

## **The New Generation of Law Enforcement**

*by Perry W. Hollowell, Captain - ILEA - 10/27/08*

The "new generation" of law enforcement officer has been referred to by a number of different monikers. Possibly the most apt of these monikers is the "Y" generation for their constant need to know why they must do something a certain way. They have also been accused of requiring instant gratification and seeking law enforcement as simply a job not a calling as many of the veteran officers view the profession.

There have been numerous other concerns regarding this generation and their preparedness to assume the duties of law enforcement officer. The confusing part about all the discussion regarding fitness for duty is that many say we have to understand and adapt to this new philosophy. Risking the label of the "Y" generation, one must ask why?

We see a number of traits as negative, but continue to adapt our profession to accommodate this type of officer. Agencies have lowered a number of requirements to attract this new breed of officer. Lowering physical standards, reducing academic requirements, tolerating prior drug use, lessening of disciplinary action and removing a paramilitary environment at the academy level are just some of the changes aimed at recruiting these officers.

While it is important to realize these issues exist and be willing to address them, it is equally important that law enforcement recruit officers who meet the profession's standards. Lowering a standard to meet officer ability has not worked in the past and will not work in the future.

Examining just the aspect of paramilitary academies produces spirited debate, but the biggest pro for moving to the college environment is that this is what new officers function best in. The Indiana Law Enforcement Academy did research how changing to this environment would impact operations. It was found those who made the transition from paramilitary to college based academies have seen a lack of discipline, respect and consistency of training as well as a lack of physical preparedness.

It is time to hold those who want to enter the profession to the accepted standards. Given the nature of the job, law enforcement cannot stray from the core values that have served the profession for years. While there are certain elements that have room for compromise, most have little tolerance for sweeping change.

Possibly we have allowed ourselves to expect that new recruits all have these views concerning the profession. If there are preconceived ideas about how certain persons or groups will respond, often they live up to or down to, as the case may be, these expectations.

In 1965 Dr. James Sweeney conducted an experiment regarding this very subject. He selected a janitor who had very little formal education and no experience with computers to become a computer programmer. Even though the janitor, George Johnson, was hesitant at first he finally agreed to attempt the task due to Dr. Sweeney's encouragement. Johnson did live up to his expectations and succeeded beyond what anybody thought possible.

Most believe Johnson's success was due to the goals and encouragement provided by Dr. Sweeney. What if the feedback had been all negative, would Johnson have made it? There have been other studies that have provided the same results, we tend to live up to the expectations others have of us.

Most people can think of situations in their own lives in which this is true, the coach that had faith in you or a teacher that encouraged you to go on to college. The opposite is also true. What about being told you were not strong enough or smart enough to complete a task? Has this ever caused you not to become involved in something you really desired to do?

Recruits as a general rule are still young enough to adapt and overcome to what may seem a new challenge to them. Most are in their early twenties giving them ample opportunity for growth.

Perhaps the bar should be set high with the expectation new recruits will live up to the challenge. If they cannot meet the challenge then law enforcement may not be the appropriate career path. It is better to find those that lack the qualities to serve during the training process rather than when serving their communities.

Bottom line is that it is up to law enforcement to establish what is best for the profession and the public it serves. We then must adhere to those standards and make potential officers live up to them. Anything else is unacceptable and will certainly lead to future deterioration of our profession. When complaints about how new officers perform it is good to remember that these officers were invited in by those in power. Officers who earn the right to enter the profession should be welcomed with open arms, but they should be given nothing.