



Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, march with rucks for physical training during the Team Leader Academy at Fort Stewart, Ga., July 19, 2019. Current and future leaders attending the academy learned that junior enlisted Soldiers look to team leaders and noncommissioned officers to provide an example of physical fitness. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Jordyn Worshek)

Preparing the Millennial Generation for Leadership

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There is a shifting demographic within the military towards the newest generation of the armed forces. This requires the U.S. Army to adapt to meet the military's future challenges. The desired end state is for millennial leaders (individuals born between 1980 and 1994) to not only understand the generational similarities and differences of their junior or future enlisted Soldiers, but also use them to their advantage to ensure organizational success.

How can millennial noncommissioned officers (NCOs) use Generation Z's (Gen Z) characteristics to complete their mission goals? The solution is to give latitude to subordinates, allow for more innovation and out-

of-the-box ideas, and tap into the minds of a tech-savvy generation. Failure to adapt will result in degraded operations, a decrease in a diverse talent pool, and the inability to properly train future leaders.

The Current Environment

During the events of September 11, 2001, millennials were between the ages of seven and 21-years-old. A small population of this group served as junior enlisted across the military. Now those same individuals are serving as senior NCOs and shaping the ethics, values, and organizational functions at the tactical and operational levels. And now a new generation of subordinates are upon them.

"An *Army leader* is anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."

—Department of the Army, 2019b, p. 1-3

According to Kate Rockwood at the *Project Management Institute*, "the oldest members of Gen Z—born between roughly 1994 and 2010—are finishing college. But by 2020, they'll make up 20 percent of the global workforce" (2017, p. 46). If millennials are coming into leadership positions, and Gen Z is different from previous generations, how is the military preparing for this shift?

The Challenge

As millennial NCOs continue to move into positions of increased responsibility, challenges will occur as their subordinates have different generational behavioral traits. In their article, Cmdr. Andy Henwood (U.S. Navy), Lt. Col. Dave Owen (U.S. Air Force), and Maj. Steven Santucci (U.S. Army) express reasons for the need to adapt to this new generation before the future talent pool decreases:

Given the preponderance of research and study, it is evident that the military must adapt its tactics, techniques, and procedures to prepare millennials for leadership. The first and most important thing to keep in mind is that if the military does not adapt, it will continue to see a decrease in the defense talent pool and a loss of continuity and expertise in critical career fields. (Henwood, Owen, & Santucci, 2019, para. 23)

The Difference

Gen Z shares a lot of similarities to the older millennials, however, recognizing and understanding the differences in generational values is crucial. The following differences are important to understand in order to lead these new junior Soldiers effectively:

1. Gen Zs are competitive. "They want to work on their own and be judged on their own merits rather than those of their team" (Patel, 2017, para. 6). This mentality is the opposite of millennials, who are team players and like to work collectively.
2. Gen Zs were born into technology. "Ubiquitous connectivity, highly curated global information, on-demand video, and 24/7 news cycles are native to Generation Z" (Jenkins, 2017, para. 9).
3. Gen Zs need space to explore and be creative. "Gen Z tends to thrive on private time to think, tinker, and explore new ideas" (Bridges, 2015, para. 6).

How can millennial leaders use these differences to their advantage? Adaptability — which includes adjusting from the way things have been done, to the way things can be done in order to set their subordinates up for career and mission success.



U.S. Army Forces Command's Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Grinston (now 16th sergeant major of the Army) speaks to Soldiers of E Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Ky., May 22, 2018. (Photo by Sgt. Steven Lopez)

The Army is already changing its recruiting strategies by promoting itself more with a new marketing campaign (Warriors Wanted), shifting recruiting focus from its traditionally conservative cities to those that are hot beds for young tech talent, and using a digital approach (to include an esports team) to attract Gen Z's top prospects (Fadel & Morris, 2019; Myers, 2019).

With the Army putting forth maximum effort to recruit and retain Gen Z talent, today's staff NCOs need to move away from the *Do As I Say Or Else* style of leadership and instead become effective communicators. "I will communicate consistently with my Soldiers and never leave them uninformed" ("NCO Creed," n.d., para 2).

The Approach

Generational differences can be beneficial to leaders. They can use Gen Z's drive to increase mission success by utilizing their innovation and out-of-the-box thinking. This type of approach is not only synonymous with the *Special Operations Forces Operating Concept* (U.S. Special Operations Command, 2016), but also with the U.S. Army's *Mission Command* philosophy:

“Through mission orders, commanders focus their subordinates on the purpose of an operation rather than on the details of how to perform assigned tasks. This allows subordinates the greatest possible freedom of action in the context of a particular situation. Finally, when delegating authority to subordinates, commanders set the necessary conditions for success by allocating resources to subordinates based on assigned tasks, findings and analysis at the point of action, providing valuable insight into ambiguous and rapidly changing environments. (Department of the Army, 2019a, p. viii)”

Innovative thinkers and technologically competent Soldiers will ensure the United States maintains its com-



Sgt. 1st Class Mario Salguerovega, an instructor with the 104th Training Division, calls out the remaining time for cadets to complete an obstacle during the Field Leaders Reaction Course at Fort Knox, Ky., July 11, 2018. U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers, with the 104th Training Division, led events at the U.S. Army's Basic Camp in order to develop and reinforce Army values in cadets. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Dalton Smith)

petitive edge over its adversaries. The Army of the future will need Gen Z's top talent to proficiently operate the technology on the horizon. This will include augmented reality headsets, unit robots and drones, and autonomous aircraft (Nye, 2019).

Conclusion

Millennial NCOs need to understand that the aggressive and punitive leadership style from 20 years ago is no longer effective. "The services have gone to great lengths to remove toxic leaders from the ranks in order to encourage trust and confidence" (Henwood, Owen, & Santucci, 2019, para. 10).

Allow this new generation a voice and the latitude to be innovative to accomplish the mission. Tapping into their technological savviness and creativity will keep the U.S. Army ahead of its enemies on the battlefield. ■

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