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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The Millennial Generation is categorically different from its predecessors. They will also occupy over fifty percent of the workforce within the next 10 years. The next generation of military leaders is also ideally adapted to thrive in the future operating environment. However, Millennials no longer approach their professions in the manner that the current military career path and leadership model support. They expect more involvement in their organizations and more attention from their leaders. To fully capitalize on this generation's potential, the Marine Corps should re-evaluate its approach to leadership. The Servant-Leader Model offers a viable approach to developing its next generation of leaders. This paper recommends several ways in which the Marine Corps can adapt to achieve this: 1) 360 degree performance reviews, 2) experimentation with flattened leadership structures focused on relationships and knowledge-sharing, and 3) implementing Servant-Leader training in Professional Military Education.					
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# **FUTURE WAR PAPER**

## ***Harnessing the Power of the Millennial Generation Through Institutional Servant Leadership***

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES**

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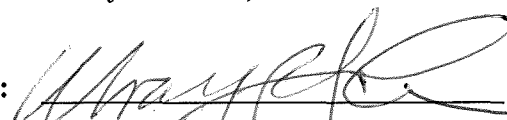

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*“The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise.”*

- Socrates

*“The relationship between officers and men should in no sense be that of superior and inferior, nor that of master and servant, but rather that of teacher and scholar. In fact, it should partake of the nature of the relationship between father and son.”*

- Gen. John A. Lejeune

Self-absorbed. Scornful of authority. Overly sensitive to criticism. These are ways in which the Millennial Generation has been described. Yet they are also described as team-players, optimists and socially aware. This generation, born between 1982 and 2000, is the youngest generation in the workplace and military. Approximately 70% of all active duty Marine officers and 93% of all active duty enlisted Marines are within this generational cohort.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, it will form nearly 46 percent of the overall workforce by the year 2020.<sup>2</sup> And it is the generation that will fight the United States' next war. The Millennial Generation is also much larger than its preceding generation, Generation X. As a result, they will occupy a larger and more senior portion of the workforce more quickly than their predecessors. They are the future of work. Yet, many of the processes, procedures, and leadership practices in the current workplace were designed for the preceding three generations.<sup>3</sup> Millennials, as a generation, have a categorically different worldview or paradigm than preceding generations, with both positive and negative attributes. The future operating environment is ideally suited to the positive traits of Millennials. The challenge to the Marine Corps is to dovetail these qualities effectively with an organizational and leadership structure to meet the challenges of future warfare. In short, if they are to be successful, Millennials require a fresh and adaptive approach to their development. This does not equate to coddling the newest members of the military--far from it. In fact, Millennials require a firm yet understanding leader who is willing to listen to his subordinates in ways that he himself is unaccustomed. Therefore, the current generation of

military leaders must evolve their leadership style as well as the existing organizational structure to maximize the potential of this next cohort of warfighters. The Servant Leader Model may provide the necessary framework for a new approach in designing Marine Corps structure and leadership training.

To begin, it is helpful to determine what constitutes a generation:

“A generation can be defined as a country’s subculture that reflects the prevalent values of a historical period determined by significant cultural, political, and economic developments....The members of a generational subculture rely on a set of shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and logical processes, which provide the framework used by people within the group to think, act, reason, process information, socialize, work, organize, and lead. Generational identity, described in terms of the subculture’s values, beliefs, understandings, perceptions, orientations, and behaviors, becomes very important as its members gain access to positions of leadership in organizations.”<sup>4</sup>

A generation, therefore, is bound by similar experiences, histories and significant events that occur during their lifetime. It is also related to birth year because, while many generations can experience the same event (say a world war), that generation’s chronological age at the time of the event will cause it to internalize the event’s meaning in a potentially different manner than preceding generations.

Who are these millennials? What defines them as a generation?

“Most of the emerging literature about Millennials’ learning and their incorporation in the workplace and in society accepts the generalized idea that they were brought up as a special group, receiving enormous care and attention from their parents, making them very self-confident, empowered, and optimistic to undertake major personal projects....They were trained at school to participate in teams, and for the most part grew up immersed in technology without authority figures controlling their access to information...In general, it is accepted that this cohort reached adulthood around the year 2000, which means that they are well into the workforce, or finishing graduate school and headed toward important roles in business, academia, the health professions and leadership positions in other fields.”<sup>5</sup>

Generation Y (another appellation for Millennials) is technologically astute. They have come of age in the digital world. In many ways, both matured together.<sup>6</sup> They are what Prensky termed “digital natives,” positing that they have a different way of thinking and processing information.<sup>7</sup> “Gen Yers [have] grown up with technology and are particularly skilled at picking up information quickly through electronic media. Technology is at the center of their personal and professional lives.”<sup>8</sup> Technology is an integral part of Millennials’ daily and routines and, indeed, their existences. Whether documenting their accomplishments on Facebook, coordinating meetings via text messages, or leveraging the internet to quickly develop solutions to problems, Millennials easily incorporate digital technology into everything they do. They are comfortable with multiple varieties of technology and their simultaneous employment. Millennials are a generation of multi-taskers who can have multiple applications open on their computers while simultaneously having a conversation and listening to music (on a digital medium, of course). This results in Generation Y being much more knowledgeable and proficient when it comes to existing technology.

Millennials expect a great deal from their work environment. In contrast to preceding generations, Millennials have a different attitude towards work and their workplaces. They want an environment that provides freedom for experimentation. Millennials desire to work in an organization that offers opportunities to take the initiative and encourages “idea generation” and innovation. They likewise desire working where their efforts are amply appreciated, rewarded, and recognized. Millennials are attracted to fairness and transparency in their organizations.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, they want (arguably need) their jobs to be both profitable *and* rewarding. A good paycheck and benefits are not the indicators of a good job to Millennials. Finally, Generation Y expects to have multiple careers in one lifetime.

In addition to their attitudes towards the workplace, Millennials have a different view of society and their role therein than the previous generations. They are “civic-minded, morally grounded and selfless.”<sup>10</sup> They view the world more optimistically. Millennials have an innate desire for coaching and need to trust their superiors. They are socially conscious, aware of their own vast numbers, and their impact on the environment.<sup>11</sup> In that regard, Generation Y is more globally cognizant than any generation before them, largely due to the internet. They are instantly aware of events around the world and feel connected to them. Millennials’ “attitudes toward diversity...are a bit like their feel for technology. They take it for granted and are comfortable being on the cutting edge.”<sup>12</sup>

With this view of the world, Millennials have high expectations of their leadership. They no longer see clearly defined lines between superior and subordinate. With their vast access to information at a moment’s notice they do not view managers as masters of knowledge. They expect open and honest communication where their ideas have equal weight. They want to be part of the decision-making process. Generation Y expects their leadership to motivate and encourage them to contribute without fear of being criticized. Raised in a culture of soccer games, ballet lessons, and hands-on parental supervision, Millennials seek continuous coaching and feedback from their leadership. An annual or semi-annual fitness report counseling session will not suffice. Moreover, they expect the feedback to come in the form of an identifiable, tangible metric. They require “clear and consistent job assessment criteria.”<sup>13</sup>

It is an aphorism in the military that our most important resource is our people. To follow this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, then, we must invest our efforts most heavily in accessing, training, developing, and retaining this resource. Millennials, like their predecessors, are in need of good leadership in order to maximize their potential. The nature of

leadership has not changed, but its character must evolve in order to positively influence this generation and prepare them to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare.

Fortunately, this newest generation of military members is ideally suited to the coming challenges of the near-term security environment. The future operating environment is characterized by volatility, global interconnectedness, and nebulous demarcations between nations, state and non-state actors, and the definition of warfare. The growth industry of cyberspace is but one example where different “domains” exist and interact simultaneously. By the year 2025 the global population will increase by some 1.2 billion people and the majority will live in urban locations. The vast majority will also be in the developing world. Notably, this urbanization, coupled with competition for resources in the Middle East, Africa, and South Central Asia, will undoubtedly result in increased instability and put considerable stress on existing governments and their ability to cope.<sup>14</sup> Future threats to global and regional security will probably require the United States to intervene in these regions in order to secure and advance American national interests. Necessarily, military operations in this environment will span the range of military operations (ROMO).

The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2014 corroborates this assessment, stating: “the international security environment remains uncertain and complicated. The United States will likely face a broad array of threats and opportunities and must prepare to address both effectively in the coming years.” Moreover, “shifting centers of gravity are empowering smaller countries and non-state actors on the international stage. Global connections are multiplying and deepening, resulting in greater interaction between states, non-state entities, and private citizens.”<sup>15</sup> Generation Y, by virtue of its innate global outlook, is poised to operate in this type of environment.

To restate the fundamental proposition of this essay, Millennials require a different organizational structure and leadership approach than preceding generations. Today, the average business or workplace is not organized to integrate the different generations which it employs. There is a one-size-fits-all approach that does not take into account generational variations. Furthermore, the more closely an organization clings to its traditional way of doing business, the harder it will be to achieve this generational integration.<sup>16</sup> In that regard, there are four primary management skills required by those who will lead millennials: flexibility, an ability to challenge them continuously, demonstrated organizational interest in their participation, and a willingness to look at organizational issues in a newer and different light.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Marine Corps must meet this challenge with a fresh perspective and embrace what makes the Millennial generation potentially the next greatest generation.

What does this new approach to leadership look like? The hierarchical military model currently in place does not capitalize on millennials' strengths and may inadvertently accentuate their weaknesses. Millennials thrive in a technologically advanced, collaborative environment where the senior/subordinate relationship is relatively flat. For this generation there is little sense in requiring multiple levels of a chain of command if the decision-making authority rests three or four levels above them. Whether seeking a resolution to a personal situation or making their ideas known and acting on them, Millennials perceive no obstacle to simply walking up to the appropriate authority and making their case.

Recent research has attempted to quantify the organizational and individual attributes necessary for success in leading the workforce's youngest generation. It has offered a set of Millennial behaviors and values that include:

“[a] multitasking work style, experiential learning, and a collaborative attitude, motivation obtained from reinforcement, authority figures earning trust and respect, a preference for decentralized, non-hierarchical structures, and democratic and inclusive access to information.”<sup>18</sup>

These values suggest that Millennials will become frustrated by organizations with top-down chains of command and structures. Further they imply that “a more holistic approach that takes into account technology, values, and behavior” is necessary in leading this generation.<sup>19</sup> In short, Generation Y sees their ideal work environment as more collaborative, flat and unencumbered by traditional organizational hierarchies.

“With 95% of the traditionalist generation now retired from the workforce, the...up and coming millennial generation will bring a fresh sense of leadership and followership that is more participatory and dynamic. Applying traditional leadership assumptions of the leader: as the *nucleus*, the pre-eminence of a *few people*; the central expression of the power; the central focus of activity; a position of *high potential*; the *primary agent*; and a person one pace ahead of the group lessens the potential for expansion of spontaneous and dynamic leader and follower roles by the next generation.”<sup>20</sup> Fundamentally, organizations that focus on the individual leader and his role as the supreme authority are out of touch with Millennials. As the older generation of workers retires, Millennials taking their place will see themselves as co-equal with their leadership in terms of power if not authority. The key element of this outlook is knowledge as an instrument of power. They do not see the leader as the sole keeper of knowledge (their digital world virtually guarantees they will obtain information at least as fast as their superiors), but that the leader’s decision to share that knowledge and strategic vision is a key component of the senior/subordinate relationship.

Unfortunately, the current military hierarchical organization is founded upon the Industrial-Era model prevalent throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This model focused on elements of predictability, stability, and compliance.<sup>21</sup> In this type of organization, employee loyalty, adherence to organizational norms, and “punching a timecard” through diligence were the paths to upward mobility. You had to “wait your turn” in order to continue to move up within the organization. The acquisition and dissemination of knowledge was the purview of the echelons of command. The higher on the ladder you were, the more you knew about the organization’s direction and intent. This is no longer the case and Millennials refuse to be part of organizations that don’t share “corporate” knowledge.

With all of the above in mind, the institutional adoption of the Servant Leader Model offers an exciting approach to engaging and developing the Millennial Generation. It capitalizes on the leadership needs of this cohort while unifying their efforts towards the goals of the organization—in this case the Marine Corps. In servant leadership, the leader-follower relationship is paramount. Servant-Leaders are primarily concerned with their followers and seek to build meaningful relationships with them. In doing so, servant leadership has a positive effect on “both job performance and commitment to the organization.”<sup>22</sup> Fundamentally, the Servant Leader Model places primary emphasis on the idea that leadership, at the institutional and individual levels, is about service first: that is, every member of the organization is a servant of his and her fellows, regardless of rank. More importantly, through this approach, leaders within the organization guide their subordinates to achieving their fullest potential and in doing so, elevate their organizational contribution.

The U.S. Navy has experimented with servant leadership comparing and contrasting it to the type of “situational leadership” that became popular in the 1980s and 1990s. The situational

leadership model involves adapting one's leadership style to different circumstances and people. However, the situational leadership model has several weaknesses. Perhaps most importantly, it does not easily transition between individual and group requirements, nor does it create the type of personalized attention that millennials thrive upon.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Ron Prindle, Assistant Professor of Communications at Gonzaga University, argues that the servant leadership model provides an alternative that corrects this gap. According to Prindle, the servant leadership model is based on the idea that effective leadership exists in service to followers: "The approach emphasizes ethical modeling, employee personal growth, teamwork, collaboration, caring behavior and group decision-making."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the leader-follower relationship is predicated upon the leader's being able to demonstrate that he cares about his subordinates before he cares about anything else. It is embodied in the notion that taking care of your Marines ensures they will take care of the mission.

The principles of the Servant Leader Model have existed for some time.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, a military example from the past is that of Evans Carlson and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Raider Battalion during World War II. Carlson's "Gung Ho" leadership philosophy and egalitarian approach to the training, organizing, and employing of his unit was a departure from the leadership style espoused by the Marine Corps at that time. And yet he successfully implemented the Servant Leader Model within a combat context. During their brief history, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion operated as a light infantry force employing guerrilla warfare conducting raids for long periods of time behind enemy lines.<sup>26</sup> Their operations required speed, surprise, and, most importantly, a need for adaptive and flexible leadership at every level.

Carlson developed four distinct approaches to building his force. First, he personally interviewed each applicant, ensuring that only quality individuals with the right personality were

admitted to the unit. Second, he developed an egalitarian approach to training, involving even the most junior member of the battalion in discussions and weekly talks. Carlson openly encouraged discourse and disagreement, regardless of rank. Third, Carlson made a specific point of providing the rationale and purpose behind everything the unit was doing. Finally, Carlson implemented all of this through tough, unyielding discipline.<sup>27</sup>

Carlson's leadership style was very much in keeping with what the Millennial Generation seeks. First, by personally interviewing each applicant, Carlson was instantly developing the close senior/subordinate relationship Millennials require to achieve organizational "buy-in." Second, the egalitarian nature of the training and flattened structure created a "first among equals" mentality and is in clear consonance with Generation Y's collaborative outlook where everyone's ideas have merit and equal weight. Third, the deliberate focus on the purpose behind every assigned task provided the context and rationale so critical to Millennials' success and enthusiasm. Finally, tough discipline provided the structure that Millennials need, being accustomed to organized and scheduled activities with clear standards of success and failure.

It is important to note that the time-honored attributes of leadership dovetail nicely with the Servant Leader Model. However, a National Defense University study assessing servant leadership attributes uncovered a somewhat disturbing trend. Although the officers surveyed scored high in possessing these attributes, they also scored high in negative attributes of pride and abuse of power. Most worrisome, the Marine Corps participants scored abnormally high on these negative traits.<sup>28</sup> There is a conflicting message in this data. On the one hand they suggest that military leaders perceive humility, cooperation, and genuine empathy for their subordinates as positive. On the other hand, these positive traits are offset by ego and positional authority. In

other words, when interacting at the individual level, Marine Corps leaders can and often do embody servant leadership qualities but these ideals are not manifested at the institutional level.

In order to effectively enact servant leadership at the institutional level, the Marine Corps must do four things. First, the Corps should implement 360-degree performance reviews as part of the overall evaluation system. Second, it must create flexible career paths and options. Third, the Corps should experiment with innovative ways to flatten structures and processes in order to develop a more collaborative environment that capitalizes on a digitized workforce. Finally, the Marine Corps must institutionalize the Servant Leader Model in its formal schooling methodology.

The idea of 360-degree reviews resonates with Millennial service members. In short, the Millennial Generation sees it as a valuable tool for assessing performance. Such a tool can also prove useful in making organization-wide decisions about the unit effectiveness. Rather than focusing on the individual, the whole organization is assessed at the same time providing Generation Y the service-level voice it needs to buy-in to the organization. All of this presupposes honest feedback without risk to their career progression. Again, this resonates with the schema of Millennials who desire feedback and room to grow.<sup>29</sup>

The career paths available to service members (enlisted and officer) currently follow prescriptive and narrow paths, two qualities antithetical to the Millennial worldview and potentially prime factors for their seeking employment elsewhere. And because the military grows its leadership from within its own ranks (as opposed to bringing in mid- and senior-level management), when talented Millennials leave for different careers, the service loses that experience as well. Therefore, the Marine Corps must develop multiple career paths and

opportunities for Generation Y. Failing to do so will result in the loss of the military's human capital.

The Marine Corps must at least experiment with flattened organizational structures that focus on collaboration. The distance between idea generation and decision-making must be shortened and must allow for the free exchange of ideas. One example from the business world is the internet-retailer Zappos' adoption of the "Holacratic" organizational structure. In short, Zappos has done away entirely with hierarchies, managers, and structures instead focusing on roles and responsibilities for each problem set encountered rather than on rigid job descriptions.<sup>30</sup> While there are obvious problems with wholesale adoption of this model for the Marine Corps, there are striking similarities to the approach employed by Evans Carlson. Experimentation focused on the individual rather than the architecture could lead to more efficient and workforce compatible structures without sacrificing authority, responsibility, and effective decision-making.

In the end, the Marine Corps should adopt the Servant Leader Model as its leadership training standard within its professional military education system at all levels. Service-wide implementation of the Servant Leader philosophy will encourage servant leadership from the ground up, especially when linked to simultaneous reforms in promotion and evaluation. The institutional implementation of this model, tailored to Generation Y from the moment they enter the service and throughout their careers, will require service-level change. But this change is necessary to effectively motivate this unique generation to successfully fight in the future.

In closing, the Marine Corps must address how to lead Generation Y service members. They are rapidly climbing into positions of impact and authority that will fundamentally affect

the way the Corps fights in the future. As this essay has demonstrated, their worldview is categorically different from that of their predecessors. Given as such, the traditional approach to leader/subordinate relationships and the organizational framework that supports it must change. The Servant Leader Model offers an alternative approach that capitalizes on the strengths of Generation Y. It is a model founded upon the principles of interpersonal trust, authenticity, and service while maintaining the primacy of the military mission. A start would be to implement 360-degree performance reviews. From there the Corps can experiment with flattened organizational structures focused on relationships and knowledge-sharing. The Servant Leader Model should be explored in PME now. By all accounts, Millennials thrive in dynamic, multi-dimensional, networked, and high speed environments. They do not see clear distinctions between different domains, social hierarchies, or professional boundaries. This makes them ideally postured to operate in the future international security environment. They will win (or lose) the wars of the future. The question is, will the Marine Corps take the steps necessary to enable them to do so?

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<sup>1</sup> United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Concepts and Programs Almanac, <https://marinecorpsconceptsandprograms.com/almanacs/active-duty-officer/age-distribution> (Active Duty Officer Age Distribution; accessed February 14, 2016); United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Concepts and Programs Almanac, <https://marinecorpsconceptsandprograms.com/almanacs/active-duty-enlisted/age-distribution> (Active Duty Enlisted Age Distribution; accessed February 14, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Brack, *Maximizing Millennials in the Workplace*, (UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School. UNC Executive Development, 2012), 2. <http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/executive-development/custom-programs/~media/DF1C11C056874DDA8097271A1ED48662.ashx> [accessed April 11, 2016].

<sup>3</sup> Buddy Hobart and Bert Sendek, *Generation Y Now: Millennials and the Evolution of Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Janis Branagan Balda and Fernando Mora, "Adapting Leadership Theory and Practice for the Networked Millennial Generation," *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 5, no. 3 (2011): 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> David A. Burnstein, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 52-53.

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<sup>8</sup> Hobart and Sendek, *Generation Y Now*, 231.

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- <sup>14</sup> United States Army and United States Marine Corps, *FM-3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 Ch1 Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: GPO, 2014), 2-1.
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- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>18</sup> Balda and Mora, "Adapting Leadership Theory," 16.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Darlene Andert, "Alternating Leadership as a Proactive Organizational Intervention: Addressing the Needs of the Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials," *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 8, no. 4 (2011): 78. <http://www.na-businesspress.com/JLAE/Andert84Web.pdf> [accessed April 11, 2016].
- <sup>21</sup> Bhandakar, et al, *Millennials and the Workplace*, 204.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert, C. Liden, Sandy J. Wayne, Hao Zhao, and David Henderson, "Servant Leadership: Development of a Multidimensional Measure and Multi-level Assessment," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19 (April 2008), 174.  
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- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> See, for example, Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant leadership: A journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (New York: Paulist Press., 2002), 27. Greenleaf described servant leadership as, "servant first...It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." According to Greenleaf, true servant leaders put others' needs before their own, and they "make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served"
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