

Best Practices Guide



International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments
Technical Assistance Program

Field Training for Today's Recruits

by Captain Margaret A. Fischer, Ph.D., J.D.

This project supported by a grant from:



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

Best Practices Guide for Field Training for Today's Recruits

*By Captain Margaret A. Fischer, Ph.D., J.D., Michigan State University Police
Department, Support Services Division Commander*

Law enforcement agencies want recruits to be well trained and enthusiastic about becoming police officers. When recruits experience training as a professional and supportive environment that focuses on safety and learning, the outcome of that training imparts both a successful transition for recruits into their new work assignments and underscores the importance and necessity of the substantial financial investment in the recruit by the local agency.

For many years, the most popular design of the Field Training Program (FTP) was patterned after a program developed in the San Jose, California, Police Department in 1971. It was developed in response to a tragic event involving a person who may have lacked the proper skills to perform his job. The program revised an earlier version of a Recruit Checklist into a four-month on-the-job training program of teaching skills for officers that included an evaluation process.

From 1972 to 1999, that early training program was modified many times to include performance evaluation and documentation, standardized task training, procedures to follow in the event the new employee does not respond to training, and, if needed, methods to terminate a failing recruit. That early model is still in place in many agencies today, but it is struggling with some newer concepts for this new generation of officers. In the San Jose model, the use of a standardized system of recruit evaluation that scores every area of performance during the course of the training day can lead to some frustration among those in the training process.

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office provided a grant to the Reno, Nevada, Police Department to develop an alternative national model for field training. The new model would utilize a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method to teach recruits using a more adult method of education. Warner (2010) describes, "PBL is a learner-centered teaching method that uses problem solving as the vehicle for learning." The new program that uses PBL is called the Police Training Officer (PTO) Program. This new method modifies the San Jose model by developing strategies between the Field Training Officer (FTO) and recruit to better address learning about challenges and problems officers face in the work environment. It focuses on community policing and problem solving principles by teaching substantive topics about policing and achieving core competencies in the recruits. It serves to ensure that academy graduates' first experience as law enforcement officers is one that reflects policing in the 21st century.

The San Jose Field Training Model and the PTO Program are the two most widely used methods to train recruits. Individuals now being hired and trained in most police agencies are primarily from the Millennial Generation, sometimes called Generation Y, and from Generation X. According to a study by Sergeant John Scott of the Port St. Lucie Police Department (2010), he found that "the PTO program is best suited to generation X and generation Y employees. To retain younger officers, an agency must be prepared to address the specific learning styles of these generations." Today's recruits appear to respond uniquely to factors in the design of current training programs due to their individual and generational characteristics.

In an effort to enhance positive training outcomes, generational issues are discussed in this article along with ways to effectively address them during the training experience.

History of Generation X and the Millennial Generation

Generation X is a term used to refer to people born between 1963 and 1981 and was first coined in the 1990's by Douglas Coupland. By 1993, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *Fortune* were all using the term Generation X (Gen X) to refer to the generation that followed the Baby Boomers, the generation born between 1946 and 1960. Although the numbers of Gen Xers entering law enforcement is waning, more of these individuals are now in the upper ranks of many police agencies. Many events have influenced this generation, including:

- ◆ The transformation of the family unit
- ◆ The AIDS epidemic
- ◆ The war on drugs and the implications of drug use at early ages
- ◆ Increased violence in society
- ◆ Threats of nuclear war
- ◆ Environmental decay
- ◆ Rapid advances in technology and communication

These issues and others have shaped the views that Gen X-ers now possess just as each generation before it was affected by the events of their time. Most literature on the development of Generation X values and perceptions include **four common themes**:

- ◆ a lack of belonging
- ◆ a need to learn rapidly
- ◆ a desire to be an entrepreneur
- ◆ a lack of security in most areas of their lives

Generation Y is the generation that followed Gen X, and now is more often called the Millennial Generation (or Millennials). There is some controversy surrounding the years Millennials were born, but Strauss and Howe (2000) were the first to coin the term and believe the birth years are between 1981-2000. Some studies have referred to this generation that follows Gen X as the "Net Generation" to refer to those born between 1977-1997 (Leung, 2013). For ease of the discussion, the term Millennials is used to refer to the group after Gen X. Influential events that occurred during those years include:

- ◆ Fall of the Berlin Wall
- ◆ Persian Gulf War
- ◆ Rise of Al Qaeda and groups protesting American values
- ◆ Dramatic changes in the U.S. economy
- ◆ Rapid use of the internet and technology in daily life activity
- ◆ Rise of social media as a dominant form of communication

The Millennials have common traits that differ from Gen X (Roberts, Newman & Schwartzstein, 2012), largely attributed to the rapid advancement of technology and social media. The common themes for the Millennials focus on:

- ◆ more need to be involved in decisions made
- ◆ tolerance
- ◆ entitlement
- ◆ narcissism/self-interest
- ◆ detachment from institutions
- ◆ participation is enough to be rewarded
- ◆ need social connectedness

If recruitment and retention of new police officers is to be successful, it is important for law enforcement to know how all of these themes influence the Field Training Program (FTP) experience for Generation X and Millennial recruits.

The FTP/PTO impact on Generation X and Millennial Recruits

Law enforcement has a huge investment in assuring positive training outcomes for recruits that both enhance learning and support officer and community safety. The FTP is an effort to teach the recruit how to translate the training and preparation from their academy experience into actual job performance. Many good trainers will recognize differences between individuals and make the needed adjustments to support successful training outcomes for the individual and the agencies that hire them. This strategy is imperative if we are to successfully recruit, train, and retain Generation X recruits.

The training impact for millennial recruits is slightly different than for Gen X recruits. One major difference noted in the training of medical personnel found that Millennials need guidance and focus in their learning. That is due to Millennials fallback position to “Google” the answer and sometimes getting it wrong (Roberts, *et al.*, 2012). It is important for an agency to examine the generations that recruits identify with and provide their trainers additional skills to prepare them to recognize differences and make changes. Because some of our department supervisors are Gen X, that also impacts how Gen X translates their own generational differences to the Millennials arriving as new recruits.

1. **Scoring and Evaluation:** The presence of low training performance scores is extremely troublesome to Generation X recruits and threatens their feeling of belonging and security. They are a generation that has been inundated with numbers to identify who they are or to assign their station in life. The negative impact of any low performance scoring causes much consternation to Gen Xers. Gen Xers sometimes lack a strong sense of security, in part because of growing up in a hero-worshipping environment without tolerance for second-best and also for having watched parents get down-sized by jobs they felt were secure. When a Gen X recruit sees a low evaluation score, it strongly influences the vision of their future in the organization. If they are to be successful, it is important for them to maintain a secure environment.

Millennials are not as troubled by scoring or evaluation, because they bring with themselves a strong sense of entitlement and feel that by participating in the training they have done enough. The Millennial Generation is less concerned with numbers because in their minds the focus is on them and not what they are or are not doing. For a Millennial to be successful in training, they need to be more involved in the decisions made so the new PTO style training is keenly suited to their own learning style.

2. **Providing Feedback:** Another important issue is the timeliness of the feedback that recruits receive in the FTP or in PTO programs. Having grown up with computers, Generation X and Millennial recruits are extremely comfortable with technology and depend on that technology to provide them with feedback. The interpretation is that feedback is instantaneous, similarly an answer to a question is merely using a phone or computer to “google” the answer. This need for timeliness in the feedback loop is indicative of their experience with access to computer-generated information as well as their need for security.

Millennial recruits are totally comfortable with technology and use that information as feedback. Millennial recruits demand instantaneous feedback and seek answers using a search engine, such as Google. Both generations examined here require timely feedback in their training program.

3. **Supplying Innovation:** Many Gen Xers desire to be entrepreneurs and do not like to be micromanaged. Much of the FTP experience emphasizes the rigidity of following written guidelines and

includes personalized and close supervision as they learn. In PTO based training programs, we encourage innovation or problem solving as a way to learn the job. Still, it is important to note that Generation X recruits typically want to be involved in program design and implementation as well as innovative problem-solving. Don't be surprised if they volunteer ways to improve a training exercise.

The Millennials crave innovation, creativity and are driven to their own self-interest. Law enforcement leaders managing this generation must keep themselves knowledgeable in the current trends for managing a police officer's work environment; and take time to listen to suggestions provided. Millennials obtain and share information on social media sites as a way to feed that innovation (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman, & Campbell, 2012). While not all ideas should be acted upon, the Millennials are very creative and innovative.

4. **Critiquing Performance:** For Gen X, the most effective way to provide critical evaluation of performance is within a context that is both positive and negative. Generation X needs to sense that they belong and are appreciated. Performance criticism that is negative and not constructive shuts that need down. For the safety of the recruit, fellow officers and the community they serve, it is extremely important to evaluate and correct sub-standard performance in the FTP or PTO. Utilizing an evaluation process that both educates the trainer to give feedback in the most effective manner and that supports a positive learning environment for recruits, can improve positive training outcomes for Generation X employees in training.

As mentioned in the feedback theme, Millennials demonstrate a tendency toward self-interest and are less interested in power. That makes it more difficult to criticize their work because those officers are not focused on punishment/reward aspect. When you assess the Millennials performance, it is imperative that you are consistent, fair and reassuring. A Millennial will quickly find when you are treating others differently and use that against your trainers (Roberts, *et al*, 2012).

5. **Using a Strengths-Based Learning Model:** Trainers need to find ways to provide Gen X with opportunities to demonstrate resourcefulness and prove themselves as being innovative. Proper reward and timeliness of feedback is critical to the success of training Gen X recruits. Performance criticism and instruction must also include individual achievement and improvement. Emphasize positive achievement while correcting deficient behavior.

Trainers should provide Millennials with the ability to be creative, which feeds the recruit's interest in themselves. The new PTO program blends this strengths-based learning model by engaging the recruit in developing their own learning model. That approach is excellent for Millennials, because it emphasizes positive achievement while also remedying deficient behavior.

6. **Selecting the Right Trainer:** Proper selection and training of the Field Training Officer (FTO) is paramount to the success of the FTP, and similarly important in the Police Training Officer program. This training should include enhancement of interpersonal and communication skills as well as differential learning techniques. This training will help the FTO to engage effectively with Gen X employees in the FTP/PTO and augment recruitment and retention efforts simultaneously. Organizational loyalty will grow as employees feel anchored to the organization that shows them respect and consideration. In many agencies, your FTO's are also Gen X so use their suggestions for the recruit as coming from someone who knows.

For Millennial recruits, they are less confident and self-assured than previous generations. Many of these officers were raised with "helicopter" parents that were always around and helping them navigate the terrain. As a trainer, it is important that you recognize the recruit may try to force you to make the decisions or find the solutions. In addition, if there is not a quick answer that can be found on the internet or similar technology; the recruit will lose interest and patience. Selection of a trainer that holds skills in helping the recruit to mature into the job is critical.

7. **Measuring Program Effectiveness.** The Chief or Field Training Program Coordinator should also employ a trainer evaluation that models and reinforces the strengths-based model intended for new officers. Measuring the effectiveness of the FTP/PTO and your trainers will help identify ways to correct deficiencies in the program and the trainers. Proper training and evaluation of your trainer's may remedy most management problems encountered with Gen X.

The Chief must evaluate the program's overall effectiveness on a number of factors: retention of employees, number of persons being placed on Performance Improvement Plans (PIP), attrition rates for trainers, and overall success in the probationary period for the new officers. In addition, the person that leads the training department in the agency should monitor Gen X and Millennial recruits closely for these signs of stress, anxiety, or fear.

8. **Applying Adult Learning Theory to All Agency Instruction.** Adult Learning Theory applications that employ multiple layers of learning styles are the most effective approach to use with Gen X. This is the foundation of the PTO program and has been receiving praise in law enforcement. Most Gen X individuals learn through a complex set of styles that focus on problem solving and the use of technology.

Application of the Adult Learning Theory with all recruits, regardless of generation, is critical. If your agency is still only focusing on the Field Training Program and have not sought concepts from the Police Training Officer program; you are missing on some important strengths that can be applied. Adult Learning Theory using problem-based tactics are very beneficial to Gen X and Millennial recruits to feed their innovation and self-interest needs.

9. **Combining numerical evaluation with recognition of personal achievement.** The basic premise of field training is to evaluate job skills and performance by assigning numerical scores to each task. When used alone, this evaluation style appears arbitrary to the Gen X recruit and conflicts with their need for positive feedback. PTO programs focus on more verbal and written feedback to provide to the trainee and that has reduced this problem with Gen X officers. A useful evaluation technique to use in this case is to find creative ways to downplay the significance of the actual numerical scores while emphasizing the actual skills learned. This technique combines critical evaluation and recognition of personal achievement and it is interpreted by this generation in a more positive context. Finding ways to reinforce and reward positive behavior in a non-numerical way will produce more positive outcomes with this generation.

Training is designed to evaluate recruit performance and there are many reasons to use a numerical system to do so, i.e., ease of computations, visual depictions of decline/rise, easy to produce with a rubric, etc. However, the issue with numerical scores the recruit may not understand his worth within the organization. As mentioned, self-interest and narcissism are strong characteristics of the Millennial and by reducing those aspects to a score the recruit may not understand what is needed to improve. Weaving into the numerical evaluation some written and verbal context; or finding a system that is not focused on numbers is important for Millennials.

10. **Implementing a Mentoring Program.** A final recommendation to address many of the issues involving the four themes of Generation X, with special application to security and belonging is to implement a mentoring program. Proper peer mentoring relationships provide another tool to help Gen X survive and thrive in the FTP and in the PTO. Providing a mentoring relationship to address the social aspects of the training program and the recruits' sense of alienation and fear will provide your FTO's more time to spend in the actual work of training.

As mentioned for Gen X, a formalized mentoring program is critical to the success of these newer generation recruits. Those officers come with their own unique challenges in fitting into the police culture. Mentors that can help the Millennial feel a sense of belonging and guide them to resources that can enhance the training program. It is important to remember that with a formalized mentoring program, do not use your training officers as mentors. Those are two distinct functions and the results

being sought are different: trainers seek to weed out those not prepared for the job and mentors find creative solutions to make all recruits fit into the organization.

Gen Xers are technologically oriented and may find ways to problem-solve through the use of existing technology. The Millennials are even savvier in using technology to identify, learn and problem-solve situations. As a rule, these individuals are eager to learn and attempt to do so at a very rapid pace with emphasis on innovation and individual accomplishment. An analyst interviewed by Bruce Tulgan for his book *Managing Generation X* described his supervision preference in this way, “the kind of manager I like is the one who gives me an assignment and then leaves me alone to work on it on my own.” The Millennials would simply add to that paradigm, “and provide me access to high-speed technology and social media so I stay connected.” To ensure successful field training outcomes with these two generations, training strategies ought to include recognition of individual accomplishment within the context of overall team success and the role technology plays in their learning.

You may solve many of the challenges related to training the new generational employees by addressing the themes discussed for Generation X and Millennial officers. It is important that in your training environment you find ways to utilize successful models of mentoring in police organizations, identify helpful technology solutions, be well-versed in social media, and establish ways to provide new employees with other tools to succeed.

Bibliography

Fritts, P.J. (1998). *The New Managerial Mentor*, (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

Gentile, B., Twenge, J.M., Freeman, E.C., and Campbell, W.K. (2012). The Effect of Social Networking Websites on Positive Self-Views: An experimental investigation, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, pp. 1929-1933.

Haider, J.T. Haider (1990). *Field Training Police Recruits: Developing, Improving, and Operating a Field Training Program*, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Leung, Louis, (2013). Generational Differences in Content Generation in Social Media: The roles of the gratifications sought and of narcissism. *Computers in Human Behaviors* 29, pp. 997-1006.

Meehan, M. (2001). Performance Evaluations of Field Training Officers, *Police Chief*, pp. 210-213.

Police Training Officer Program, Retrieved from <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=461> on August 31, 2015.

PTO: An overview and introduction (2004). *Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice* retrieved from <http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0150-pub.pdf> on August 31, 2015.

Roberts, D.H., Newman, L. R., and Schwartzstein, R.M. (2012) Twelve Tips for Facilitating Millennials' Learning. *Medical Teacher*, 34(4), pp. 274-278.

Scott, J. (November 2010). Survey: The Status of Field Training, *The Police Chief*, 77, p. 66.

Strauss, W. and Howe, N. (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York, NY: Vintage Original.

Tulgan, B. (1996). *Managing Generation X: How to Bring Out the Best in Young Talent*. Santa Monica, CA: Merrit Publishing.

Unsinger, P.C. and More, H.W. (1990). *Criminal Justice Induction Training: The Field Training Concept*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Warners, R.H. (November 2010). The Field Training Experience: Perspectives of Field Training Officers and Trainees, *The Police Chief*, 77, pp. 58-64.

Whitehead, R. (May 2015). Is it Time to Rethink our Field Training Officer Program? *International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA) Journal* 5(1).

About the Author

Captain Margaret A. Fischer successfully implemented a Mentoring Program that meshes with the FTP to create new solutions to training problems. It was first implemented in 2000, patterned after a model created in the Lansing Police Department, Lansing, Michigan by then Captain Julie Williams. Our Mentoring Program was so successful that it has led to informal mentoring, which does not require formal mentor training. From 2008-2014, my department stopped offering a formal mentor program and reinvigorated the program last year. In the last seven years approximately 30% of new officers have been gained from our civilian workforce. We currently have 10 trained mentors that work with 4 sworn members. It continues to be a very successful tool to hire new members from our cadet ranks. Their progress in the FTP is nothing short of amazing, with work performed at each step in excess of that required.