

Managing a Multi-Generational Work Force



In corrections, we are presented an immense amount of differences in the generations we manage. Every generation has a managing style that works best for them, and you have to be adaptable to manage each efficiently. I, alongside my partners, have unique training tactics we used to face these challenges, which have not only molded my staff but myself as well.

In October of 2020 at the age of 26, I was promoted to sergeant at the Davidson County Sheriff's Office, in Nashville, TN. This made me the youngest correctional supervisor at my agency, a title I still hold today. My first assignment was an intimidating task for any new supervisor; integrating over 30 brand new officers from the private sector to my agency, with ages ranging from 24 to 63. This experience has taught me important lessons about generational differences and ways to manage those differences in a correctional setting.

Gen Z: 1997-2012



Many Correctional Agencies have lowered their hiring age from 21 to 18 due to difficulties in hiring and retaining staff. As a result, more correctional employees from Gen

Z are being hired every day. While they share similar traits to Millennials, there are several key differences between them and Gen Y.

Making a strong first impression, as an agency, on this group of employees is key to retention with this generation. My observation is Gen Z employees are more willing to leave employment due to the work environment rather than maintaining employment for the sake of employment unlike the other generations. Gen Z are young, not as established, and a lot of them still live at home, which gives

this generation the ability to quit a job with little repercussions unlike the other generations. For Gen Z employees working is simply a means to an end. Gen Z sees working as a way to finance their immediate wants and needs, not as a future/current career like other generations. However, like the previous generations, instilling a sense of autonomy and independence in how you manage these employees are critical.

Gen Z employees are both problem solvers and free thinkers. They also tend to work best alone with little assistance from their supervisor. I've found it best to manage these employees lightly to give them a sense of independence. I give my expectations of an assignment, how I want it accomplished, and I get clarification to ensure the employee understands. This allows me to monitor the employee from afar, while checking in periodically to ensure they're remaining on task, within standards, and allows me to offer advice when necessary. Keep in mind these employees are more likely to make a mistake due to their lack of experience. However, allowing them to learn from their errors makes them stronger long-term. Using effective coaching with positive reinforcement is crucial to the development and retention of these staff members.

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Millennial: 1980-1996



Contrary to popular belief, I consider Millennials (Gen Y) to be the easiest group of employees to manage in our current work force. Millennials are a unique group of

employees. Most Millennials haven't served in the military and are less familiar with strict structure, contrary to their parent's upbringing (Baby Boomers). Where Baby Boomers and Gen X were socialized to have a greater reliance on past directives, Millennials were socialized to expect a sense of freedom and independence from their institutions. In fact, most Millennials resent the older, authoritarian mind set.

From my experience, the key to managing Millennials is giving clear instructions and offering a clear explanation when making certain decisions. Following these two principles leads to a much more productive, knowledgeable and compliant employees. Millennials also appreciate being acknowledged for their accomplishments. When you recognize their efforts, it gives them a sense of dignity and it makes them feel valued at their workplace.

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Millennials are the future of all correctional agencies. Since more millennials will be stepping into leadership roles soon, it's vital to equip them for the challenges they will face and to retain these employees. When poorly managed, Millennials can be some of the worst employees. Micromanaging millennials tends to cause them to lose their sense of autonomy and become rebellious and unproductive. Millennials have a strong sense of pride



and it's your job as their supervisor to establish their level of importance in the job force. Sometimes we find it hard, as supervisors, to manage from afar, especially with our younger employees. Supervising without micro-management will ultimately lead to mistakes being made along the way; however, we as supervisors must make these mistakes an opportunity for learning rather than punishment. These learning opportunities are the keys to building successful employees and instilling key values in the future leaders of our agencies.

Gen X: 1965-1980



In my opinion, Gen X are the hardest group of people to manage in one singular way: the extreme differences in personality and work ethic they have. A lot of Gen X

employees were socialized under an authoritative structure due to a lot of their parents coming from a military background. As a result, authority does not intimidate this generation. They work well as not only supervisors but also general line staff due to their experience, ability to be a team player, and the vast different types of work



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ethics they bring to the table. Gen X employees work best in a group setting and must be delegated tasks because they require the most amount of supervision, both direct and indirect. In addition, they're also open to the changing world that has been presented to them in the field of corrections. Gen X employees are family oriented, and they require a balance between both work and home. I do have multiple Gen X employees that are extremely independent, but at the same time, I also have several Gen X employees that require an extended amount of supervisory oversight. Overall, I've learned to be flexible with my supervisory style with this generation, while also giving clear expectations as to what I need done, because it's apparent to me most Gen X employees appreciate and work best under a structured environment and while given goal-oriented tasks.

Baby Boomers: 1946-1964



In my experience of working with Baby Boomers, they have a great respect for authority and structure. This is typically rooted from past personal or family

experience in the military. Baby Boomers typically work well when given clear tasks and positive coaching. As a supervisor, I have learned many lessons in leadership from this generation. I've learned keeping an open mind and listening to employee input on certain issues will lead to a more positive and team-oriented work environment. Although Boomers like a strong sense of authority and structure, I've found that "micro-managing" is the least effective means of managing this group of employees. They like to be the star of the show, so to speak, and they try to do everything themselves. I typically tend to pair a younger officer with Boomers, when I can, because it benefits both the Boomer and the younger officer. This forces the Boomer to work with other officers to help them see the success of this agency is reliant on a unified team, while also allowing the younger generations to obtain valuable insight firsthand from the Boomers.

Closing

One of the greatest things about my job as a supervisor is the wide diversity of people, we work with at the Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO). At DCSO, one of the Fundamental Pillars of our mission statement is diversity. Whether it be age, sex, or race, we work with a vast amount of officers from multiple walks of life. Having a better understanding of these officer's mind sets and perspectives is a vital key to a successful mission. Working with this mind set will not only help us presently but will also help with understanding future generations to come. I hope in reading this article you not only obtained some pointers, but you also now have a greater understanding of the culture we try to implement within my agency.



Samuel Jines, CJO, CBHC, is a sergeant for the Davidson County Sheriff's Office in Nashville Tennessee. Although new in his supervisory role, he has worked in many capacities while at DCSO, including corporal in both the Restrictive Housing Units and Booking. He has worked with both male and female offenders (pretrial and post-conviction). Sgt. Jines is currently working to obtain his Certified Corrections Supervisor certification through ACA along with his Certified Jail Supervisor with AJA. He can be contacted at SJINES@dcso.nashville.org.