

LEADING GENERATION Y

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The Army's ranks at the junior grades are filled with a new generation. Regardless of their initial motivation to serve, the Army must adapt its culture, training and leadership to accommodate an emerging new generational workforce – Generation Y. Adapting to Generation Y will ensure that the Army continues to recruit, retain and develop its rising forces to “own” the Army of the future.

Whether referred to as the Millennial Generation, Generation Y or the Next Generation, the Army needs to consider the gap between Boomers, Generation X and the Soldiers that fill our junior ranks. Today enlisting new recruits and the retention of quality mid-grade Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Soldiers is key to the continued success of our nation's Army. It is important that the Army study the differences and needs of its newest Soldiers – Generation Y.

LEADING GENERATION Y

Introduction

“What keeps me awake at night is what this all-volunteer force will look like in 2007.”¹ General Richard A. Cody, the Army Vice Chief of Staff voiced his concern to reporters in March of 2005. When queried at the U.S. Army War College some 2 years later about what keeps him awake, the answer did not change - it was once again the “health of the all volunteer force.” Since September 11, 2001, the Army’s all volunteer force has been in a protracted war spanning two fronts and requiring multiple rotational deployments. The Army’s ranks at the junior grades are filled with a new generation and regardless of their initial motivation to serve, the Army must adjust its culture, training and leadership to accommodate an emerging new generational workforce – Generation Y. Adapting to Generation Y will ensure that the Army continues to recruit, retain and develop its rising force to “own” the Army of the future.

Whether referred to as the Millennial Generation, Generation Y or the Next Generation², the Army needs to consider the gap between Boomers, Generation X and the soldiers that fill our junior ranks today. Today enlisting new recruits and the retention of quality mid-grade Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Soldiers is key to the continued success of the U.S. Army. The Army should study the differences and needs of its workforce that began to enter the ranks as early as 1996 and will continue entering until 2018.

For the purpose of clarity, popular research defines generation Y as those born between 1978 and 2000, and quantifies the generation at about 80 million strong.³ In contrast, leading generation authors, Neil Howe and William Strauss define generation

Y as those born after 1982.⁴ This discrepancy in defining generation Y lends credence to the argument that popular literature characterizing various generations is not scientifically sound and popular approaches to generational research tend to be selective.⁵ This work will not attempt to qualify or quantify the scientific evidence of popular literature but focus on generational trends and assessing the Army's ability to shape its culture and leaders in order to recruit, retain, educate and develop the Next Generation of leaders needed to sustain our Nation's Army.

Defining Generation Y

To understand Generation Y, it is important to understand the Generation Y parents. "Generation Y is being raised in the age of the active parent."⁶ Parents of this generation view the child as the center of the family. Some literature today labels the parents of Generation Y as "*helicopter parents* because they tend to 'hover' over their children's every move."⁷ They are ready to swoop in and save them from failure whenever necessary. Kevin Wheeler with Global Learning Resources describes Gen Yers as:

The most "parented" generation that we have seen. Since birth, these young folks have been protected, chaperoned, coached, and guided by their parents. Rather than shun parental influence, as most Baby Boomers did, they expect and even embrace the close relationship they have with their parents. They look to their parents to guide them in whatever choices they make and often call mom or dad to get their advice on even trivial matters.⁸

Australian generational author, Rebecca Huntley, describes Generation Y as the "healthiest, and most cared for generation in history".⁹

"Changes in politics and culture during the 1980s mirrored a new interest in children's welfare and protection."¹⁰ Howe and Strauss describe the introduction of the

term *kinderpolitics* by a major newsweekly; *kinderpolitics* refers to “the voter determination to translate America’s fears about kids into aggressive public policies that would protect their health, stop their crime, improve their learning, filter their media, and perhaps, over time, shape them into positive examples of civic virtue.”¹¹ This political and economic shift served to predestine the Y Generation with the awareness that they would restore the sense of community their parents cannot.¹²

Although parents of the Y Generation are cited as spending more “hands-on” time with their children, divorce rates still rank at 50 percent for families in the United States.¹³ The difference is today’s divorced families tend to differ than that of 30 years ago. Although the statistics are not currently being recorded on today’s parenting plans, the *Washington Post* reported that according to divorce lawyers, judges, mediators and family therapists, divorces are tailored to the children’s needs.¹⁴

A Parenting Plan is new terminology referring to a temporary or final court order that sets out the rights and duties of parents in a suit affecting the parent-child relationship and includes provisions relating to conservatorship, possession of and access to a child, child support, and a dispute resolution process to minimize future disputes.¹⁵

But regardless of today’s modern divorce plans, this level of high divorce rates and single parenting add a level of complexity to Generation Y’s upbringing. Multiple parents and grandparents, step and half-sibling relations, complex scheduling challenges, and dual dwellings add to the already over committed life styles of young Millennials.

Many parents are dual income and fathers have entered the parenting equation in ways not often seen by Generation X’s parents and seen even less by the Baby Boomer’s parents. This is because of the rising cost of housing, education and initial house hold start up costs have moved ahead of starting salaries. Balancing economic

demands with caring for the family provides an extra level of stress to many households today. This situation adds to the complexities of rearing of this Next Generation.

Regardless of the complexity surrounding the rearing of the Y Generation, critics and researchers alike agree that they are the most parented and protected generation yet. This active parental involvement makes this new generation believe that they can accomplish almost anything, and if they can't, they can always go back home.¹⁶ Gen Yers are confident, better educated, techno-savvy, adept at global and diversity issues, team oriented and multi-taskers – all very positive aspects for the nation's future leaders.¹⁷ The downside to this generation's characteristics is that they are impatient, skeptical, blunt, expressive, and have grown up with a sense of entitlement.

Confidence and optimism are two key words used to describe Generation Y. Howe and Strauss write that today's parents describe raising children as getting harder, but the results of this difficult parenting is that being a child is getting easier.¹⁸ With *helicopter parents* hovering to ensure the success of their child, failure is not often experienced. These successes and the ease of childhood lead to not only confidence but an optimistic outlook for the future. The leading generational authors state, "at the same time, the teen view of success has become better-rounded and less exclusively focused toward one life goal."¹⁹ After Yers live the complexity of their environments and watch their parents deal with the stressors of an increasing challenging economic milieu, the Y Generation seeks to achieve balance in their life especially between work and family.

Generation Y is one of the most educated generations yet; they love to learn.²⁰ "Going to college is no longer reserved for the elite, it is the norm. Today, 64 percent of

women and 60 percent of men go to college after graduating high school and 85 percent attend full time.”²¹ In October, 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that 65.8 percent of high school graduates from the class of 2006 were enrolled in universities or colleges.²² With the renewed emphasis on math and science curriculums, this generation is “three times more likely to take calculus, twice as likely to take all three major sciences (Biology, chemistry, physics), and are taking twice as many Advanced Placement Tests”.²³ With college attendance so high, advanced degrees have become the higher education discriminator sought after by this generation.²⁴

This Next Generation is “techno-savvy”. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Insights from 2006 reports that:

Growing up in the age of technology has put a computer in the hands of almost every child. They have understanding and knowledge of technology and keep up quite well with its advances. Three out of four teenagers are on line, and 93% of those ages 15-17 are computer users.²⁵

Kathryn Tyler, a Generation X freelance writer and former Human Resources generalist and trainer, describes them as “enormous consumers of information and can locate details about anything within seconds.”²⁶ This ability to readily obtain information and choices is why Generation Y members believe that if they do not get what they want from one source they will immediately go to another. This may prove challenging for employers to enforce workplace regulations such as uniforms, dress codes, and schedules because Gen Yers know that there are alternative options available.²⁷

Diversity is prevalent with this generation. Not only are Gen Yers the most diverse generation to date, but they are also the most accepting of ethnicity.²⁸ The NAS Insights report prepared to examine Generation Y, their attitudes and how to recruit and

retain them, reveals that “one in every three Generation Y members is not Caucasian.”²⁹

NAS further reveals that approximately nine out of ten in this generation have at least 12 friends outside of their own ethnicity. Generational authors, Howe and Strauss, write about Generation Y’s perception of diversity issues:

To Millennials diversity doesn’t mean black or white, it means Korean, Malaysian, Latvian, Guatemalan, Peruvian, Nigerian, Trinidadian, and skins in more hues from more places than see on any generation in any society in the history of humanity... In their eyes, race has become so fluid, complex, and multifaceted that the old answers seem less persuasive, the old struggles less purposeful, the old racial equations less relevant³⁰

By the time Generation Y was in school, the leftover agendas of the Civil Rights movement were over, and the “old turns of phrase were more descriptive of what *is* than what *could be*.”³¹ Generation Y wants a new agenda – “their agenda -- to create opportunities for racial groups to shed their adult-imposed sense of separateness.”³² The internet has tremendously influenced the globalization and melding of this generation. An *msnbc.com* excerpt published in *Millennials Rising* states that:

There has always been a universal culture of young humanity; but only now are the means arising for us to make common cause, using technology to bring all of us closer. Together we can harness the natural virtues of youth: tolerance, energy, playfulness, hope, and a willingness to share.³³

This youthful energy and sharing lend merit to this generation bringing the world closer than ever imagined. Howe and Strauss predict that Generation Y will mobilize their global generation like never seen before... “a source of immense civic energy, for good or ill, throughout the world.”³⁴

Growing up in the age of technology allows for the globalization of this generation and also helps shape a generation that is team-oriented. Former Gateway 2000 vice-president, Jim Taylor, now a futurist and author of the 500-Year plan, estimates that

Generation Y spends 72 hours per week connected by phone or instant messaging.³⁵ This connection fosters peer input and advice into the smallest of decisions. Couple this fact with the influence of their parents on most decisions made and one has a recipe for very little autonomy.³⁶ Howe and Strauss show readers that this team ethic shows up in Generation Y's political views.³⁷ When teens from the Millennial Generation were asked to identify the major causes of problems in America today, their seven top answers pertained to what they perceived as "an excess of adult individualism".³⁸ Stated simply, Generation Y parents focused on themselves, their own individual needs and success, versus that of the greater good of others.

Jim Taylor provides insight that Generation Y, "measure themselves by their peers. They will form communal tribes and communicate astonishing amounts."³⁹ Collaboration and consensus building are practiced skills sought after in many organizations today. A consortium formed by The Conference Board, Corporate Voice for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Society for Human Resource Management found that Teamwork/Collaboration ranked in the top three most important applied skills needed by entrants in the workforce today.⁴⁰

Connectivity in the form of the internet, instant messaging, blogs and multi-media formats play yet another role in shaping the multi-tasking attribute of Generation Y. Robert Ebstein, West Coast editor of Psychology Today, states "For today's young people, multi-tasking is as natural as eating."⁴¹ Instant Messaging, chatting on the cell phone and working on homework is a common place scene for teens and college students. "The level of multiprocessing and interpersonal connectivity is now so commonplace that it's easy to forget how quickly it came about."⁴² Media multitasking

as described above allows Generation Y to cram more media exposure into an already expanded use of electronic media. Sommer Kehrli, organization development consultant at The Center for Organization Effectiveness, and Trudy Sopp, PhD sociologist and founder of The Center for Organization Effectiveness, tell readers in “Managing Generation Y” that these young people:

process information selectively due to the abundance of MTV images and resources at their fingertips. They can not take it all in so they don’t take it all in, and they bring these behaviors to work. This makes them appear slippery about accountability and sometimes leads to end products that are incomplete.⁴³

The benefits of multi-processing is, when they do take it all in, Gen Yers will do it faster and better than their competition. The down side is that there attention to detail and follow through may be limited. The ability to multi-task in a fast pace military environment could help to manage chaos and lead to a more efficient methodology but the inability to stay on task could affect the long term problem solving often needed in the armed forces.

The negative characteristics of Generation Y include impatience and skepticism. They are blunt, expressive, and bear a sense of entitlement. Generation Y is accustomed to instant gratification. Whether the immediate answer or solution comes from technology or *helicopter parents* ready to swoop in and save them, Yers were raised to expect an immediate solution. “Generation Y expects things to happen quickly, at the speed of the MP3 downloads and text messages.”⁴⁴ The contraction of time means there is little space for quiet reflection and thoughtful consideration.”⁴⁵ Gen Yers may not have the patience to work through complex problems requiring in depth analysis, and study. While this impatience may inspire Yers to become more efficient in their endeavors, in depth problem solving may be pushed aside in frustration.⁴⁶

Generation Y is skeptical. They have witnessed more scamming, cheating lying and exploiting than ever before from major media figures.⁴⁷ This includes major league baseball players, rock stars and even presidents.⁴⁸ In a New York Times Article, “A Defining Moment”, David Brooks (Op-ed columnist) tells readers,

This is a country in the midst of a crisis of authority, a country that has become disillusioned not only by one president but with a whole system of politics. It’s a country that has lost faith not only with one institution, but with the entire set of leadership institutions.⁴⁹

Democratic Presidential candidate, Senator Barack Obama has built his campaign appealing to our newest generation as a “nonhierarchical, collaborative leader who can inspire autonomous individuals to cooperate for the sake of common concerns.”⁵⁰ Senator Obama is inspiring the belief that:

a spontaneous dynamic order could emerge from thousands of individual decisions...this is a persuasive way of seeing the world. For young people who have grown up on Facebook, YouTube, open-source software and an array of decentralized networks, this is a compelling theory of how change happens.⁵¹

If the Y generation proves to be the key to Senator Obama’s winning the 2008 Democratic Primary, the upcoming 2008 Presidential election could reveal the power of this Next Generation’s ability to influence the nation and its politics.

The Y generation is blunt and expressive. They prefer directness over subtlety, action over observation, self expression is favored over self control...making their point is most important.⁵² This generation’s communication style is largely shaped by the technological media at their fingertips. Text messaging, blogging and cell phone use allow for endless opportunity for interaction with peers; information exchange is abundant but often in short bursts fostering quick expression.

Generation Yers are curious. Being curious is the mother of all creativity. From the beginning of their educational endeavors, they have been taught to question – as Sommer Kehrli and Trudy Sopp tell readers “their questioning is not because they distrust managers’ experience. It’s more an issue of having a strong curiosity and desire to better understand the history or background of a situation.”⁵³ With this strong curiosity, Gen Yers should be more innovative and creative than its previous generation.

Generation Y’s communication style has been shaped by their techno-savvy environment and curiosity. Interpersonal communications have been redefined by Generation Y. These new and unique interpersonal communication styles will create a challenge for the Boomers and Gen Xers remaining in the force.

Howe and Strauss write about the “special” nature of Generation Y. They state,

As Millennials absorb the adult message that they rank atop America’s list of priorities, they naturally come to the conclusion that their problems are the nation’s problems, that their future is the nation’s future and that by extension, everyone in America is naturally inclined to help them solve their problems.⁵⁴

This sense of specialness, coupled with their boosted sense of confidence leads to Gen Yers entering the workforce with unrealistic expectations and a sense of entitlement.

Barbara Dwyer, CEO of the Job Journey, states that Generation Y believes they can change the world upon entering the work force.⁵⁵ “The problem is that they don’t have the track record to support these statements. When they are told their entire lives how wonderful they are, and they’re challenged in the business environment, they are crushed.”⁵⁶ The NAS Insights report states that “Generation Y wants to start at the top, or at least be climbing the corporate ladder by their sixth month on the job.”⁵⁷ Yers have been told and shown continually how special they are; they were raised in an

environment of instant gratification; they are confident why shouldn't they start at the top?

Defining generation Y is not an exact science; it is not quantitatively or qualitatively based, but there is evidence in trends among this generation that Generation X freelance writer and former human resources generalist and trainer, Kathryn Tyler, describes as born between 1978 and 2000 and comprised of approximately 80 million people.⁵⁸ They are the most parented and protected generation yet. Generation Y is confident, highly educated, techno-savvy, adept at global and diversity issues, team oriented and multi-taskers. They are also impatient, skeptical, blunt, expressive, and have grown up with a sense of entitlement. Beginning in 2001, the U.S. Army has chosen to take a closer look on the recruiting and retention of this Y generation. The Army does not need to be short sighted in this analysis by just looking at recruiting. The Army needs to sensitize its leaders to the education and leadership methods best suited for retaining and developing this Next Generation that now comprises our entry level and mid grade soldiers.

Recruiting Generation Y

A requested and separate National Academies report on Youth Populations, Military Recruitment and the popular literature surrounding the Millennial Generation provided findings that popular literature and generational study is often based on selective, non-systematic data and analysis using non-representative samples.⁵⁹ Despite this report, both the Department of Defense and Department of the Army have remained flexible and adaptable in their policies and approach to recruiting Generation Y. In 2006, a separate National Academy of Science Committee published another

NAS Insights report titled “Generation Y: The Millennials *Ready or Not Here They Come*”. This report acknowledges distinct attitudes and attributes of the Y Generation that the 2001 committee report had brought into question.⁶⁰

In 2001, the U.S. Army Recruiting Command partnered with Lifecourse Associates to produce “The Recruiting Millennials Handbook”.⁶¹ This handbook centered recruiter efforts on leading generational authors Howe and Strauss’ Millennial Generation attributes of being special, confident, sheltered, team oriented, achieving and seeking convention.⁶²

To reinforce the trait of being special, recruiters are to reinforce a recruit’s view of peers and be prepared to answer the parent’s question: “Are the Armed forces special enough for our kids?”⁶³ They were to replace individualism with a link to future generational events of great significance emphasizing group and global missions.⁶⁴

Appealing to their sense of confidence, recruiters are encouraged to stress positive outcomes of military service, again, emphasizing constructive images of military service to others. Recruitment material is designed to be upbeat, well rounded and create an expectation of “success for all.”⁶⁵

As the Y Generation grew up sheltered, they want to feel safe. Recruiters are to reinforce that training environments are healthy and safe; that supervision and guidance are inherent in the culture; corrupting influences are protected against; and physical fitness and healthy lifestyle patterns are ingrained in the Army’s day to day practices.⁶⁶

Team-work is inherent in the Army’s culture. The Y generation is connected and influenced by friends and parents like no other generation before them. They value input and collaboration in decision making and task completion. Recruiters are

encouraged to stress interchangeable skills and broad participation among recruits; emphasize the teaching of team skills; show recruits in groups – not solo; and demonstrate racial and ethnic diversity beyond simple black and white.⁶⁷

Generation Y has been labeled “as one of the most educated generations yet and they love to learn.”⁶⁸ Recruiters are encouraged to stress educational opportunities emphasizing math, science and technological achievement. The recruiters should demonstrate a planned future demonstrating how recruits will “keep up” with their civilian peers and be provided with success and long term growth opportunities.⁶⁹

The millennials are showing signs of trying to reestablish a regime of rules.⁷⁰ They are attempting to return convention to their lives. Kirsty Doig, teen marketer, is cited in “The Recruiting Millennials Handbook”: “These kids are fed up with the superficialities of life... It’s a backlash, a return to tradition and ritual. Millennials overwhelmingly favor the teaching of values in school.”⁷¹ The Army culture is rich with tradition, ritual and values. This is an area where the Army could appeal to Generation Y’s inherent beliefs, but Army leaders and trainers must take the time to educate and teach these traditions, rituals and values as well as their deeper meanings to this Next Generation.

What “The Recruiting Millennials Handbook” did not include was the projection of a protracted, arguably unpopular war and a growth of 65 thousand soldiers in the Army. Recruiting still emphasizes appealing to the attributes of the Y generation, but has stepped up the focus on parents, community influencers and economic incentives. New bonus incentives have been implemented to help draw new recruits to include one trial program called “the Army Advantage Fund which offers up to a \$40,000 bonus for recruits to use toward purchase of a house or starting a business.”⁷² The “Every Soldier

a Recruiter” program offers soldiers a two thousand dollar bonus for referring a recruit that is assessed into the Army.⁷³ The Army National Guard has successfully met its recruiting challenges for FY07 using this program and other incentives. As the Army continues to recruit during a protracted period of war, recruiters will call on parents, veterans and soldiers to help recruit our Nation’s all-volunteer force.

Retaining and Leading Generation Y

Recent Army incentives offered to retain Captains fell short of its 14,184 person goal by 2,251 Captain retentions.⁷⁴ The shortfall indicates how hard it is for the Army to keep young soldiers that are worn down by a protracted war on two fronts.⁷⁵ The incentive package included five options:

- Critical Skills Retention Bonus
- Graduate School
- Military School
- Branch/Functional Area of Choice
- Post of Choice

The Army will pay out more than 349 million dollars in bonuses to those who took the incentives.⁷⁶ Army spokesperson, Paul Boyce, states, “We must reduce the rate of captains departing long term if we are to sustain the growth needed to meet future requirements.” Ironically, the last time incentives were offered to Captains in 1992, it was not for retention but for voluntary separation to fulfill downsizing requirements.

While Army incentive packages and bonuses will remain necessary for soldier retention during protracted conflict, the NAS and Kathryn Tyler offer some prudent advice on leading and retaining this new generation of soldiers.

The NAS Insights report outlines elements of the work environment that are important to Gen Yers. These include:

- Good Relationships with Boss' and co-workers
- Income
- Opportunity for Growth
- Opportunity to show off skills and receiving recognition of a job well done
- Challenging daily work
- Flexible schedules for work and personal time
- A casual dress environment⁷⁷

While recent Army incentive packages and reenlistment bonuses address income and offer opportunity for growth, it is leadership from Sergeants through Generals that must focus on many of the work environment issues that are critical for the retention of this Next Generation.

Embrace their values. The NAS Insights report also relates that leaders must encourage the values of Generation Y.⁷⁸ Suggestions include “show appreciation for their individuality and let them be expressive...allow them to have input into the decision-making process”.⁷⁹ Leaders need to make Gen Yers heard and to give them feedback. Kathryn Tyler reminds readers that this generation is going to be high-maintenance⁸⁰. They were born into the generation of active parenting – “these kids were overindulged, overprotected and over supervised. Because of this, Gen Yers want constant feedback.”⁸¹ Leaders will need to take advantage of their techno-savvy nature to provide and request feedback.

Provide access to technology. Generation Y has grown up with technology at their fingertips. Army leaders at all levels will need to make available the newest and best technologies. Leaders must use these newest technologies to hold Gen Yers responsible and accountable.⁸² From Infantry soldiers to Electronic Warfare Specialists, this Next Generation will crave the best and latest technology available to accomplish their mission. Leaders need to keep Gen Yers exposed and informed on capability updates and involved with testing when possible.

Feedback is essential for this new generation. Sommer Kehrli and Trudy Sopp recommend in “Managing Generation Y”, “create a new accountability structure and use new technology to do so.”⁸³ They challenge leaders and managers to ask for more updates on projects and provided more feedback. Tyler writes,

This generation has grown up sitting in front of a monitor playing video games. Players always know how they’re doing by the score on the screen...therefore, this generation won’t want to wait for a semiannual or annual performance review. They will require ongoing feedback.⁸⁴

By providing more immediate feedback, these same leaders are also setting up accountability checks to ensure that Gen Yers stay on track and are accountable for their work.

Adjust training programs. The NAS Insights report states that “this is the most education-oriented generation in history... Complete training and availability of answers is the key.”⁸⁵ Army trainers and leaders must provide answers in situations when and where possible, such that when it is not possible, soldiers will feel certain in their training and understanding so that they may accomplish the mission. The Army as an institution needs to focus on learning and not just training.

While Army training is embedded at individual, unit and collective levels, training programs need to be reviewed and tweaked to ensure that they remain relevant and provide the feedback needed. Kathryn Tyler suggests that as you teach processes and give instruction, leaders and trainers need to elucidate the rationale behind their instructions.⁸⁶ The Next Generation is full of questions and “Generation Yers explain that their questioning is not because they distrust managers’ experience. It’s more an issue of having a strong curiosity and desire to better understand the history or background of a situation.”⁸⁷

When possible show Gen Yers where and how their mission fits in the context of the bigger mission. Trainers and leaders should satisfy that ingrained curiosity by showing Millennials how they will contribute to the bottom line.⁸⁸

Attempt to Balance Work with Life. Generation Y grew up watching both parents go off to work and watched their parents struggle with the pressures of managing career and family. According to a study by Spherion (a recruiting firm in Fort Lauderdale, Florida), “Millennials highlight ‘Time and Flexibility’ as the most important thing in keeping them loyal to their employers...”⁸⁹ Army leaders will need to ensure that life balance and family are truly values “in use” and not just espoused by the institution and its leaders. This will not be an easy task as the Army continues to fight protracted wars on two major fronts.

Mentor, Mentor, Mentor. The Army has long professed the importance of mentoring. Generation Y is looking for more than a one on one formal counseling session periodically couched as “mentoring”. Army leaders need to adopt mentoring practices that foster regular interaction and feedback for this Next Generation. Almost

all of Generation Y literature addresses the importance of mentoring with this generation. They were raised in an era of active parenting. They seek advice and feedback on the simplest of issues. They were taught to ask “why”? Leaders will need to take the time to get to know this generation and understand how to communicate with them. Gen Yers are “high maintenance”, and it will be imperative for keeping them in the force, that leaders at every level engage with their subordinates. Sommer Kerhli and Trudy Sopp from The Center for Organization Effectiveness cite “Generation Yers will not waste their time paying attention to someone if they think they’re viewed as an expendable asset and unworthy of the time.”⁹⁰

Sommer Kehrli and Trudy Sopp’s, “Managing Generation Y” offers several more tips for leading this generation - tips that Army leaders can apply when interacting with its current soldiers, junior grade officers and Non-commissioned Officers:

- Take off your defensive hat and put on your development hat
- Leave the tones of power and authority out of the picture
- Answer “why” before they ask
- Give them the benefits of your experience
- Let them inside
- Provide full disclosure⁹¹

The Army espouses mentoring, but it is time consuming and sometimes daunting. In retaining and leading Generation Y, Army leaders at every rank need to do a better job of reaching out and mentoring like they mean it. As the NAS Insight report outlines this “includes creating and customizing career paths...this creates a sense of control that Gen Yers desire and will provide them with a realistic account of their progress.”⁹²

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Gen Y is the highest maintenance workforce in history. They want feedback now, they want training now, they want recognitions now, and they want to create the lifestyle they desire now. If managers can learn how to harness their energy and coach them effectively, these young employees have the potential to be the highest producing generation ever.⁹³

Carolyn A. Martin, Ph.D penned the above words on Generation Y. Although popular literature and research on generations does not always stand up to scientific analysis and critique, there are certainly generational characteristics that Army leaders need to be cognizant of when dealing with this Next Generation of Soldiers.

The U.S. Army Recruiting Command has worked hard to stay in touch with Generation Y. From the use of artificial intelligence tools such as SGT Star that electronically answers questions from potential recruits to advertisements geared toward parents, recruiting efforts are adhering to generational trends.⁹⁴ Sustainment of our Nation's all-volunteer force depends on such efforts and the Department of the Army remains flexible and open to using current literature and recruiting tips from generational researchers.

The U.S. Army's retention efforts are more limited in their inclusion of generational appeals but have not disregarded the focus of the family and educational values of the Millennial Generation. The key focus of Army leaders at every level should be the mentoring and development of Generation Y. Understanding their values, appealing to their techno-savvy upbringing, providing feedback, adjusting the design of the training base, and attempting to balance work with life are all areas that leaders should focus on to help keep this new generation around for the fight. Mentoring is one of the keys to retaining Gen Yers in the force. Leaders are going to need to do more than espouse

mentorship -- they are going to have to ingrain mentoring in their everyday interaction with soldiers. From the youngest corporal to the ranking general, mentoring has always been every soldier's responsibility, but now mentorship has taken on new importance.

Our Nation is hard at work breaking ground on providing security and stability so that struggling states can build and redefine themselves. The U.S. Army stands ready to provide for the greater good of our nation and struggling nation states around the globe. The convention of the Army provides the stability and structure the Next Generation desires. The Army values are congruent with the values of Generation Y. The Army must ensure that the remaining Boomer's and Generation X leaders at every level understand and develop this Next Generation. The message to convey is how important they are to the Army and the Nation. As General Cartwright, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the students and faculty of the U.S. Army War College, "This new generation is ready to own this country – we need to make sure the doors are open."⁹⁵

Endnotes

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