”. The concept of “paying dues” comes from a trust relationship between the employer and the employee. The employer offers good wages, benefits and long time job security, while the employee offers hard work until retirement. In the eyes of the younger employees, that relationship no longer exists. Since no job is permanent, a person should go as high as he can go with an organization, learning as much as he can, in order to prepare himself for the next position. From this perspective, there is no time to “pay dues.”

As a result of their pessimism, Gen X and Gen Y workers are not as quick to respect authority. Managers have to prove themselves worthy of respect. Xers and Yers also will not perform and in most cases will not work for an abusive manager. Abusive managers have no validity in the eyes of Gen Xers and Yers, because they see those managers as having psychological issues of their own rather than issues with the employee’s work performance. They

consider abusive managers to be the same as schoolyard bullies and wife beaters. (Tulgan 2000)

People from Generation X and Y are very independent, self-confident and self-reliant. These employees ask “why” and can be the greatest “out of the box” thinkers in an organization if this talent is appreciated and not stifled. This trait comes from them being “latch key” kids, and growing up fending for themselves and solving problems on their own. This can cause problems in police departments, because of the paramilitary model which they are founded on. This is totally against the military model, which tells the officers what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. In most cases there is a manual of instruction, and there is not much room for changing. This model assumes that there is one right answer to a problem and younger workers many times see multiple solutions to problems. It is amazing how many times law enforcement agencies look for the brightest, most educated, psychologically stable recruits with the best backgrounds, to turn in to police officers, only to stop them at the door and tell them to stop thinking, do not ask why, fall into line and do things as they have always been done. This goes against everything that these younger workers learned their whole life and they resent it.

By growing up during the information or technology revolution, younger workers are very comfortable with information, technology and change. It was not a big issue for them to upgrade from DOS to Windows, or from revolvers to semi-automatic pistols. There have actually been officers who have threatened to retire over such changes. Gen Xers and Yers not only adapt well to change,

but they like it. This comfort with technology and information has helped these employees develop the skills of multi-tasking and focusing on multiple targets while selectively eliminating the facts that are not important. Xers and Yers like for their jobs to be challenging and they continually want to develop new skills. Increased responsibility and continued training work as great rewards for these younger workers.

Younger workers tend to be very flexible and thrive in a work environment of flexibility and freedom. They prefer to work at their own pace and set their own hours whenever possible. They hate to be micromanaged and prefer for their bosses to describe the desired outcome and then allow them to complete the task, holding them accountable if they fail. They work well in corporations with empowerment strategies of management.

Discussion/Conclusions

Recruitment and retention of quality officers is one of the greatest personnel problems facing police agencies today. The purpose of this study is to determine what, if anything, police administrators can do to better attract quality people into the field of law enforcement, and then retain them once they are hired. It was expected that this research would show that if police administrators would change management styles and make some organizational changes, they would be more successful in retaining quality Generation X and Generation Y officers, which is the age group of officers that are targeted for recruitment and retention.

The results of the research suggest that there are some things that police administrators can do to help their recruitment and retention efforts. First, administrators should relax the rigidity of the current military model of police department structure. It is understood, however, that by the nature of the job of law enforcement and civil service in many departments, police agencies are forced to be more rigid than most business organizations, but in most agencies there is still room for flexibility.

Administrators should also attempt to hire officers that they can trust to make decisions and take on responsibilities. Administrators can empower their officers by including them in the decision making process, explaining the big picture to them, and allowing them to take on more responsibility. If administrators will do this, younger officers will feel more a part of the organization and they will be more willing to buy into the vision and mission of the administration. Younger officers thrive when they are trusted with responsibility and have the chance to be creative in their problem solving. The concepts of community oriented policing or geographical policing fit into this goal well. Not only is it good for the community, it also suits the younger officer's preferred work habits.

Empowerment of the troops could also allow for a more horizontal rank structure, which places the higher ranking officers closer to the line officers where they can get a more accurate view of the operations of the organization. The more horizontal an organization's structure is the more efficient in communication it should be due to the fewer number of times information is

filtered on the way up and down the chain of command. Gen Xers and Yers need rapid feedback, and a horizontal organization could help with this. It is also important to keep officers informed situations within the department.

Another suggestion for administrators is to use a team approach in their organizations. Gen Xers and Yers work well in teams. Teams can produce more innovative solutions to problems, and they fit well into community or geographical policing.

A great attraction for Gen X and Y officers is training and personal growth. They consider it a benefit and they are more likely to invest in a department that invests in them. They also like to be recognized for their accomplishments. Tuition reimbursements programs are good ways to promote education and extra pay for college degrees or specialized training is a good way to show officers that their efforts to better themselves are worthwhile. The lack of funding for continuing education and education incentive programs is always a concern for police departments, especially for small departments, but it is well worth the expense and could make the department a more attractive place to work.

On the personal growth side of the coin, there are several things that can be done, one of which is to rotate personnel throughout the divisions within the departments. This helps to give officers a variety of experience which benefits them and the department as they promote into management positions by making them more versatile officers. It also offers new challenges and keeps them from becoming bored with the monotony of doing the same thing each day.

The Civil Service System is quickly becoming obsolete due to the limitations placed on administrators when hiring or promoting individuals. The positives and negatives of Civil Service Systems could be a study of its own, but there are a few points worth mentioning at this time. Civil Service Systems vary in specifics from state to state, and even some within states. The system discussed here is the Texas System outlined in the Texas Local Government code Chapter 143. For example, when an entrance test is scored, the candidates with military experience receive five extra points. This in itself is not a problem. The problem arises when a candidate with a college degree gets no more consideration than a candidate with a GED. This applies to this study because Generation X is the first generation to not grow up when the military draft was in effect. For that reason, there are fewer people with military experience and more with college degrees.

The promotion process under civil service also needs to be revised. The system takes two factors into account when determining whether a candidate is eligible for promotion; written test score and years of service with that department. A candidate for promotion receives one extra point to his written score for each year of service up to ten years. Therefore if a ten year officer scores an 80 on his exam then his score is a 90. A two year officer has to score an 89 to be promoted over this senior officer. Education level, prior experience, or leadership skill do not factor into the equation. From the research on the younger officer's view on paying dues, it is easy to see why younger officers would not see civil service as the ideal system.

Another flaw with this system is that it does not recognize experience from other agencies. In other words there is no lateral entry at any other level than beginning patrolman. In today's mobile society where both husband and wife have careers that cause the family to relocate, this system is discouraging to officers that need to relocate for one reason or another.

There are many things that police departments can do to improve their recruitment and retention rates. This research shows that one of the most valuable things is to understand the people that are being targeted and make appropriate accommodations to attract them. Law enforcement is not an easy career. Many of the tough conditions can not be avoided, but there is no reason not to make the job as enjoyable for people as possible. In times of good economy, people can be more selective with the employment positions they accept. The attitude that "those candidates should just be glad we are even considering them" will not do anything but keep administrators complaining about not being able to find or keep good officers.

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