

LAW



ENFORCEMENT

GUIDE

TO RECRUITING

AND

RETAINING

MILLENNIALS

PowerDMS®

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Introduction

“To build a police force capable of dealing with the complexity of the 21st century, it is imperative that agencies place value on both educational achievements and socialization skills when making hiring decisions. Hiring officers who reflect the community they serve is important not only to external relations, but also to increasing understanding within the agency.”

President’s Task Force
ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

Everyone’s got an opinion about the millennial generation. Some say millennials have a sense of entitlement and are addicted to their smartphones, while others say they bring an energy and excitement to their work that’s lacking in previous generations. Whatever the stereotypes and generalizations, the bottom line is that millennials are the future of our law enforcement agencies, and learning how to recruit and retain them is of paramount importance.

We spoke with several law enforcement experts who deal regularly with the upcoming generation of young people. We talked through perceptions, misconceptions, myths, and specific tactics on how to recruit and retain law enforcement recruits in the 21st Century. This guide will cover (number) actionable ways to capitalize on their strengths and coach them through their weaknesses.

This guide is broken up into two sections, one that discusses aspects of recruiting millennials. The other ther deals with retaining them. Use the strategies included here to find, hire, and retain your next wave of high-performing officers.

Recruiting Millennials

In the book *Good to Great*, a study of how good companies become great, author Jim Collins espouses the “*First Who, Then What?*” principle. In his research, Collins found that the most successful companies focused on personnel first, “getting them in the right seats” second, and finally, the direction of the organization.

Above all, good people are the lifeblood of a successful law enforcement agency. The principles outlined below are gathered from academic articles, expert opinion, and anecdotal experience. Not all of them may be applicable to your agency, but our hope is that they’re the first step in a larger journey of getting the right people on your bus.

1. Hire for qualities rather than skills

“It’s a lot easier to teach someone how to shoot a firearm than it is to change their biases and value system.”

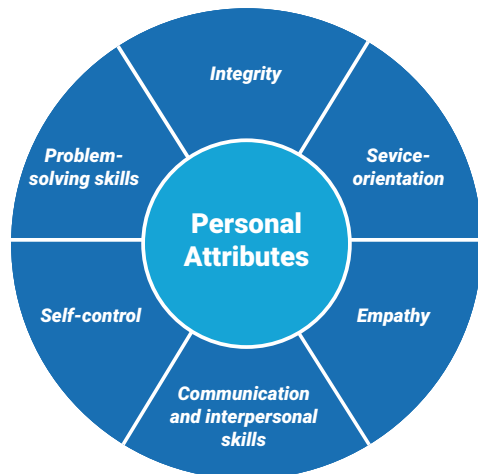
Marcia Thompson

MARCIA’S TITLE HERE

In the past, law enforcement has placed a high value on skill-based tests like push-up drills and marksman training in the interview process. The law enforcement leaders we spoke with were in agreement that there needs to be a significant shift to “hiring the heart and training the mind.”

When you think of the ideal officer, what qualities come to mind? What attributes best align with the core values your agency strives toward? As a helpful exercise, make a list of the character traits you want in your future recruits and share them with your HR director or hiring committee.

BELOW ARE SOME SUGGESTED ATTRIBUTES TO LOOK FOR IN LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITS:



- Integrity
- Service-orientation
- Empathy
- Communication and human relation skills
- Self-control Problem-solving skills

We'll go over some interview tactics later on in the guide that can help you uncover some of these attributes in your potential prospects, as well as weed out the applicants who don't possess these attributes.

2. Relax education prerequisites

These principles are highly subjective and must be custom-tailored to each organization. The demographic and socio-economic class of your recruits will highly skew how you go about education prerequisites.

Agencies like the New Orleans Police Department are relaxing their education prerequisites so as not to exclude hard-working, honest recruits who, because of circumstances outside of their control, couldn't afford a college education.

3. Implement stricter education prerequisites

On the flipside, other agencies are enforcing stricter education principles, requiring a four-year college degree. One of the biggest complaints with millennials is their inability to communicate effectively in face-to-face contexts when the smartphone is shut off. It was made abundantly clear in our conversations with law enforcement leaders that officers can benefit more from interpersonal interactions in college than from actual classroom learning.

In most university settings, you're forced to cohabit with people from different cultures and worldviews. Suspending bias and seeking to understand someone perceived as "different" is an essential attribute of a good police officer.

4. Rethink drug prerequisites

It's clear from the spread of marijuana decriminalization laws that the public's attitude toward cannabis is shifting. While still a social stigma in certain parts of the country, many workplaces have become more accepting of prior marijuana use in candidates. Law enforcement agencies often have very strict marijuana policies that can even permanently bar candidates from job consideration.

Law enforcement leaders claim such bans focus on the wrong thing. Agencies like Baltimore Police Department do not necessarily disqualify candidates based on past drug use. Instead, many now look only to current behavior, and whether the candidate uses drugs today, when making a hiring decision.

Should prior drug use disqualify someone from ever getting a job at your agency, even if they've been completely clean for a reasonable amount of time? This is a decision best left to the agency as it weighs its staffing needs against its pool of good candidates.

5. Revamp your website

Seven to ten years ago, an ad in the classified section of the local newspaper was enough to bring young talent to an organization. When it comes to hiring millennials, it'd be a waste of money. Millennials, more than any other generation, live online. Just last year, [mobile internet browsing traffic exceeded desktop browsing traffic](#). As smartphone technology increases, so too will this number.

What does this mean for your agency? It's important to ensure your website is not only easy to find and clearly articulates the important information a new recruit needs to see, but that it's mobile-friendly. There are many free resources and guides online for how to create a "responsive" website - one that automatically conforms to mobile, desktop and tablet screens.

Another idea is to create a mobile application process that allows candidates to sign in with their LinkedIn profile from their smartphone. The key is to eliminate as much friction and tedium as possible in the application process, both for your agency and the prospective recruit.

If you think these tweaks are unnecessary, consider the fact that [research has demonstrated](#) that 61% of users are unlikely to return to a mobile site they had trouble accessing and 40% visit a competitor's site instead.

6. Optimize your social media presence

One of the biggest ways agencies are changing the public narrative of policing is through intimate engagement with the community through social media. Parker (Colorado) Police Department is an excellent example of how social media can make a huge impact on building trust with the community and potential recruits.

When young people grow up engaging with their city's police department on a regular basis, a bond of trust is built that's simply impossible through other mediums.

Seattle (WA) Police Department also has an excellent social media strategy that's worth studying. If you need help setting up your social media presence or developing a strategy, [download our free guide on social media for law enforcement](#). In it, we give practical, step-by-step advice you can take to optimize your agency's page.

7. Get offline and in front of potential recruits

While social media is a must-have in today's world, nothing beats face-to-face contact and physically shaking someone's hand. University job fairs and criminal justice programs are all great places to scout out potential talent. Also visiting schools that have traditional criminal justice curriculum, but focus on problem-solving, critical thinking skills with traits that might be valuable to the agencies.

8. Use scenario-based interview prompts to identify prospects

The tired interview questions that are asked over and over may have worked in prior generations, but with younger candidates, it's important to ask scenario-based questions that tease out certain qualities you're looking for (or looking to avoid).

Marcia Thompson, a law enforcement expert who regularly works with younger generations recommends using "scenario-based" questions to let the interviewee demonstrate a certain character trait. For example, should you want to identify if a candidate is empathetic, a good question might be: "Can you describe a situation in which you showed empathy to someone of a different culture?"

Preparing a number of scenario-based questions, each with a target character trait in mind can be an illuminating exercise and very quickly unveil individual biases.

Retaining Millennials

Continuing the Good to Great analogy, once you've got the right people on the bus, how do you ensure they stay there? What's stopping them from leaving for another agency and keeping them motivated to fulfill their duties day in and day out?

A healthy culture, a clear purpose, and a clear path to career growth are some of the most important things to millennials today. Below are a few tips for meeting those needs without compromising the core values of your agency.

1. Understand that millennials learn through questions

Another observation of law enforcement experts is that prior generations place a much higher value on hierarchy and chain of command than today's millennials. They are taught to do what they're told without asking "why." Millennials tend to believe differently. Because of their desire for purpose, millennials often [start with "why."](#)

Rhonda Glover noticed that many leaders tend to feel undermined when new recruits ask them questions. "Because I told you so," is no longer an acceptable answer for today's recruits, and it's important to understand that millennials often learn through asking questions.

Arlington (TX) Police Academy has regular topical conversations with command staff to encourage transparency. Students are encouraged to ask questions and engage with the leadership on various topics.

2. Utilize their strengths

Millennials are an easy target for stereotypes of laziness and entitlement. But every generation has strengths and weaknesses, and alongside these challenges come valuable skills. The law enforcement experts we spoke with all agreed: millennials have a certain vim and vigor they bring to the organization that simply isn't found in prior generations.

Their energy is also coupled with a keen insight into technology and how it can be used for the good of the police department and the community. To continue the point above, social media is almost second nature to anyone born after 1990. In her time consulting with law enforcement practitioners, Marcia has seen some creative uses for social media (such as live-tweeting questions at a town hall meeting).

3. Follow through on promises

Maintaining a healthy culture in a police department is no easy task. Anytime people are involved, things are bound to get messy. There's nothing that encourages turnover more than a toxic culture.

It's often said that culture is dictated from the top-down. In law enforcement, this means that the command staff is largely responsible for setting the tone for the rest of the agency.

One of the ways this can be done is by following through on promises. If a certain perk or benefit is mentioned in the interview process, it's important to make good on those assurances even after the paperwork is signed.

Not following through on promises is bound to cause dissension and distrust, and good employees won't want to stick around.

4. Receive feedback humbly

Nobody likes to receive criticism. It's especially difficult to hear criticism from a younger employee. Another phrase that needs to be banished from the vocabulary of law enforcement officers is "because this is the way we've always done it." While millennials and new recruits need to integrate into the organizational culture, they can also bring valuable insight in a process or problem that has gone overlooked for years.

One of the trademarks of good leaders is that they're willing to learn from anyone and everyone. They don't let ego, rank, or status get in the way of weighing all the facts, perspectives, and insights and making a rational decision.

Perhaps there's a slow, cumbersome process in your agency that could be streamlined through technology or automatic processes. When inefficiencies are pointed out, wise leaders don't pull rank and get defensive, but seek the welfare of the agency.

5. Train officers regularly and thoroughly

A practical way you can maintain excellence in your agency is by constantly investing in your officers through retraining. Don't stop at the annual classroom retraining, but invest in range time, use-of-force scenario training, procedural justice, constitutional policing ethics, and everything in between. There's nothing more frustrating to a good officer than feeling inadequately equipped and thrown to the wolves.

This is especially pertinent in law enforcement, where one wrong move could be the difference between life and death. PowerDMS automates training with randomized tests, and cyclical reminders. Not only does it take minutes to create new training material around your policies and accreditation, but employees are immediately alerted and held accountable to finish the training in a timely manner. This ensures that they comprehend the material and behave consistently in the field.

[\[See how PowerDMS helps with training\]](#)

6. Praise in public, rebuke in private

This keystone leadership adage still rings true today. Many studies have demonstrated the inefficient and demotivating power of negative reinforcement, especially in a public space. A young officer criticized in front of their peers at role call isn't more likely to work harder, but resent the superior that humiliated her.

This immediately breaks down the walls of healthy communication between command staff and patrol staff. A better choice is to correct in private, not under the watchful eye of fellow officers.

7. Offer personal development opportunities

As mentioned above, one of the most important things to today's young recruit is a clear purpose and path to career development. Marcia Thompson noted that millennials are some of the hardest-working people in the world — when they're given a goal to work toward. Giving them the tools to succeed is an integral part of career development

"It's important that you invest in them and coach them in career development, but at the same time ensure that they're giving their all at the position they're currently working."

8. Learn from exit interviews

Inevitably, your agency will experience turnover. It's important to take advantage of these opportunities to speak to employees who might have valuable feedback on how to improve your agency. View the exit interview as an opportunity for development, not as a finger-pointing session.

It's easy to get defensive when faced with criticism, but a thorough exit interview is a prime place to receive unfiltered feedback on what really goes on among the ranks of your agency. Make a record of the feedback and keep it stored in a [repository](#) that allows you share it with leadership. If over time you identify trends or issues being brought up, it's likely a systemic problem that's affecting the entire organization and needs to be addressed.

9. Give recognition often

Arguably the most important thing to millennials is recognition for their efforts. A simple "good job" is enough. John Mina, Chief of Orlando Police Department, will often email his staff short notes of encouragement, acknowledging the weightiness of their job and honoring the effort and sacrifices they make to serve their community. It's little things like this that can go a long way in motivating officers (especially millennials) to give 100% to their duties everyday.

[Studies have shown](#) that recognition is even more highly prized than money in the modern workplace.

10. Set the precedent you want your officers to follow

An illuminating realization came to light after picking the brains of law enforcement experts: the prior generations of officers are just as prone to distraction and smartphone addiction as their millennial counterparts. This can even lead to overlooking the smartphone-addicted millennials so as not to apply the same standard of excellence to the command staff.

To continue the line of thinking above, the culture of an agency is ultimately set by the command staff. If maintaining a half-focused, half-trained "status quo" staff is the set standard, the rest of the team will follow suit and that attitude will eventually take root in the agency. If excellence is the goal, it's important to learn from, not condemn, the newest workforce generation, and adapt your recruiting tactics for the changing world, all the while maintaining the core values that make your agency great.

About Marcia

Marcia K. Thompson is an attorney and law enforcement consultant with over 20 years working in the criminal justice field. She started her career in federal law enforcement intelligence with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Mrs. Thompson has been an active member of the IACP Civil Rights Committee for over 10 years and has provided insight and guidance on timely and novel civil rights and human rights matters impacting law enforcement nationally.

Mrs. Thompson was a professor for almost 10 years at Bowie State University teaching criminal justice and other related topics. She is licensed to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

About PowerDMS

PowerDMS is a document management platform designed to increase employee accountability and operational excellence. The browser-based software is a one-stop shop for all policies, training, and accreditation management. All your crucial content is securely stored in one spot, and can be collaborated on from the comfort of any browser-enabled device.

To learn more about how PowerDMS can help you with recruiting, training, and accountability, [click here](#).



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