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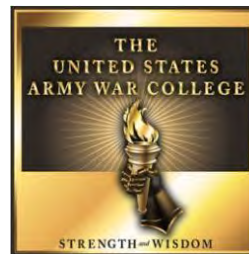
Optimizing Our Army for the Millennial Generation

by

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Abstract

The Army must embrace the millennial generation soldiers to capitalize on their unique attributes and perspectives. Millennials possess qualities the Army must harvest to inspire and empower them to perform at their best. Circumstances associated with the environment they were raised also created some characteristics that are inconsistent with the Army's traditions and professional culture, which must be addressed through mentorship and training. This project draws on principles of organizational theories of effectiveness, and inter-dependent leader theory to understand the leader-millennial soldier relationship. The principal research question driving the study is, Can the Army optimize the effectiveness of millennials soldiers within the U.S. Army's institutional culture? Subordinate research questions include: How can the Army modify its practices, policies, and culture in innovative ways to optimize millennial soldier performance for national defense? Can the Army mold millennial soldier behavior to fit the needs of the Army in the face of generational tendencies and behaviors that are inconsistent with the Army Profession, the Army Ethic, and timeless principles inseparable from the profession of arms? Finally, what do senior leaders need to know about effective interaction with millennials? This paper offers practical recommendations to optimize millennial soldier performance, thereby improving the Army's effectiveness as a professional organization.

Optimizing Our Army for the Millennial Generation

Among democratic nations each generation is a new people.

-Alexis de Tocqueville¹

The key influences that shaped the national and social atmosphere during the youth of millennials are actual or perceived changes in personal safety, economics, and technology.² Millennials grew up in an environment perceived less safe in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, media coverage of numerous deadly mass shootings, and the increased awareness of sexual assault. As children, college students, or young adults, they witnessed and experienced the economic impacts of the great recession from December 2007 to June 2009 and the skyrocketing costs of higher education.³ They have come of age during a time of extreme technological advancements including the ubiquity of internet access, mobile devices, and social media that have revolutionized society and fundamentally changed the way people interact.⁴ While the pre-millennial Greatest Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X also coped with the same societal challenges, these influences were more pronounced on millennials as it shaped their development.

In a speech at George Washington University in November 2015, former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter declared that while the people of our military have always mastered change with excellence, that excellence is not a birthright. It's not guaranteed, and it cannot be taken for granted in today's changing and competitive world. Excellence must be earned again and again. He said that our nation's ability to have our best people in military service is our most enduring advantage.⁵

The Army's leaders and trusted stewards of the profession are always accountable to each other and to the American people.⁶ These stewards must ensure

we are doing all we can to create a culture that inspires and retains our best millennials. However, we should never yield our commitment to instill military expertise, honorable service, esprit de Corps, and the stewardship that preserves internal and external trust required to deter, fight and win our nation's wars.

In 1970 Charles Moskos skeptically wrote that if the U.S. military changed to an all-volunteer force, the institution's future would be composed of a foundation of low-income Third World people that require more authoritarian leadership than those that were drafted.⁷ Moskos's assertion has not been the case, and the American society has produced yet another new people, a distinctive generation. Failure of the Army's stewards to appreciate the millennial's background, preferences, and attitudes will only develop cross-generational friction and frustration.⁸ This could result in the exodus of the most talented millennials, moving the Army closer to Moskos' troubling forecast. Meeting millennials midway by doing what we can to embrace their unique qualities while preserving the characteristics of the profession is our best chance to develop and retain them.

The Problem

The Army has underestimated the difficulties associated with engaging and integrating millennials. Despite their reputation in the media and pop culture as being narcissistic, entitled, needy, overly confident, and overly casual; millennials, and their perspectives and opinions have much to offer the workforce and the U.S. Army.⁹ Millennials have revolutionized the way the global community interacts, shares ideas, travels, and shops. Some of the top corporations founded and led by millennials include Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Airbnb, Lyft, Spotify, Groupon, and Snap.

The current Army human resource practices and leadership culture are falling short, and much more needs to be done to properly develop talent. In the Army's *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond*, Brad Carson, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness acknowledged that "There is a revolution going on in human resources today and we are not taking part in it. What once worked for us has, in the 21st century, become unnecessarily inflexible and inefficient."¹⁰ There are a number of areas that reflect symptoms of this greater problem.

The document's findings show a failure to develop and match talent to current and future requirements and reveal that the Army fails to optimize individual and team performance.¹¹ It also states that the service does not effectively train character to ensure readiness and effectiveness.¹² The main findings of the 2015 Center for Army Leadership's *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL)* Report indicates that over one third of soldiers do not have high or very high trust in their leaders.¹³ Trust is among the top factors most strongly contributing to military career satisfaction, unit cohesion, and unit effectiveness.¹⁴

A 2012 Rand Study found that only 44% of U.S. Military Academy and 51% of Army ROTC commissioned officers chose to continue serving past their initial service obligations; both numbers reflect all-time lows.¹⁵ Over half of these millennials that had already chosen to take an oath to defend the nation and committed to lead soldiers decided the Army was not for them. Additionally, early attrition for first term soldiers has reached 41%. Establishing conditions that help more millennials achieve Army

standards and fulfill their initial contracts could reduce this figure by 10%, saving our taxpayers over \$262 million.¹⁶

Today's exceptionally busy Army leaders need simple and practical solutions for assimilating and developing millennials. Leaders are already inundated with a flood of training and administrative requirements that are literally impossible to complete to standard.¹⁷ They are forced to decide which requirements will be prioritized to be marginally completed, what tasks will be completed to standard, and what will be performed with excellence. Many leaders have not been adequately developed themselves, and are too busy to fully develop their subordinates. The tragedy is that true leader development and expert duty specific training associated with transformational leadership is often dropped down the list of priorities as we sacrifice intrinsic quality for "to do list" quantity as transactional leaders. A transformational leadership approach requires a deeper appreciation of the human dimension, addressing the follower's sense of self-worth to inspire true commitment and involvement.¹⁸

The Army is taking steps to address problems caused by cultural, economic and generational shifts within the society at large that have impacted the service's ability to compete for talent.¹⁹ The career expectations for millennials and perceived freedom and information gained from the proliferation of technology and social media are among the driving factors for the Army's current talent management initiatives.²⁰ The Army established the Talent Management Task Force (TMTF) in 2016 to synchronize and integrate efforts to acquire, develop, employ, and retain high quality people that are ready to fight and win against any enemy in the world.²¹ The TMTF develops

institutional strategies to align individual capabilities and preferences to keep pace with the latest best practices.²²

Additional actions from the strategic level include the Secretary of the Army's June 2018 elimination or modification of twenty-six mandatory training requirements to address the problem of burdensome obligations detracting leaders from focusing on core mission tasks.²³ The Army's strategic leadership is implementing policies and initiatives to improve human resource and leadership practices, but much more remains to be done. Organizational and direct leaders must also seek creative methods to follow suit within their areas of responsibility.

Addressing some inconsistencies between millennial attributes and the Army culture and practices should solve some of the core issues causing the above problems while influencing more volunteers to continue service. Better accommodation and integration would benefit the Army and make millennial soldiers more engaged and committed to the institution.

Research Questions

The principal research question driving the study is to determine if the Army can optimize the effectiveness of millennials soldiers within the U.S. Army's institutional culture. Subordinate research questions include: How can the Army modify its practices, policies, and culture in innovative ways to optimize millennial soldier performance for national defense? Can the Army mold millennial soldier behavior to fit the needs of the Army in the face of generational tendencies and behaviors that can be inconsistent with the Army Profession, the Army Ethic, and timeless principles

inseparable from the profession of arms? Finally, what do senior leaders need to know about effective interaction with millennials?

Any lasting culture change requires senior leader ownership, commitment, and investment.²⁴ This project should help senior leaders better understand the factors that cultivated the unique qualities that make the millennials a distinctive generation and provide insight into how they view the world and themselves. Such information is critical to developing strategies to create a work environment that best utilizes their skills and talents.

Methodology

This project addresses generational trends identified during an extensive literature review of scholarly sources on millennials, books on the topics of leadership and military service, civilian and military media articles, and military doctrine. The focus and structure of this research also benefited from suggestions and discussions with the author's peers, non-military millennials, and experts on the Army Profession.

The project is intended to target millennials who are already in the service and is focused on recommendations that increase both job satisfaction and retention. These soldiers have already demonstrated their propensity to serve and have willfully taken the oath to defend The Constitution and our way of life. The contents of this project should serve as a tool for leaders to better understand this generation so they can shape an environment that will increase enthusiasm for service, influence them to give more than they take, and inspire them to invest and give their all. It should improve their duty performance and set the conditions to better retain top talent.

The paper provides recommendations on how strategic, organizational and direct leaders can capitalize on qualities that help create conditions that can make millennial soldiers of all ranks to perform as well as possible while enhancing the appeal and satisfaction of Army service and improving the institution. This information is intended to provide practical recommendations to be most useful to organizational and direct leaders at the brigade level and below.

Organization

This project discusses the societal environment during the upbringing of millennials and how key influences shaped the generation to exhibit the four unique millennial qualities of frequent feedback, a desire for more flexibility and control, increased loyalty to friends and family over career, and a constant reliance upon digital technology. The paper analyzes how some aspects of these qualities can improve the Army while others, especially when overly adopted, are incompatible with military service. The analysis also provides practical recommendations on how the Army can incorporate these qualities into leader and organizational habits and practices.

Next, the project analyzes how the Army's older, pre-millennial, and senior leader stewards of the profession can better assimilate millennials into the institution without compromising the characteristics of the profession. Assimilation focuses on returning to foundational principles found in The Army Profession and The Army Ethic, while prioritizing transformational over transactional leadership practices to develop trust and mold the millennial soldier's identity to the profession.

The paper's analysis concludes by offering techniques for effectively communicating with millennials. It discusses the millennial attention span, the

importance of authenticity, and a greater need to articulate where the millennial and their work fits into the big picture of the organization and the Army.

Background

For the purpose of this research, millennials are defined as those born between 1982 and 2004.²⁵ These dates were established by historians Neil Howe and William Strauss who coined the term “millennials” in their 1992 book, *Generations* based on the fact that the oldest of the generation would graduate high school in 2000.²⁶ Howe and Strauss observed that millennial children were raised with excessive protections and structure compared to their predecessors.²⁷ They anticipated that the environment in which millennials were raised would surely produce a distinctive generation with marked differences than the attributes of Generation X and Baby Boomer’s when they reached their late teens and early 20s.²⁸

At the risk of overgeneralizing and categorizing such a large population, identifying generational characteristics allows Army leaders at the strategic, organizational, and direct levels to develop an environment that is appealing and relevant to millennials.²⁹ The conditions in which millennials were raised shaped the generation to develop unique preferences, habits, experiences, and priorities.³⁰ The key environmental influencers on millennial youth were parental influences due to the perception of a more dangerous society, economic impacts, and the rapid development of digital and communication technologies.³¹

Findings

A review of the literature on the millennial generation revealed several trends across the population. Some of the consistent themes that were found addressing

millennials involved the topics of experiencing different parenting styles than previous generations, the impacts of economic uncertainty, and the rapid propagation of communications and other digital technologies.

Parental Influences

Earlier generations enjoyed childhood during a time when kids would leave the house on a summer or weekend morning for a day of play and were expected to be home for dinner.³² This type of “free range childhood” became taboo in the late 1980s as the media provided greater coverage on stories of abducted children, and photos of them began appearing on milk cartons.³³ The 1999 Columbine High School massacre and numerous other school and public shootings and terrorist attacks caused parents to respond by taking greater steps to keep their children safe.³⁴ The geography of the average child shrunk from the friend’s house or the neighborhood ball field to the backyard where children could be carefully monitored and contained.³⁵ This contrasts with the environment in the aftermath of World War II, when children were expected to challenge danger with an assertive attitude, or even bravado as their parents felt they may be required to fight wars as adults.³⁶

Parental rules such as not allowing children to walk home alone or play outside without adult supervision, and infrastructural codes including excessively safe playgrounds designed to break falls exacerbate risk aversion and unintentionally forms people less equipped to handle dangerous situations.³⁷ Consequentially, a less active sedentary population ultimately contributes to an overweight Army. Obesity is the top disqualifier of potential recruits.³⁸ According to the Army Times, nearly one in five male soldiers was obese in 2015, doubling the medical resources required by their

counterparts at normal weights.³⁹ The prevalence of safety throughout the childhood of millennials is not limited to the physical. Many parents of millennials have instead chosen to place greater emphasis on shielding their children from anxiety and stressors than teaching them how to effectively cope with adversity on their own.⁴⁰

Millennial children received a consistent message from adults: the world is “dangerous,” but the adults in your life will protect you from any type of harm, not just from adult “strangers” but even from other children.⁴¹ This protection includes efforts to prevent children from even experiencing the emotional pain and disappointment of losing at youth athletic events. Hence the participation trophy, an item that has even become a symbol of the millennial generation.⁴² Many well-meaning parents have overemphasized the importance of self-esteem, constantly praising their children as “winners” and “special” regardless of their actions, effort, or behaviors with unintended negative consequences.⁴³ Many millennials have become victims of excessive overpraise, lacking the coping skills and resiliency to deal with frank feedback, bad news, and failure.⁴⁴

The lack of unsupervised play and peer interaction acclimated millennial children to constant adult attention, direction, and guidance from parents, teachers, coaches and other familiar authority figures.⁴⁵ Many adult millennials remain in constant communication with their parents via cell phone calls and text messaging. There are numerous instances of parents calling their adult children’s bosses or human resource department to advocate for a raise or inquire why they were not awarded the promotion.⁴⁶ The days of the weekly five-minute Sunday phone call are over, and adult millennials seek more assistance with problem solving than young adults in earlier

generations.⁴⁷ This generates the need for continuous feedback and reassurance that their work is on track and their contributions are appreciated.⁴⁸

Economic Impacts

The economic climate over the past three decades has changed the traditional path children follow to adulthood. Using the term “adultolescents”, Newsweek claimed that “The conveyor belt that transported adolescents into adulthood has broken down.”⁴⁹ Despite being raised throughout one of the most economically prosperous times in the last 100 years, major events such as the Enron accounting scandal, sharp swings in the stock market, and the recession and energy crisis in the 2000s stoked fear in millennials.⁵⁰

It has become increasingly difficult for young adults to earn a living wage, achieve financial independence, marry, and become parents early without a college education.⁵¹ Higher housing costs, rising college tuition and the associated student loan debt have also become major factors compromising millennials’ ability to support themselves.⁵² Many millennials dismiss these traditional milestones as qualifications for “adulthood” as numerous young adults cope with these financial challenges by “boomeranging” back to live with their parents and continue receiving monetary and other material support after graduating.⁵³ Evidence of this trend includes the 2011 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. This law mandates that adult children must be allowed to remain on their parents’ health insurance policies until they are twenty-six years old regardless of their employment, financial, residency, marital, or student status.⁵⁴ Goldfarb (2014) cites factors such as smaller nuclear families, more single

parent homes, and longer life expectancies as primary reasons the parent-child relationship is the strongest and most enduring for millennials.⁵⁵

Millennials are concerned that they will not achieve the economic success of their parents, with the chances of children earning more than their parents dropping from 90% to 50% over the last half century.⁵⁶ They also face diminished opportunities for jobs with dependable health insurance and a secure retirement.⁵⁷ Many millennials view their employment future with constantly changing career steps as opposed to a single career choice.⁵⁸ This has propagated a feeling among some millennials that if they are not routinely changing jobs or even careers that they are missing out on opportunities to grow, develop new skills, build their resumes, and extend their professional networks.⁵⁹ Millennials tend to view the apprentice, journeyman, master pathway at a single company inconsistent to both their career aspirations and feelings of survival.

Many millennials prefer the flexibility of job-hopping to take maximum control of their careers, to maintain alignment between the integrity of their personal values and the business culture, and to adjust an uneven work-life balance.⁶⁰ There is also data indicating an average pay increase of 8-10% per job change, and that remaining with one employer for over two years can lose the employee 50% or more in lost lifetime wages.⁶¹ Likewise, employers should expect millennials to leave much earlier than pre-millennials if they perceive they are in a dead end job due to wages, fit, or culture.⁶² In addition to flexibility and a sense of control, job-hopping also reinforces the millennial quality of valuing family and long term close friends over career, which are viewed as the major constant in their lives.⁶³

The Influence of Technology

Technological developments and the rise of social media networks affected the generations differently.⁶⁴ The oldest millennials were born when television was the dominant technology, and in their formative years witnessed the expansion of the personal computer, introduction of the internet, cell phones, and ultimately social media and smart phones. The youngest millennials do not know a world without these technologies. This made the generation the first “social-media natives,” influencing how they support each other, stay in contact, and share moral judgements.⁶⁵ It further allowed them to maintain near continuous contact with their parents, contributing to the tendency of this habit to routinely continue into adulthood. The comfort with and use of digital access 24/7 can facilitate more flexibility and control and can be used as a tool to manage the balance of work duties with family and personal life commitments.

There are many benefits to the millennial preference for constant digital connectivity.⁶⁶ These tools have molded the generation into savvy multitaskers that use technology to quickly learn and validate information through numerous sources.⁶⁷ The continuous launch of new and better commercial apps makes them comfortable with learning new methods to interact with technology.⁶⁸ Their ability to rapidly check information and research limitless topics leads them to view their supervisors not as experts, but mentors and coaches who help them understand how to best incorporate skills and information to contribute in the workplace.⁶⁹ Among the most useful attributes the generation has gained through constant digital connectivity and social media is the ability to collaborate and build cohesive digital networks outside their formal organizations or physical location.⁷⁰ Millennials thrive in team-based projects with

unstructured information and leaders should seek opportunities to harness this attribute.⁷¹

The ubiquity of internet and social media access has also developed a deep need for constant feedback through digital and social media apps. The resultant micro-feedback and associated digital micro-rewards form habits that mimic drug addiction.⁷² This psychological need for continuous internet access and superficial feedback can have negative consequences to personal and unit readiness.

The over reliance upon internet and digital access can provide a weakness for enemies of the U.S. to exploit, whether it be a near-peer competitor's ability to jam, shut down, or intercept communications or by a sub-peer's ability to better operate without such devices in a post electrical magnetic pulse environment.⁷³ The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Milley has frequently warned of the dangers of emitting electromagnetic signals against peer threats.⁷⁴

Increased cyber and digital threats require soldiers that are able to perform their duties and live within emissions controlled spaces. Millennials who have rarely been separated from the internet and mobile devices must be subjected to longer stretches of digital silence where they are not allowed to check their phones, answer texts, post or monitor social media or query information. This increased emphasis on actual face to face interaction over the virtual world also provides an opportunity for organizational and direct leaders to provide genuine feedback, coaching, and mentorship. Techniques to harness the tech-savvy millennials will be discussed in the analysis below.

Making a Difference

Since millennials view the world differently than pre-millennials, they also bring altered perspectives to the meaning of personal and professional success.⁷⁵ While they are achievement oriented and optimistic, millennials prioritize meaningful work and a sense of accomplishment more than high pay and the status associated with greater levels of responsibility compared to their pre-millennial managers (Figure 1).⁷⁶ They view work as much for personal enrichment as for income, and they want a workplace that inspires them.⁷⁷ Leaders of millennials can provide inspiration by emphasizing and pointing out the meaningfulness of everyday work and how their contributions fit into the big picture and larger goals of the organization and community.⁷⁸



Figure 1 Job Factors Valued as Important⁷⁹

Flexibility and Control Over Career

Many millennials gravitate towards temporary and freelance jobs, enjoying a lifestyle untethered from the traditional workplace with little interest in permanent full-

time jobs.⁸⁰ Furthermore, a preponderance of millennials have little intention to remain with one employer for more than two years.⁸¹

Franziska Schaadt is a millennial and self-described “digital nomad,” someone who can work from anywhere at any time.⁸² She has no aspirations to climb the corporate ladder or earn a corner office, and her online tech consulting work provides the flexibility and freedom she cherishes the most. Franziska and other digital nomads enjoy the freedom of not being bound to eight hour days generated by the industrial revolution, preferring instead to work split shifts four days per week. Digital nomads advocate using the freedom of Wi-Fi to work where they please, be it on their couch, on a beach in the Caribbean, or in an café in Croatia with internet access.⁸³ While the above example is clearly an extreme representation of flexibility and control, it provides context to how millennials are willing to forego traditional stability and structure for less hierarchy and more perceived freedom.

Summary of Findings

Each of the unique qualities of the millennial generation stems from individual upbringing experiences and views influenced by trends in perceived safety, economic instability, and the full integration of new technologies into their daily lives. The findings demonstrate the root differences between the upbringing of millennial and those of previous generations. An awareness of these attributes should help Army leaders understand why this generation of soldier is different than those of the 1980s and 90s. This information should facilitate appropriate adjustments that benefit millennials and the service’s ability to harvest millennial talent that is currently in the Army.

Analysis

Findings from previously published literature indicate that there are four qualities that characterize millennials and differentiate the generation from their Generation X and Baby Boomer elders. This analysis extrapolates three recommendations to help Army leaders get the highest performance from millennials by capitalizing on their unique qualities, better assimilating them into the Army Profession, and offering suggestions for communicating with millennials.

Unique Qualities.

The above findings led the author to identify four unique qualities that define the millennial generation 1) the need for continuous supervisory feedback, 2) the desire for more flexibility and perception of control over their lives and work, 3) increased loyalty to family and friends over careers compared to earlier generations, and 4) the need for and comfort with 24/7 digital connectivity.⁸⁴

The millennial parent's implementation of more parameters to ensure safety and the associated increased supervision led adult millennials to feel the need for continuous managerial feedback.⁸⁵ Personal and emotional safety, the avoidance of strangers, the lack of corporate stability, and the luxury of constant social media and digital connectivity increased the importance of and ease to maintain constant and close relationships to family and friends.

The sharp shifts in the economy and job market due to rapid technological developments has created an environment that influences millennials to constantly explore new career opportunities.⁸⁶ Economic and employment uncertainty and the desire to "make a difference" more than to make money has led many millennials to insistence upon more career and day to day flexibility and control in the workplace.⁸⁷

The explosion of digital technology in the past 25 years has caused most millennials to not know a world without cell phones and the internet. They insist upon always being connected to their family and friends. This has caused a measure of instant gratification, having always enjoyed access to nearly unlimited information and tremendous options for their time and attention.⁸⁸

These factors changed the way young people enter the workforce and challenged the effectiveness and relevance of the U.S. military policies and culture. Millennials are more willing to question the status quo than their elders. They are more apt to change their employer or career when they sense they are not growing and could pursue other opportunities in environments and cultures that better capitalize on their talents and align with their beliefs. Pre-millennial strategic and organizational leaders must appreciate and embrace the idea that many of the norms, habits, and cultures they encountered upon entering the Army will not inspire and influence today's millennial soldiers to remain in the service or to perform at their best. Understanding millennial perspectives and competencies allows their strengths to be fully harnessed.⁸⁹

Recommendation 1: Capitalizing on the Unique Qualities

The Army should make modifications to its policies, culture, and practices and recognize new ways to operate in order for more millennial soldiers to find service appealing, and to perform at the height of their potential. This analysis of incorporating the unique qualities will explore how strategic, organizational, and direct leaders can capitalize on millennial traits. It includes practical suggestions on how to meet the need for frequent supervisor feedback and ideas for how millennials can increase flexibility and control over their careers and daily duties. This section contains suggestions on

how the Army can be a viable choice for those with a greater sense of loyalty to family and friends over career than previous generations, along with methods for harnessing the millennial comfort with and preference for continuous digital connectivity. Adapting practices and policies to accommodate millennials across these qualities can improve the Army by increasing their performance within the institution.

Provide More Frequent Feedback

Properly integrating the millennial newcomer into a new organization and duty location is critical to their understanding of the unit and their place within the big picture in order to capture the meaning of their contribution. In addition to prioritizing the importance of a proper and thorough sponsorship program to welcome newcomers, there are two tools that can effectively integrate millennials and make them feel comfortable with how they are doing and where they stand. Implementing a shadow “left seat / right seat” style leadership professional development program and utilizing simple one minute techniques from Ken Blanchard’s *The One Minute Manager* can create an environment of open dialogue that is conducive to the millennial need for feedback.

Shadow Leadership Development Program

Familiarity breeds contentment and can increase employee well-being.⁹⁰ An effective leader development tool the author received under the mentorship of the division commander and implemented as a battalion commander is informally referred to as “the shadow program”. It acquaints soldiers with their senior rater and establishes an environment conducive to frequent feedback.

Within the first two weeks of assignment to the organization, lieutenant colonel battalion commanders with approximately seventeen years of Army service spent two full duty days with the division commander, a (two star) major general with nearly thirty years of service. Likewise, lieutenants and pre-company command captains with 6 months to 5 years of experience would shadow the lieutenant colonel.

The junior officer with one or two peers would meet with their senior rater for fifteen minutes to get acquainted and learn basic information about each other and review the schedule for the day. The first event was normally physical training, followed by breakfast to discuss current organizational priorities or a predetermined topic. The senior leader was obviously very busy, with various meetings, phone calls, dilemmas to address, and often travel to meet with leaders across the unit. Junior leaders would be present for all engagements minus the most sensitive legal or personal issues. The senior would utilize travel time or five minutes between events for the group to discuss what they observed or learned and were required to ask questions.

The two day event includes a more formal counseling session of approximately ten minutes and the opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns one on one. One of the benefits of this program is that it requires minimal time investment, since the senior leader is performing his or her duties throughout the engagement. After the initial two day shadow, the division's goal was for each officer to conduct a subsequent one day shadow every three months.

The primary intent of this program is to "break the ice" and develop a relationship between the senior rater and junior officer. If done properly and authentically, this technique should build trust and familiarity. It creates an environment that cultivates two

way communication and feedback, and junior leaders should become much more comfortable with future interactions. Millennials would gain a more expansive view of the larger organization. The shadow program can inspire by providing a higher level perspective of where the millennial soldier and their duties fit into the big picture broader team.

One Minute Goals, Praisings, and Reprimands

While the shadow program is a tool more beneficial between soldiers two levels removed, the next recommendation is geared more for first line direct leaders. Millennials expect constant coaching and assurance that their work is on track, therefore they view formal feedback as time consuming, overly formal, and unnecessary.⁹¹ A brief text, a quick email, or a two-minute conversation meets their needs.⁹² Ken Blanchard's 1982 book *The One Minute Manager* provides practical and effective tools that can be used to provide millennials feedback in the midst of the most hectic schedules and situations. U.S. Air Force General David Jones, the 9th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff commended the effectiveness of the book's technique that emphasizes catching someone doing something right over predominantly criticizing a subordinate's performance.⁹³ It involves three processes called One Minute Goals, One Minute Praisings, and One Minute Reprimands.⁹⁴

During the brief One Minute Goal Setting session, the supervisor and follower mutually agree on what constitutes a good behavior or performance. This should be synchronized with the senior rater to ensure it is nested within and is complementary to the senior rater counseling from the shadow program. Next, One Minute Praisings begin with the leader explaining up front that she will let the employee know how they

are doing. It requires leaders to praise satisfactory performances immediately with specific feedback, and how good the supervisor feels about their contribution to the team and how their efforts support coworkers. The praising concludes with encouragement and a handshake, affirming the leader's support for the employee's success within the organization.⁹⁵

Finally, when subordinate performances fall short, the One Minute Reprimand also needs to happen immediately, starting with specifically what they did wrong and how the leader feels about it in no uncertain terms. This is followed by a handshake reaffirming the leader's honest commitment to the subordinate's success and how much they are valued members of the team. It concludes with reassurance that they are well thought of as a person, and the disappointment is directed at this specific performance and the realization that when the reprimand is over, it's over. Reprimands should never be given based on unconfirmed information or hearsay.⁹⁶

These techniques can prevent millennials from becoming frustrated by wondering if they are doing a good job, and are more important when they are learning a new duty position or skill. The frequency of this feedback should occur as often as possible, weekly at an absolute minimum. The One Minute Management techniques are recommended to be a vehicle to ensure millennials are receiving the expert knowledge and development necessary to confidently and competently execute their duties per the doctrine of mission command, not to micromanage. The Army's quarterly counseling program, even when faithfully implemented produces frank feedback at intervals much too long to satisfy millennials. Blanchard states that the top motivator of people is feedback on their results, and that feedback is the real "Breakfast of Champions".⁹⁷

Offering More Flexibility and Control over Career and Duties

Army leaders should be mindful that millennials tend to prioritize their lives outside of work more than previous generations. A participant in Schaefer's research on millennial turnover within the Department of Defense stated that "we just want to be able to support ourselves to live, but we would like more time to actually live."⁹⁸ The institutional Army should implement policies and programs that take into consideration the millennial importance of flexibility and control of career and work tasks. Just as the TMTF is intended to develop ideas to capitalize on the latest best practices within the global human resource community, organizational and direct leaders should seek creative solutions to follow suit.

Organizational and Direct Level Opportunities.

Commanders and senior non-commissioned officers should continuously learn, utilize, and communicate to their formations about the latest available policies to maximize soldier flexibility and control over their careers. Fully integrating new enterprise level tools such as the Assignment Information Portal 2.0, and generating and reviewing simple inprocessing forms at the local level can help direct leaders fully understand the capabilities and goals of their millennial soldiers. Knowing the skills, desires, interests, and passions of millennials helps capitalize on their contributions to the organization.

Unit leaders should make every effort to forecast requirements and provide opportunities for millennials to volunteer, interview, build collaborative teams, and even negotiate with peers who will assume primary and additional duties, official taskings, and other missions and projects. This gives control back to junior officers and the

enlisted population rather than relying on the Adjutant's dated DA 6 "next up" roster to indiscriminately select who will perform an assignment or additional duty.

Accommodating a Greater Sense of Loyalty to Family and Friends over Career

Many leaders tout the importance of achieving and maintaining a healthy work life balance. Managing the requirements and demands of a successful Army career with personal and family responsibilities is a tremendous challenge for soldiers of any generation. However, as the findings of the literature on millennials indicate, they are less likely to sacrifice and remain in service for career goals and financial security.

46% of the 7,800 respondents to the 2017 Blue Star Families Military Lifestyle survey cited time away from family as their top concern.⁹⁹ Pay and benefits had previously been the highest areas of concern on the list. Other top stressors included family stability, the impact of service on children, and spouse employment. 72%, the same percentage as the 2016 survey, felt that the operational tempo exerts an unacceptably high level of stress.¹⁰⁰

The term family life "balance" implies there may be an effective method to measure time spent on duty versus time invested with the family or tending to personal priorities. This can be objectively judged by the number of evenings the service member leaves the office by 5:00 pm in garrison, how many nights she makes it home for dinner, or how few duty phone calls or emails he receives after hours or on weekends. The Army value of selfless service can cut both ways, with leaders struggling to give all they have to fulfil their responsibilities while aiming to not be viewed as a selfish careerist to the family. Part of the solution can be found by increasing family inclusion into the Army unit.

Integration and Inclusion of Family into the Army Organization

There are some simple steps that unit leaders can take to encourage the maximum inclusion and integration of families into the organization. Commanders can support family presence in the workplace at appropriate times throughout the duty day. The author's operations officer's wife would stop by the office to eat lunch once or twice per week. His children were not yet school age, and this allowed him to be with them for another hour throughout the day. This busy major would have to respond to some emails, or would have junior officers or non-commissioned officers (NCOs) step in to ask work related questions, but the family was present, most of his attention was on them, and they were happy to have more time together. While this admittedly could become a problem if the unit work area was suddenly flooded with families at inconvenient times, the author has seen nothing but cohesion and good faith with families result from the practice.

A creative approach to family integration can lead to identifying other techniques to maximize family inclusion. One practice is to designate one day per month to invite families to attend unit physical training. Clearly, many of the exercises and activities would need to be modified or scaled but the literal family presence can make the unit feel more like an extended family. Other ideas that fit into the intent of family and close friend inclusion are implementing activities that allow them to come to work for a day in various environments. Letting family see the diversity and scope of work duties on a routine garrison day, observing weapons firing at ranges, being allowed near drop zones during airborne operations, or visiting a field training exercise for several hours can make them feel part of the organization.

Another idea is to use Family Readiness Groups (FRG) and other phone rosters or social media to inform family and friends of when soldiers are returning from training exercises. This provides the opportunity for a “welcome home troops” style event with posters, baked goods or even a cookout as initial recovery tasks are completed. FRGs can also take advantage of the opportunity to have lunch fundraisers in the workplace, building familiarity between families and raising funds for more formal events.

Unit commanders could implement policies allowing those with an appropriate physical training (PT) score to “PT on their own” a specified number of days per month. Excusing soldiers from the routine 6:30 a.m. PT formation provides the opportunity to attend to some morning family activities they regularly miss, such as walking their children to the school bus stop, driving them to school, or sharing breakfast. Since excelling at PT and physical tasks come more naturally to some soldiers than others, creative methods can be developed to incentivize a limitless number of areas to free up time for family and friends.

These activities would appeal to millennials not only because they include family and friends, but because they can address all of the unique qualities. In addition to being meaningful and memorable activities, planning these events encourages the initiative associated with flexibility and control, provides another venue to contribute, can provide less formal opportunities for interaction and feedback, and can be planned and recorded on social media to share with extended family and friends.

Expectation Management

An effective technique is to clearly communicate the spectrum of routine, important, critical, and emergency levels of participation for both personal / family

commitments and Army work requirements. For example, it may be critical for a soldier to attend a sibling's wedding that has been scheduled six months out. If the soldier communicates this event to her chain of command, it should be protected and absolutely not infringed upon due to routine garrison or training events or important requirements such as a small arms range. The millennial soldier should be clearly informed that a work emergency event such as a short or no notice combat deployment would trump the critical family wedding. If there is a duty conflict such as a major training event at the level of a combat training center rotation, the chain of command and the soldier need to meet, and the supervisor needs to make the appropriate tough call face to face with a negotiated mitigation strategy if necessary. Regardless, millennial soldiers must clearly know what is required to place personal events over the needs of the unit. Likewise, millennials need to know that leaders respect their personal priorities and will overtly endeavor to support them. Ensuring that FRG meetings and other unit announcements articulate the spectrum of importance for upcoming events cultivates open communication and trust.

Capitalizing on 24/7 Digital Connectivity

Millennials prefer instant communication over email, a medium the youngest of the generation view as merely an antiquated tool for turning in assignments to their teachers.¹⁰¹ They prefer mobile work apps such as Snapchat, Instagram, Messenger, or WhatsApp that do not tether them to the office or a cubicle.¹⁰² Instant communications also provide the ability to quickly deal with contingencies and immediately put plans in place to mitigate shortcomings. Personal electronic devices (PEDs) have revolutionized unit alert procedures, responsiveness, and the ability to

effectively deal with changes. Allowing direct leaders to utilize mass notification apps including Slack, WhatsApp and GroupMe avoids group texts and is significantly faster than sequential voice phone calls.

However, leaders should also be careful not to abuse the millennial soldier's inclination to operate their PEDs for work use with constant work texts, calls, or emails all hours of the night and weekends. Just because millennials are comfortable with the 27/4 use and access to technology does not mean they want to constantly hear from their boss when they are off duty.

Caution should also be exercised to be mindful of potential operational security concerns with such a high volume of military work occurring via personal commercial devices. Our nation's enemy's cyber capabilities have increased drastically over the last decade and they could exploit an overreliance on PED use. Secondly, garrison and training use of PEDs establishes poor habits that cannot be sustained in tactical environments or facilities that restrict their access. Next, when leaders can constantly access subordinates at all levels, there is risk that the "good idea cutoff point" is erased or pushed dangerously close to execution. If soldiers can "make it happen" at the last minute, they are likely to get changes up to the last minute.

However, since smartphones are a constant presence and most millennials have enjoyed a life of instant access to nearly any information, we should provide them top quality training anytime and anywhere they want it.¹⁰³ The Army must continue to take advantage of electronic doctrinal publications, interactive apps and other emerging technologies that are available for PED upload. Leaders should ensure the maximum use of and encourage the full utilization of such tools. These training and resource

applications engage millennials through their constant accessibility, relevancy and the familiarity they have with digital media.

Develop and Implement Digital Training Materials

Nearly all of the current training and doctrinal materials remain in hard copy book or pdf form despite the fact that millennials prefer and are accustomed to the latest digital technology. The millennial's technical understanding requires the latest methods to engage with information.¹⁰⁴ Both the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, KS and the U.S. Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, AL have taken steps to bring soldier training into the 21st century with a concept called Living Doctrine.

Living Doctrine is an immersive digital training device available on smart phones, tablets, or laptops that allows the learner to quickly experience a new level of understanding. It is a blended learning product that appeals to millennials by providing intellectual stimulation far past reading materials.¹⁰⁵ It uses computer generated 3D graphics and modeling to "bring to life" doctrinal concepts with a captivating narrative that facilitates a rapid visualization of tactical tasks.¹⁰⁶ This technique simply and effectively provides understanding and clarity in a fraction of the time possible with only text.

Simplify and Update Programs of Record

The institutional Army could continue to strive for simple and intuitive tactical, online, and network software programs that require minimal training. Millennials do not undergo training to learn how to use new apps and programs used for shopping, personal finance, entertainment, or personal GPS navigation. We owe them programs of record that are just as simple, effective and easy to learn. Potential areas of

improvement include mission command and navigation systems, readiness reporting, training management, logistics, maintenance, personal administration, and travel to name a few. Frustration is the expected result when millennials that have enjoyed the latest and best functioning technology nearly their entire lives yet are required to work on cumbersome, slow, complex and non-intuitive digital systems.

Recommendation 2: Assimilate Millennials into the Army Profession

The above information described trends in how millennials were raised and how their world experiences shaped their attributes. This project followed with some practical solutions for how Army leaders can prioritize these attributes to create conditions that facilitate millennial strengths and preferences. This section will explore how to get millennial buy-in into The Army Profession and Ethos.

Corporate leadership and training expert Diane Spiegel wrote that millennials want to work for organizations that provide coaching, encourage collaboration in an environment with clear group goals, give clear expectations on how they will be judged, and inspire intrinsic motivation.¹⁰⁷ Work is about much more than income for this generation. They want to learn meaningful skills, to grow from professional development opportunities, and work in organizations where they trust their leaders.¹⁰⁸ They choose employers that will allow them to make a difference and be part of a vision bigger than themselves.¹⁰⁹

These findings should be encouraging to the Army since many of the employer traits millennials seek align with The Army Ethic and the doctrine of mission command. The Army Ethic, also called “the heart of the Army” includes moral principles that guide decision making and actions in the pursuit of fulfilling the organization’s purpose to

defend the Constitution and our way of life. It states that trusted Army Professionals are stewards who honorably serve, demonstrate character, do what is right, and are competent and committed experts committed to lifelong learning.¹¹⁰

Mission command is the method by which commanders use their authority through directive mission orders to describe a desired outcome and their intent for conduct of the task. It relies upon the subordinate leader's disciplined initiative and ability to be adaptive, to accept prudent risk, and build cohesive teams operating with a foundation of mutual trust.¹¹¹ It requires the subordinate to work flexibly and to exercise control over their mission. If there is truly such a cohesive alignment between the values millennials seek in employers and the Army then attrition would not be near all-time highs. Nearly half of officers, those that raised their hands and took an oath to risk their lives and futures to defend the nation decide that the Army is not for them and they depart at the first opportunity¹¹²

Develop Trust

As mentioned in the introduction, the 2015 Center for Army Leadership's *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL)* Report reflected that more than a third of soldiers lack trust in their leaders.¹¹³ Trust is foundational to the Army's five professional characteristics, forming the base for military expertise, honorable service, esprit de corps, and stewardship.¹¹⁴ If trust fails, not only will the additional characteristics ring hollow, but the unit's ability to build esprit de corps and cohesion is severely impacted. This sense of belonging and community is a critical need for millennials whose connections have become increasingly virtual, and they are likely geographically

separated from their extended families and lifelong friends. We must identify the source of this lack of trust, and repair what is blocking leaders at all levels to build it.

According to Dr. Don Snider, a Senior Fellow with the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, trust has been compromised by leaders failing to sufficiently practice professional transformational leadership, instead succumbing to busy work and bureaucratic transactional leadership habits.¹¹⁵ Snider wrote that the Army possesses a perpetual dual character, simultaneously existing as both a military profession and a government bureaucracy and that only one can dominate.¹¹⁶ Millennials want to work for the type of organization described under the “Profession” column in Figure 2, yet numerous forces compete to bias Army leaders and their organizations to act as a “Bureaucracy” explained under the corresponding heading.

Comparison	Profession	Bureaucracy
Knowledge	Expert, requires life-long learning, education, and practice to develop expertise	Non-expert skills based, learned on the job and/or through short duration training
Application	Knowledge applied as expert practice through discretion and judgment of individual professional; commitment based	Work accomplished by following SOPs, administrative rules and procedures; compliance based
Measure of Success	Mission effectiveness	Efficiency of resource expenditure
Culture	Values and ethic based; granted autonomy with high degree of authority, responsibility and accountability founded on trust; a self-policing meritocracy	Procedural compliance based; closely supervised with limited discretionary authority, highly structured, task-driven environment founded on low-trust
Investments	Priority investment in leader development; human capital/talent management; investment strategy	Priority investment in hardware, routines; driven by cost
Growth	Develop critical thinking skills to spur innovation, flexibility, adaptability; broadened perspectives	Develop tactical and technical competence to perform tasks
Motivation	Intrinsic - Sacrificial service, sense of honor and duty, work is a calling	Extrinsic - Ambition to get ahead, competition; work is a job

Figure 2 Profession versus Bureaucracy Comparison¹¹⁷

Practice Transformational Over Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is based on the primary motivation of obligation to obey the formal authority. It is contingent upon rewards, punishment, threats and coercion to generate the proper behaviors.¹¹⁸ If overly used, this will create a top down culture of vertical hierarchy and legalistic compliance, similar to a bureaucratic organization.¹¹⁹

This climate is more akin to the pre-all volunteer Army and is not effective at inspiring millennials.

Conversely, transformational leaders instill aspiration as a primary motivation. They lead with intrinsic rewards and an inspiring motivation for the follower to be the best professional they can be as the ultimate motivation or authority. The follower's sense of genuine commitment and engaged involvement align with a professional Army and the employment preferences of millennials. Transformational leadership is up to 85 percent more effective in complex, uncertain, and unstable environments, exactly the conditions we need our millennials to be at their best.¹²⁰ Maximizing the effective use of this style is critical to restoring a climate of trust and cohesion and fully engaging millennials.

The next step is to identify why more Army leaders do not effectively practice transformational leadership. The reason appears to be because it takes dedicated time and focused attention to develop individuals. The 2015 CASL Report also found that “the stress from a high workload is a serious problem for nearly one-fifth of leaders” with a significant drop in career satisfaction and increases in workload stress and discipline problems since 2009.¹²¹ Mission command cannot be accomplished without trust.¹²² Leaders need to trust that their followers have the competence to perform their duties, and that they possess the character and commitment to prevail despite grave obstacles. Followers learn these traits within a professional organization that makes the time for leader development.

The type of development soldiers desperately require provides the values based training, expert skills, and critical thinking challenges to cultivate the discretion and

judgement millennials need to experience the meaningfulness, sense of accomplishment, and contribution to the big picture they seek. Acknowledging this need is not new, it simply continues to be inadequately addressed. The mismatch between the intent and necessity of developing soldiers to be prepared to confidently perform their duties and providing time to do so fractures trust. If more time were provided to direct leaders to accomplish what they are expected to, then trust would rise.

Recommendation 3: Suggestions for Communicating with Millennials

If it is in fact critical for pre-millennial leaders to provide feedback, coach, develop, encourage, inspire, and provide guidance to millennials to ultimately build trust, then effective communication is a must. There are essential aspects to understand about communicating with millennials, and reasons why communication is more important to leading them than their Generation X or Baby Boomer predecessors. The primary suggestions for communicating with millennials relate to attention spans, authenticity, and providing an understanding of where they fit into the broader institution.

Attention Spans

Millennials have much shorter attention spans than their elders and are accustomed to multitasking and processing more information than what can be provided in a one way lecture.¹²³ A 2015 study revealed that today's youth have become conditioned to activate a "tune-out filter" if they do not perceive the personal value of the information they are presented within 8 seconds.¹²⁴ Hence, communicators should be quick to "hook" the listener by offering some insight into why this information is relevant.

When able, offer information beyond why it is relevant to perform a specific task, but how it can be personally beneficial, how they can apply it, the risks of not knowing this information, or insight into a larger context using the “Profession” column from Figure 2.¹²⁵

When able, the flipped classroom technique can be used to maximize active learning. This requires learner self-preparation followed by solidified group debates, teamwork, case study discussions, and coaching that challenges thinking and problem solving.¹²⁶ If the information requires visual aids, minimize the use of PowerPoint. Millennials view it as static and as boring to them as email. If able, incorporate flash technology and short videos that are more engaging and provide greater stimulation.¹²⁷

Authenticity

The average millennial viewed approximately 200,000 marketing messages by their fifteenth birthday, and they tend to distrust those they feel are trying to sell to them.¹²⁸ Millennials have a deep preference for what they perceive as “real people” and have an active distrust of brands. Messaging campaigns and slogans generated by strategic and organizational leaders and their staffs can quickly be dismissed as propaganda, which engages yet another “tune-out filter”.¹²⁹ This complicates the effort to convince millennial soldiers of the importance of doctrine surrounding character, values, and ethics since many of the words associated with them appear to be platitudes and mantras. It’s not that they reject these types of concepts, but that the delivery method should be relevant and those conveying the message must be perceived as honest, authentic, and approachable.¹³⁰

There is a time, place, and purpose for senior leaders to conduct battlefield circulation to meet and interact with soldiers. Millennials do not view leaders such as a general, their unit commander, or even their senior enlisted as 'real people' per se, they are more like celebrities and faces of the institution. However, the closer the messenger is in rank, age, and proximity, the more relevant and real the message feels to them. Training on topics like The Army Values, The Army Ethic, The Army Profession, or even safety messages resonate with greater power when presented by the sergeant or a younger authority figures than web-based training or mass unit formation speeches by senior leaders.¹³¹

Articulating where Millennials Fit Into the "Big Picture"

Millennials want to know how their job, their daily duties, and their goals and talents fit into the organization's "big picture". They want to be mentored to see the little 'me' in the broader team.¹³² They want to be taught the cultural norms of the organization and expectations for acceptable behavior.¹³³ They want professional development that shows them how they can 'make a difference' and mentorship to help them chart their own future.¹³⁴ This type of authentic coaching helps millennials find the meaningfulness they crave in their work.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Millennials will fundamentally change the workforce, how business is conducted, and how the Army runs in the future. Leadership and human resource practices and policies designed to attract, develop and retain this generation must adapt to reflect their expectations for work and life.¹³⁶ The Army must adjust how it interacts,

communicates, and trains to generate a fighting force with the skills, character, and cohesion to fight and win wars.¹³⁷

Army leaders at the strategic, organizational, and direct levels that understand the key influencers that molded the millennial generation will be better equipped to influence and lead this vast cohort. Leaders that capitalize on the four unique qualities that define the millennial generation are more likely to establish an environment that maximizes their performance. These qualities are: 1) the need for continuous supervisory feedback, 2) the desire for more flexibility and perception of control over their lives and work, 3) increased loyalty to family and friends over careers compared to earlier generations, and 4) the need for and comfort with 24/7 digital connectivity.

Prioritizing transformational leadership and developing millennials in a way that instills trust and intrinsic motivation will cultivate The Army Profession and build the characteristics of military expertise, honorable service, esprit de corps, and stewardship. Communicating with authenticity, broadening perspectives, and developing relationships help break through generational barriers of misunderstanding and frustration. Instilling a sense of duty and investing in human capital and talent management will help the millennial see the meaning of their work, and feel that serving in the Army is not a job but a calling.

Much of what has been mentioned in this project is already happening. Many of the recommendations are occurring at all levels of the Army. However, we can do much more to fully inspire millennials to perform at their best. We can go further to make Army service more appealing to this generation, and to influence more millennials to continue their sacrificial service to our nation. We must fully engage and connect

through the strengths of millennials. As Secretary Carter implored, “as long as our military continues to harness the best talent America has to offer, we will always come out ahead”.¹³⁸

Recommended Future Research

Investigate the common trends of why officers and E6 and above NCOs depart the Army after more than six years of service to identify trends and develop solutions to systematic issues.

Endnotes



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