

THE FUTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITING: THE IMPACT OF GENERATION X

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Abstract

This research project examined what the profession of law enforcement will need to do to successfully recruit, train, and retain employees in the next decade. A survey was conducted with the study group being comprised of Florida State University criminology students. The survey questions were developed by the members of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Senior Leadership Program class five. The results of the study indicate a need to modify our recruiting and retention methods in essentially three areas: 1) increased ethics training, 2) enhanced pension programs, and 3) increased in-service professional training regarding future technology.

Introduction

What will the profession of law enforcement need to do to successfully recruit, train, satisfy, and retain employees in the next decade? For several generations, when a young person chose a career and became employed by a corporation, an unwritten quid pro quo existed. The corporation, or government entity, for the most part guaranteed a job for life. In return, the employee was expected to conform to the organizational culture and demonstrate a high degree of loyalty.

Our recent quantum leap into the information age has redistributed competitive powers in the global market. This has allowed small entrepreneurs to successfully compete for business contracts with large corporations and has resulted in the large corporations no longer offering the job security that they once did. Not only has the way that we do business been changed but the organizational and social culture of the workplace has changed as well. It now becomes incumbent upon law enforcement planners to determine what the values and expectations of the next generation, Generation X, are and to determine if there is a need to adjust the culture of our profession to meet any predicted change.

A value can be defined as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state. A value system, on the other hand, can be defined as an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of importance (Rokeach, 1968). The importance of values and value systems derives from the fact that they constitute a basis for orienting the behavior of individuals in various social settings (Aryee, Kang, & Putti, 1988). Since it is widely recognized that the police profession has its own subculture, the behavior of our members is expected to comply with our institutional norm. This can result in value conflict between new and veteran members of an organization. Police commanders are granted substantial leeway in determining the course of their organizations. As a result, there is an aversion to the meddlings of the general public and therefore resistance to change. This recognition that values are so critical in the practice of law enforcement resulted in the International Association of Chiefs of Police developing a police code of

ethics in 1957 (Wilson & McLaren, 1977). It is a well-founded professional belief that officers with high personal values will have nothing to do with racial prejudices, will not exceed their authority in the exercise of discretion, abuse the powers of their office, falsify reports, or give perjured testimony (Delattre, 1994).

So just what is Generation X and are their personal values really any different than the Boomer generation? In 1991, a book called Generation X was published. The author, Douglas Coupland, defined Generation X as the group of people born between 1961 and 1981 (Generation X page, 1997). Since that time, the term "Generation X" has become part of our culture with the archetypal X'er being thought of as a young, witless, bepimpled hip-hopper with a tattooed ankle whose SAT score correlates inversely with the hours of MTV watched (Brinkley, 1994). Of course, those making that observation are apparently quick to forget their past experience with bell bottoms and leisure suits. Appearances and associated perceptions notwithstanding, the personal values of young Americans may be changing and while the law enforcement profession is good at modifying the behavior of individual employees, it has not been very adept at changing generational behaviors.

What job expectations will our potential recruits have? Commitment to an organization and a profession cannot be simply purchased with a paycheck. Issues such as total compensation, job status, and job security will need to be addressed.

The average member of the workforce of the past was male, white, approximately twenty-nine years old, and had fewer than twelve years of education. These men were usually married to homemaker wives, had children, and worked within their region of birth. A high degree of similarity and a generally less liberal society led to a prevalence of commonly held beliefs and values. Changes are taking place in America's workforce. The working population is aging, many more women are working, ethnic diversity is growing, more people with disabilities are employed, and an increasing gap exists between highly educated persons and the large number of persons who cannot read and write well enough to hold simple jobs (Jamieson & O'Mara, 1991).

Almost everybody is interested in the pay and benefits of public employees. Taxpayers are prone to be outraged at what they consider excessive pay and overly generous benefits in public service, especially in light of what they consider to be inefficiency and unresponsiveness in government. As for public employees, they generally consider themselves underpaid and exploited, as well as unappreciated and have seen their purchasing power slowly eroding while the pay of many workers in the private sector has kept pace with inflation. This awareness has not escaped the observations of young people about to begin a career who are considering public service.

Pay should not be confused with compensation. Compensation includes benefits such as medical insurance, pension, vacation leave, furnished equipment such as cars, uniforms, and weapons, and the opportunity to earn extra money in overtime situations or off-duty employment. Individual compensation plans, popular for years in the private sector, may be an option that needs to be explored. Tailored employee benefit packages use a buffet approach that permits an employee to select, with a given dollar amount, the mix of pay, leave, insurance, health benefits, retirement benefits, and other

compensation that best satisfies the employee's personal needs. Other issues such as the quality of the work environment and training opportunities are difficult to quantify.

Still another issue involves job status. In some European countries public employment has been accorded a certain status and prestige. This tradition has allowed governments to pick and choose some of the most talented and educated people from the pool of prospective employees. With the possible exception of the United States Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency, which have a tradition of recruiting from the Ivy League colleges, this has not been the case in the United States. Local and state governments have had to struggle to overcome our society's value of careers in the private sector over those in public service.

Trends that developed during the 1990's are likely to continue after the turn of the century. Decreasing public budgets, in concert with political pressures to get more done with less, may force changes in the way that law enforcement agencies operate. These could include privatization of some functions and a restructuring of pay and benefit packages for employees. The role of the law enforcement officer will require personnel who are highly professionalized and are prepared to upgrade their knowledge and skill levels on a continuing basis.

This research examines whom law enforcement planners will be targeting for recruitment in the 21st century and what their expectations will be.

Method

The methodology for this study involved four parts: a review of the literature that has previously been published; the development of questions for the survey instrument; administering the survey instrument; and, the analysis of the data captured by the survey.

The literature review was conducted by research at a university library. This research included a review of professional journals, abstracts, social science indices, and the Internet.

The survey questions were developed by soliciting input from the criminal justice professionals enrolled in the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Senior Leadership Program class five. These professionals are senior law enforcement and criminal justice commanders who will be responsible for solving institutional problems in the next decade.

The survey instrument was comprised of information and demographic questions. These questions focus on three areas: Personal values, employment expectations, and job benefits. The instrument employed a Likert scale for quantitative analysis. The population universe was criminology students attending Florida State University during the summer semester of 1997 with the study group being the responses received. The survey was conducted collectively with Professor William Doerner and the advice and consent of the Criminology Dean. The analysis of data, from a test survey, was conducted by use of the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS).

A test survey was conducted in February, 1997 of seventy one students. SPSS data reduction solutions, Principal Components and Varimax, were conducted to see if any of the questions indicated high or low groupings. As a result of this analysis, some questions were eliminated and others were rewritten for simplicity. Other adjustments

were made to make the instrument easier to understand and analyze. The members of the Senior Leadership Program participated in the interpretation of the data. Refer to Appendix A for a list of the survey questions.

Results

For simplicity, the first 35 questions are grouped according to whether they pertained to values, expectations, or benefits. The number in which the question appeared on the survey instrument appears in parentheses. For the first 35 questions the Likert scale reflected the following values: 1-Disagree strongly; 2-Disagree; 3-No opinion; 4-Agree; and, 5-Agree strongly. For questions 36-40, the Likert scale reflected the following values: 1-Very unlikely; 2-Unlikely; 3-No opinion; 4-Likely; and, 5-Very likely.

Value questions

1. (1) Individual character, honesty, and integrity are the most serious values that a law enforcement officer can possess.

1-0%	2-1.1%	3-3.4%	4-39.0%	5-56.3%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(S A)

2. (3) My off-duty, personal lifestyle should have no impact on my professional career.

1-22.9%	2-40.2%	3-8.0%	4-19.5%	5-9.1%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

3. (4) A person with a felony arrest record could still make a good law enforcement officer.

1-12.6%	2-27.5%	3-31.0%	4-22.9%	5-5.7%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

4. (5) If I were attending a party, and I knew people were using marijuana, I would leave.

1-8.0%	2-22.9%	3-21.8%	4-24.1%	5-22.9%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

5. (6) If I were attending a party, and I knew people were using cocaine, I would leave.

1-5.7%	2-2.2%	3-12.6%	4-27.5%	5-51.7%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

6. (8) I expect law enforcement officers to hold their personal lives to a higher standard than what is expected of the average person in our society.

1-0%	2-11.4%	3-14.9%	4-52.8%	5-20.6%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

7. (9) It is acceptable for a law enforcement officer to refuse a direct, lawful, and morally correct order by a ranking officer, if it is unfair to them.

1-18.3%	2-40.2%	3-20.6%	4-17.2%	5-3.4%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

8. (10) If you are a member of a law enforcement agency you should be loyal to its policies and lawful, morally correct methods, even if they are criticized by others publicly.

1-0%	2-0%	3-6.8%	4-50.5%	5-42.5%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

9. (19) I am motivated toward a law enforcement career for humanitarian reasons.

1-3.4%	2-18.3%	3-28.7%	4-39.0%	5-10.3%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

10. (20) I am personally offended by the use of "hard" drugs, such as cocaine, on the street.

1-3.4%	2-8.0%	3-17.2%	4-24.1%	5-47.1%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

11. (21) I would want to become a law enforcement officer because it would give me authority over others.

1-32.1%	2-48.2%	3-13.7%	4-4.5%	5-1.1%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

12. (22) I would want to become a law enforcement officer because it would give me the opportunity to help others and influence events within the community.

1-0%	2-4.5%	3-4.5%	4-54.0%	5-35.7%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

13. (23) There are times when it is acceptable for a police officer to lie in order to arrest a criminal whom the officer believes committed a heinous crime.

1-29.8% 2-36.7% 3-14.9% 4-12.6% 5-5.7%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

14. (23) The end always justifies the means when enforcing the law.

1-19.5% 2-32.1% 3-26.4% 4-16.0% 5-3.4% unanswered-2
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

Expectations questions

15. (2) I believe that the general public's opinion of law enforcement is positive.

1-3.4% 2-37.9% 3-10.3% 4-47.1% 5-1.1%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

16. (7) I feel that local law enforcement is a profession, not simply a job.

1-2.2% 2-1.1% 3-3.4% 4-45.9% 5-47.1%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

17. (11) I believe that a paramilitary type organization is necessary to enforce discipline in a law enforcement agency.

1-1.1% 2-25.2% 3-28.7% 4-29.8% 5-14.9%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

18. (18) Affirmative action programs are necessary as we approach the 21st century.

1-14.9% 2-13.7% 3-20.6% 4-29.8% 5-20.6%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

19. (24) A broad, formal education is more important in law enforcement than physical strength.

1-0% 2-17.2% 3-13.7% 4-44.8% 5-21.8%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

20. (26) I would consider the professional reputation of a law enforcement agency important when choosing a particular agency for potential employment.

1-0% 2-2.2% 3-2.2% 4-57.4% 5-35.6%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

21. (31) I would like to be a law enforcement officer for the strong camaraderie with others in the profession.

1-0% 2-20.6% 3-28.7% 4-45.9% 5-3.4% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

22. (32) I would like to be employed with the same law enforcement agency for my entire career.

1-2.2% 2-20.6% 3-31.0% 4-32.1% 5-12.6% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

23. (33) I consider the opportunity to advance in rank extremely important.

1-0% 2-4.5% 3-8.0% 4-37.9% 5-48.2% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

24. (34) I consider the opportunity to progress in a specialized area, i.e. narcotics enforcement, more important than advancement in rank.

1-2.2% 2-16.0% 3-27.5% 4-35.6% 5-17.2% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

25. (35) I consider local law enforcement a stepping stone to other employment in law enforcement.

1-0% 2-12.6% 3-16.0% 4-48.2% 5-21.8% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

Benefits questions

26. (12) Starting salaries for local and state law enforcement officers are appealing.

1-17.2% 2-39.0% 3-25.2% 4-17.2% 5-0% unanswered-1
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

27. (13) Retirement benefits are important when choosing a specific agency for a career.

1-1.1% 2-1.1% 3-5.7% 4-40.2% 5-51.7%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

28. (14) I would consider a tuition reimbursement program for continuing education important when choosing a specific agency for a career.

1-1.1% 2-3.4% 3-10.3% 4-45.9% 5-39.0%
(D S) (D) (N O) (A) (A S)

29. (15) The salary range of a specific agency is critical when deciding whether to apply for employment.

1-0%	2-5.7%	3-1.1%	4-50.5%	5-42.5%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

30. (16) Off-duty work opportunities are important when choosing a specific agency for a career.

1-1.1%	2-14.9%	3-29.8%	4-41.3%	5-12.6%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

31. (17) Overtime pay opportunities are important when choosing a specific agency for a career.

1-0%	2-6.8%	3-13.7%	4-55.1%	5-24.1%
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)

32. (27) The rate of pay would be more important than the geographical area where I worked.

1-6.8%	2-41.3%	3-17.2%	4-21.8%	5-10.3%	unanswered-2
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)	

33. (28) A furnished, take-home car would be critical in deciding whether to apply at a specific agency.

1-8.0%	2-37.9%	3-29.8%	4-14.9%	5-8.0%	unanswered-1
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)	

34. (29) All equipment such as weapons, gun belts, and uniforms being furnished would be critical in deciding whether to apply at a specific agency.

1-1.1%	2-25.2%	3-25.2%	4-40.2%	5-6.8%	unanswered-1
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)	

35. (30) Training and educational opportunities are more important than salary when choosing an agency for employment.

1-1.1%	2-31.0%	3-25.2%	4-36.7%	5-4.5%	unanswered-1
(D S)	(D)	(N O)	(A)	(A S)	

General and Demographic Questions

36. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a law enforcement officer.

1-21.8% 2-18.3% 3-5.7% 4-24.1% 5-27.5%

37. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a correctional officer.

1-52.8% 2-27.5% 3-10.3% 4-3.4% 5-3.4% unanswered-2

38. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a probation and parole officer.

1-41.3% 2-22.9% 3-11.4% 4-13.7% 5-8.0% unanswered-2

39. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a federal law enforcement agent.

1-12.6% 2-16.0% 3-12.6% 4-40.2% 5-16.0% unanswered-2

40. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a child protection case worker.

1-37.9% 2-20.6% 3-16.0% 4-16.0% 5-6.8% unanswered-2

41. Average age of respondent in years - 21.7

42. Race

White (non-hispanic)	68.9%
African American	16.0%
Hispanic	09.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	01.1%
Other	01.1%
Unanswered-	3

43. Gender

Male	58.6%
Female	37.9%

Discussion

While many of the responses were acceptable to outstanding with regard to contemporary professional values, the responses in three areas were disturbing: off-duty lifestyle; honesty; and, controlled substance use.

Almost 30% of the respondents believed that their off-duty life should have no impact on their professional career. The citizens that we serve demand that we exercise the highest standards in our personal life. This applies whether an officer speeds through their own neighborhood or simply does not mow his or her own lawn.

From a management standpoint, character has such a critical impact on the officer's professional decision process that it is usually included in lateral transfer and promotion decisions. Almost 28% of the respondents agreed that a person with a felony arrest record could still make a good law enforcement officer and approximately 18% agreed that there are times when it is acceptable for a police officer to lie. The fact that this is an incorrect assumption lies on its own merit. Approximately 31% of the respondents would not leave a party if marijuana was being used. This seems to be viewed as socially acceptable, much like underage drinking.

The expectations portion of the survey provided some surprising responses. While there was a split opinion regarding the general public's opinion of law enforcement, an overwhelming 93% indicated that they felt local law enforcement was a profession, not simply a job. The author suspects that this answer would have been considerably different 20 years ago. A surprising 44.7% indicated that they would like to remain employed with the same agency for their entire career. This could be due to the assumption that they would choose the agency best for them the first time or perhaps due to the current job market.

Approximately 56% of the respondents agreed that the starting pay for local and state law enforcement officers was low. An overwhelming majority agreed that benefits such as pension and a tuition reimbursement program would be essential in their decision to apply at a particular agency.

Given the serious nature of the questions in the survey and the sincere responses that were received, the law enforcement community can look forward to an excellent pool of potential candidates in the next decade. We do, however, need to examine the four basic issues in the recommendations section.

Recommendations

1. Increase and modify the ethics portion of basic recruit training. In the State of Florida only one hour of ethics training is currently required in the police standards basic recruit class. The responses concerning off-duty personal conduct and controlled substance use indicate that this area needs to be substantially enhanced. Since a surprising 49.3% of the respondents indicated that they were interested in the strong camaraderie with others in the profession, this would not only provide a strong legal education but also instill a sense of the expectations of the police organizational culture.

2. Develop a cafeteria approach to pension programs; 91.9% of the respondents indicated that retirement benefits were very important. Our workforce has changed considerably in the last ten years and will continue to change. Issues such as childcare, co-parenting, and a spouse's job being transferred to another city are common. Recruitment in the future will require more competitive plans with a mix of regular pension, social security, and 401k programs that could be transferred from agency to agency. This would enable agencies to recruit from a broader base of prospective employees.

3. Increase the level of in-service professional training. Currently, law enforcement is at a pivotal position in history. In the last 30 years we have seen law enforcement progress from a vocation, which required little or no formal education, to a profession. We have now entered the information age where patrol cars are equipped with mobile data terminals and other sophisticated equipment which require complex

training to operate. The personnel we are now recruiting are well educated at the entry level and if their professional education is not kept at a quality level they will leave for the private sector.

4. Further study. This study has two limitations. The survey was limited to 87 respondents. While we have no way of determining who may ultimately choose law enforcement as a career, 51.6% indicated that they were definitely interested. This suggests that a more comprehensive study would provide more definitive data. Secondly, it was conducted during the summer semester. It is unknown if any variable was present, during the summer semester, that would have an influence over the outcome of this survey compared to the spring and fall semesters.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

For the first 35 questions the Likert scale reflected the following values: 1-Disagree strongly 2-Disagree 3-No opinion 4-Agree 5-Agree strongly

1. Individual character, honesty, and integrity are the most serious values that a law enforcement officer can possess. (values)
2. I believe that the general public's opinion of law enforcement is positive. (expectations)
3. My off-duty, personal lifestyle should have no impact on my professional career. (values)
4. A person with a felony arrest record could still make a good law enforcement officer. (values)
5. If I were attending a party, and people that I knew were using marijuana, I would leave. (values)
6. If I were attending a party, and people that I knew were using cocaine, I would leave. (values)
7. I feel that local law enforcement is a profession, not simply a job. (expectations)
8. I expect law enforcement officers to hold their personal lives to a higher standard than what is expected of the average person in our society. (values)
9. It is acceptable for a law enforcement officer to refuse a direct, lawful, and morally correct order by a ranking officer, if it is unfair to them. (values)
10. If you are a member of a law enforcement agency you should be loyal to it's policies and lawful, morally correct methods, even if they are criticized by others publically. (values)
11. I believe that a paramilitary type organization is necessary to enforce discipline in a law enforcement agency. (expectations)
12. Starting salaries for local and state law enforcement officers are appealing. (benefits)
13. Retirement benefits are important when choosing a specific agency for a career. (benefits)

14. I would consider a tuition reimbursement program for continuing education important when choosing a specific agency for a career. (benefits)
15. The salary range of a specific agency is critical when deciding whether to apply for employment. (benefits)
16. Off-duty work opportunities are important when choosing a specific agency for a career. (benefits)
17. Overtime pay opportunities are important when choosing a specific agency for a career. (benefits)
18. Affirmative Action programs are necessary as we approach the 21st century. (expectations)
19. I am motivated toward a law enforcement career for humanitarian reasons. (values)
20. I am personally offended by the use of "hard" drugs, such as cocaine, on the street. (values)
21. I would want to become a law enforcement officer because it would give me authority over others. (values)
22. I would want to become a law enforcement officer because it would give me the opportunity to help others and influence events within the community. (values)
23. There are times when it is acceptable for a police officer to lie in order to arrest a criminal that the officer believes committed a heinous crime. (values)
24. A broad, formal education is more important in law enforcement than physical strength. (expectations)
25. The end always justifies the means when enforcing the law. (values)
26. I would consider the professional reputation of a law enforcement agency important when choosing a particular agency for potential employment. (expectations)
27. The rate of pay would be more important than the geographical area where I worked. (benefits)
28. A furnished, take-home car would be critical in deciding whether to apply at a specific agency. (benefits)
29. All equipment such as weapons, gun belts, and uniforms being furnished would be critical in deciding whether to apply at a specific agency. (benefits)

30. Training and educational opportunities are more important than salary when choosing an agency for employment. (benefits)

31. I would like to be a law enforcement officer for the strong camaraderie with others in the profession. (expectations)

32. I would like to be employed with the same law enforcement agency for my entire career. (expectations)

33. I consider the opportunity to advance in rank extremely important. (expectations)

34. I consider the opportunity to progress in a specialized area, i.e. narcotics enforcement, more important than advancement in rank. (expectations)

35. I consider local law enforcement a stepping stone to other employment in law enforcement. (expectations)

36. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a law enforcement officer.
(1-Very unlikely 2-Unlikely 3-No opinion 4-Likely 5-Very likely)

37. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a correctional officer.

38. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a probation and parole officer.

39. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a federal law enforcement agent.

40. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to become a child protection caseworker.

Demographic questions

41. Average age of respondent in years - 21.7

42. Race

White (non-hispanic)	68.9%
African American	16.0%
Hispanic	09.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	01.1%
Other	01.1%

43. Gender

Male	58.6%
Female	37.9%