

# The Character and Motivation of Millennials: Understanding Tomorrow's Military Leaders

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

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Millennials are changing the landscape of how the Army operates. Millennials are less patriotic, adopt individualism or collectivism, and as a result of their increasingly sheltered upbringing, they seemingly lack the mental toughness to deal with tough crisis. These characteristics are in stark contrast to Army values. With nearly 75% of the total military comprised of Millennials it is important to understand the character and motivation of Millennials in order to best prepare them for military service. Changing the way leaders communicate with Millennials by explaining the mission and tasks, breeding a competitive environment, and incorporating adversity training into entry level training will help ensure the Army is prepared for future engagement



## **The Character and Motivation of Millennials: Understanding Tomorrow's Military Leaders**

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

—Theodore Roosevelt<sup>1</sup>

Delivered over 100 years ago in his "Citizenship in a Republic" speech at the Sorbonne, in Paris, France, these words inspired generations of military volunteers across the nation. Their character was such that President Roosevelt's words motivated them to volunteer for service in the armed forces in order to defend the right to be in the arena and they were focused on the greater good of the nation. There was a sense of moral obligation and patriotism centered on selfless service and collective betterment.

Nearly 75% of the total military force is comprised of Millennials.<sup>2</sup> Today's generation of millennial volunteers varies significantly from preceding generations, commonly referred to as Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation. Millennials are far more self-centered, materialistically motivated and less likely to view themselves as patriotic.<sup>3</sup> These values stand in stark contrast with values espoused and desired by the Army. That is a situation that concerns even Millennials looking to join the service. As one West Point cadet noted, "I am worried about how my generation will perform when we are given the responsibility of governing our own world."<sup>4</sup> While the military, as a profession, should adapt so to best serve the public and sustain its ties to

the American people, its norms and values are forged in battle and cannot be compromised. If Millennials are going to make up the majority of the future Army, then it is the Millennials who would have to adapt more than the Army. The question is how to do that and yet not deter Millennials from volunteering, so that enough young men and women still enlist and fill the ranks. Senior leaders are dutifully bound to critically examine the force and constantly reassess the manner in which they operate. They must be critics of their subordinates, themselves, and their superiors. Introspection is often difficult in military culture because it forces us to come to grips with the reality that we may have been wrong in approach or execution. Nevertheless, it is the self-awareness required of leaders that is mandatory for the future success of the military.

To ensure effective shaping of the military enterprise this paper is concerned with three factors of the Millennial generation that are of particular interest for the Army's desire to sustain the All-Volunteer Force. These are: (1) Their character, such as their views of individualism over collectivism, (2) their motivations to learn, and (3) their qualities of physical and mental toughness. Through examination of those factors the military enterprise can begin to develop a strategy that is best suited to not only ensure its survival but further to regain its dominance.

Operational design methodology requires a common understanding of a situation in order to frame the environment, frame the problem, and develop an approach for solving the problem.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this paper will follow a parallel methodology and begin that examination by achieving a common understanding through a definition of terms from both scholarly sources and personal experience.

## The Environment

A commonly agreed upon span for a generation is approximately 20 years.<sup>6</sup> Typically, there is a dramatic event that separates one generation from the next. As an example, World War II separated the Silent Generation born 1925 to 1942 from the Baby Boomer Generation born 1943 to 1960.<sup>7</sup> According to Merriam-Webster, a Millennial is a person born in the 1980s or 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Expounding on that definition, they are the offspring of the Baby Boomer generation and have also commonly been referred to as Echo Boomers, Generation Next, the Boomerang Generation, or Generation Y. Furthermore, Millennials have been raised in a technology based era. That their growth and development has largely been by digital means, they have also been referred to as the Net generation or digital natives. Most everything Millennials do is connected to digital means to include dating and marriage. As an example, “35% of couples married between 2005 and 2012 met online and these couples were slightly more likely to stay together.”<sup>9</sup> They were additionally more likely to experience more satisfaction in their marriage for those that remained married.<sup>10</sup>

Generational theorists William Strauss and Neil Howe identified seven traits that are indicative of Millennials: special, sheltered, confident, team oriented, pressured, achieving, and conventional.<sup>11</sup>

### Special

Previous generations have engrained in Millennials a sense that as a group they are imperative to the nation and critically essential to their parents.<sup>12</sup> Without the constructive criticism to accompany that perception it causes them to believe they are better than they really are. It therefore becomes a significant emotional event for them

when they meet adversity for the first time as an adult. It additionally has a tendency to instill a belief that hard work is not required to achieve success.<sup>13</sup>

### Sheltered

Millennials lived under more safety initiatives, rules and regulations than any other previous generation. Everything from public school lockdowns to riding their bicycle is governed. The significant increase of “helicopter parents” that follow their children through every aspect of life in an over controlling manner, to include moving with them to college, only contributes to their sheltered persona.<sup>14</sup>

### Confident

The collective optimism about their future and that of the Nation as a whole is high among Millennials.<sup>15</sup> While they are confident about the existence of their future, Millennials now entering adulthood are cynical of government programs such as the viability of the Affordable Care Act and the future in viability of social security.<sup>16</sup> Despite their concerns over current government structure and health care laws, Millennials do not believe that social security benefits should be reduced.<sup>17</sup> This belief stems from Millennials’ confidence in the ability to effect change and a concept of balance in life with large financial gain having less importance.<sup>18</sup> It is further amplified by their being sheltered, causing Millennials to think they are better than they are or that they deserve more than they have earned.<sup>19</sup>

### Team-Oriented

They see the world through lenses of optimism and trust of each other. Conversely, they distrust the government, with only 30% of Millennials having a favorable view of Congress.<sup>20</sup> That is a significant decrease from the 68% approval rating 10 years prior.<sup>21</sup> However, from a generational perspective they are optimistic

about the future. Millennials are collaborative learners with an extensive social network and strong team instincts.<sup>22</sup> The teamwork aspect is worth further exploration due to military culture favoring teamwork and collaboration.

Millennials enjoy teamwork. They are fond of working in groups and typically choose unity and collaboration over division and competition. They seek reassurance amongst themselves and there is a belief that the effectiveness of their collective effort is more effective than individual effort.<sup>23</sup> This collective effort is one that is characterized as constructivist, meaning millennial learning and accomplishment is achieved through a collective and collaborative interaction and sharing of ideas. This researcher's experience suggests that when those ideas are not accepted as the solution that there may be a tendency to feel disenfranchised with the organization for which they suggested the solution.

### Achieving

Higher school standards and accountability have come to the forefront of the political agenda in the United States (U.S.), which manifested itself directly in the educational environment to which Millennials were exposed. Thus, Millennials are fixated on achievement. Furthermore, and partially as a result of the explosion of technology based learning, Millennials are heading in the direction of becoming the best-educated young adults in U.S. history.<sup>24</sup> Whereas previous generations had access to information through books and newspapers, Millennials have access to unlimited information and around the clock news through the World Wide Web.

### Pressured

Pushed to study hard, plan for the long term, and take full advantage of the opportunities offered them, Millennials feel a "trophy kid" pressure to excel, both in the

classroom and in the workplace. This could be a factor in the health issues such as obesity and asthma being exhibited by Millennials.<sup>25</sup> Millennials spend less time outdoors “playing” and more time indoors trying to achieve. It has further been noted that the pressure Millennials feel to achieve transcends to the beginnings with children’s sports. That pressure may be creating the perception amongst Millennials that cheating, taunting, playing with injuries, and criticizing the referees is acceptable.<sup>26</sup>

### Conventional

Millennials are comfortable with their parents’ values. Clarifying, they are apt to be more conventional thinkers, gravitating towards the cultural center vice challenging cultural boundaries. This provides insight as to why a large majority of Millennials are likely to live with their parents during and after college instead of venturing out on their own.<sup>27</sup>

Understanding Millennial traits provides a more solid foundation for understanding Millennials writ large. Furthering that understanding involves the additional comprehension of characteristics associated with Millennials. There are numerous works that list characteristics associated with Millennials. However, recruitment marketing firm “Nationwide Advertising Service Recruitment Communications” further expounded on the characteristics of Millennials utilizing a compare and contrast type model. Figure 1 below provides further illustration on the characteristics of Millennials through a comparative analysis.

Characteristics of "Generation Y"	
On one side...	And on the other...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adaptability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Able to be comfortable in various situations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Technologically Savvy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Raised on computers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Ability to grasp new concepts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Learning oriented generation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Efficient multi-taskers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ They will do everything better and faster</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Tolerant</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Increasingly diverse population</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impatient</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Dominated by instant gratification</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Skeptical</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Media scamming, lying, and exploiting</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Blunt and Expressive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Self expression valued over self-control</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Image-driven</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Personal statements with their images</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Lack life experiences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ They have "seen it all, heard it all" attitude, but also realize they have much to learn; however they are not afraid to ask questions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Figure 1. Characteristics of Millennials<sup>28</sup>

Millennials provide a modern twist to the traditional belief that social rules and standards can make life easier.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Millennials are less concerned with creativity and originality. A prime example of this lack of creativity is the number of recent pop songs that are cover versions of other songs and not original works. Millennials are far less concerned about the creative writing aspect of music than they are with whether or not they enjoy it.<sup>30</sup> Overall, these are not traits and characteristics that would have been linked with any of the previous generations in their youth.

#### The Problem

Having provided a review of key traits of the Millennial generation, this paper now examines the potential issues that the basic aspects of Millennials pose to military service. According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1 a profession is defined as "a trusted, disciplined, and relatively autonomous vocation whose members:

- Provide a unique and vital service to society
- Provide this service by developing and applying expert knowledge.

- Earn the trust of society through ethical, effective, and efficient practice.
- Establish and uphold the discipline and standards of their art and science; including the responsibility for professional development and certification.
- Are granted significant autonomy and discretion in the practice of their profession on behalf of society.”<sup>31</sup>

The Army profession therefore is “a unique vocation of experts certified in the ethical design, generation, support, and application of land power, serving under civilian authority and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people.”<sup>32</sup> Fundamental and essential characteristics of the Army Profession are further codified in ADRP-1 as trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship of the profession and esprit de corps.<sup>33</sup> A member of this profession, or Army Professional, is “a Soldier or Army civilian who meet’s the Army Profession’s certification criteria in character, Competence, and Commitment.”<sup>34</sup>

The unchanging nature of war makes the character of the individuals who might decide to go to war and/or fight in it of the utmost importance. By examining the traits and characteristics of Millennials, the researcher draws an overall hypothesis that the lens through which Millennials view the world is almost constructivist in nature. They have lofty ideas about how the world should be but when it comes to the hard-nosed execution of policy or decision making, are less likely to confront hard situations.

Individualism is the belief that the needs of each person are more important than the needs of the whole society or group.<sup>35</sup> The actions or attitudes of a person who does things without being concerned about what other people will think.<sup>36</sup> Individualism may arguably be one of the biggest challenges facing the Army as it relates to Millennials.

The younger generation Pew Research noted that Millennials are drifting away from traditional political, religious and cultural institutions. Additionally, consider the seemingly endless number of Millennials posting “selfies” on line or fashion trends of Millennials that have their pants hanging below their buttocks and it is clear that at least certain members of the Millennial generation are not concerned with what other people think as they crave to be at the center of social networks. Millennials are a generation that place institutions subordinate to their individual needs and where social circles that are digital in nature vice interpersonally acquired.<sup>37</sup>

Another difference between Millennial and Army cultures is the intensely popular desire of Millennials to be connected to, or at the forefront of, social media. The advent of social media sites as Facebook and Twitter in the 2000s allowed Millennials to live in technology based media circles where they could update the world as to every moment and aspect of their lives. Social media has permeated most traditional media as well, with many current television shows, movies, or radio stations incorporate social media concepts such as updating status, posting, and tweeting. However this form of interconnectedness, combined with being sheltered, inhibits Millennials from completely understanding the consequences of their actions. This is exemplified by an unfortunate common practice of posting a picture or video of themselves in a compromised or inebriated state. Combining immaturity with the ability to broadcast every action to the World Wide Web very directly contrasts with the Army vales of “demonstrating character in all aspects of (life).”<sup>38</sup>

Character is very important for the Army, who must earn and maintain the trust of the citizens it represents. When any citizen can conduct a search on YouTube and find

endless videos of drunk Soldiers acting in a manner that is ill-suited for the force that is supposed to represent the nation, the trust that the Army has worked hard to earn can dissipate rapidly.

The consequences can be severe. Consider how the lack of trust in the Army's ability to manage its sexual assault problem spurred members of Congress to submit legislation in an attempt to pull authority away from commanders. Therefore, Millennial use of social media is fraught with danger for the Army. Millennial individualism represents a potential culture clash that would have to be addressed.

Collectivism, which is more aligned with Army culture is the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it.<sup>39</sup> It is "emphasis on collective rather than individual action or identity."<sup>40</sup> The Army's ability to succeed is based on collectivism. "High levels of collectivism lead soldiers to subordinate their own desires to those of the unit. Selfless service before self is a fundamental creed in the Army."<sup>41</sup> It is a method by which the organization coupled with societal institutional practices can motivate the group and how members of the group feel pride in ownership of the organizations accomplishments.<sup>42</sup> Collectivism strengthens the Army organization.

As previously mentioned, Millennials' use of, and adaptation to, technology is far beyond that of any previous generation. The latter half of the Millennial period represents first wave of people that has not had to adapt to modern technology. Technology is all they have ever known and it is how they learn. Online classes or blocks of instruction are the norm for Millennials.

Because of Google and other online sources, the answer to any question is at their fingertips without having to verbally ask the question. That ability to self-teach, or

learn without the fear of having to ask the unintelligent question in front of their peers is vastly different from previous generations. This may enhance their sheltered trait, which would be disadvantageous when facing very difficult or controversial choices.

Millennials have a different view of training than previous generations. In the past, generations viewed job related training as a reward or security.<sup>43</sup> They felt that if they were not learning, they would not be prepared for future endeavors.<sup>44</sup> Regarding job-related training, Millennials would tend to ask who would work for an organization that did not provide training.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, Millennial and Army cultures probably do align.

However, the work ethics do not align well. As previously stated, Millennials are efficient multi-taskers. However, a report published in the U.S. Naval Institute noted that Millennials are predisposed to work minimal hours, requesting shorter workdays and additional time compensation in addition to federal holidays and their 30 days' annual leave.<sup>46</sup> The researcher's experience echoes that assessment, noting that Millennials perceived shorter work days as sufficient, even in preparation for combat operations with equipment in desperate need of preparedness for deployment. The lack of life experience and individualistic nature serves as barriers to understanding the importance of hard work and preparation to ensure mission success. The Millennial motivating sense of entitlement for a more balanced life under such circumstances conflict with military requirements. And while it is true that the military has also pursued a slightly more balanced approach, that balance comes from the investment in hard work up front.

Previously noting that Millennials are less patriotic, it is important to note that Millennials have grown up amidst two very long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A 24 hour-a-day news cycle has placed both of those conflicts at the forefront for most of their lives. A result of that constant bombardment of those wars may be a certain numbness and, along with general cynicism about the government, questioning the wars' purposes and the purpose for going to war at all in future. This contributes to perceptions of a lack of patriotism.

Despite that Millennials favor teamwork, they are less likely to volunteer than previous generations and be civically oriented in their volunteering.<sup>47</sup> Men are less likely to volunteer than women, and the civic volunteering of women has declined, arguably as a result of a larger presence of women in the overall workforce.<sup>48</sup> As possible result in the civilian environment has been that community service is becoming more compulsory for high school students, such that an estimated 80% of high school students participate in community service projects.<sup>49</sup> While such projects may benefit, this raises clear questions about the viability of volunteerism. For an All-Volunteer Army, a lack of volunteers to fill the ranks presents a significant problem.

Millennials prefer a bottom-up style of engagement over the top-down style characterized by government and epitomized by the military.<sup>50</sup> That Millennial preference is in stark contrast with the traditional use of a chain of command. Their familiarity with and eagerness to use technology assists them in that endeavor, allowing them to jump several levels of the chain of command through email, text or Facebook.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, and despite a tendency to avoid confrontation in general, confrontations between senior leaders and junior service members is on the rise.<sup>52</sup> Instead of rendering

the proper customs and courtesies and providing the appropriate greeting of the day by acknowledgement of rank, Millennials may be more apt to greet their superiors with “Hi, how’s it going?”<sup>53</sup> In contrast to good order and discipline and responding to commands with the appropriate “Yes Sir” or “Yes Sergeant” Millennials routinely question why they have to do it.<sup>54</sup>

Along the same lines, Drs. Leonard Wong and Stephen Gerras from the U.S. Army War College cite the aforementioned trait of the mounting pressure of increased requirements as a major contributing factor in the ethical fading of Army leaders in their writing titled “Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession.”<sup>55</sup> That leads to the examination of the physical and mental toughness of Millennials.

Examining the physical toughness of Millennials becomes complicated. On the one hand, Millennials are physically active and regularly work out. However, Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association’s annual report found that Millennials are more likely to partake in physical activity that is more focused on togetherness instead of competition.<sup>56</sup> “In 2011, Millennial participation in cycling and aerobics (usually done in groups) rose by 30 percent and 20 percent respectively.”<sup>57</sup> The draw to group fitness for Millennials is the feeling of communal environment where the group helps to motivate other members of the group to “be their best instead of competing for a victory.”<sup>58</sup> The business of the military, warfighting, is a competitive contact sport. Competition breeds improvement. When a cohort group shies away from competition in the physical aspect and is averse to confrontation from a mental perspective, the end result becomes a leader with the inability to effectively lead during times of adversity.

The Millennial regard toward teamwork and collective effort risks group think or solely convergent thinking. Military problem solving requires critical thinking, utilizing divergent followed by convergent thinking methodology.<sup>59</sup> Without a desire to win and competition among peers the chance for divergent thinking significantly decreases. Divergent thinking is a crucial initial step in the critical thinking process.<sup>60</sup> Failure to do this or fear of doing this impacts the probability of finding the best solution to the wicked problems facing today's military force. The U.S. Army War College curriculum discussions have suggested that aspects of critical thinking should begin much earlier in one's military career than in the lieutenant colonel and colonel ranks.<sup>61</sup> Recognizing that today's Millennials will soon be tomorrow's senior leaders, introduction to that critical thinking is already delayed in starting.

The Army's Soldier's Creed is a declaration of the warrior ethos that reflects the Army's espoused values. It includes the statement "I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, (and) trained and proficient in my warrior task drills."<sup>62</sup> Several instances thus far have been cited suggesting that Millennials are likely to be embarrassed by failure which may create a fear to try. That fear reflects a lack of mental toughness that stems from having been sheltered and consistently showered with words of affirmation, even when not be earned or warranted. When Soldiers who are Millennials have grown up getting a trophy for simply showing up to the game it creates an over inflated sense of self-worth and the sense of entitlement. It may come as a significant shock when a Millennial Soldiers first experiences failure from the inability to complete a task with quantifiable tasks, conditions, and standards set forth by military regulations.

This researcher has seen examples of Soldiers when facing the first taste of adversity resort to contemplating suicide. The level of adversity is one that previous generations might not consider significant, such as having to pick up rocks during installation beatification or the dissolving of a short-lived relationship. It is also true that there are many Millennials who, once indoctrinated into the Army, will go on to perform and lead very effectively in both garrison and in combat. That point is exemplified by the performance of many Millennials in combat over the past 14 years in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, getting Millennials to the point of indoctrination is unusually difficult compared with past generations of recruits, and this should be a cause for concern.

### The Approach

The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic published that “Radical innovation is needed in Army leaders to meet the new demands of the Profession of Arms.”<sup>63</sup> The all-volunteer military force is built on the concept of the “Man in the Arena” with a tremendous emphasis on such intangibles as duty, honor, service, and sacrifice. Taking into account the Millennial view of balance, these intangibles must be carefully balanced with concrete benefits of service such as compensation and quality of life.

Not all Millennial characteristics are bad, and there are some which may improve certain aspects of Army culture that are weak. For example, strategic communication is a concept that Millennials are potentially better suited to embrace. Strategic communication is a “way” by which the Army can achieve the desired end state of a more effective fighting force with Millennials increasingly in charge. “Strategic communication is the synchronization of our words and deeds as well as deliberate efforts to communicate and engage with intended audiences.”<sup>64</sup> The Department of Defense alternately defines strategic communications as,

Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.<sup>65</sup>

Breaking these definitions down to their essentials, strategic communication is “the orchestration of actions, images and words to achieve cognitive effects in support of policy and military objectives.”<sup>66</sup> The strategic military objective is to continue to assess and maintain the world’s greatest fighting force.

Addressing individualism, leaders must play to the non-competitive teamwork aspect of Millennials. They are very receptive to leadership messages and more willing to offer buy-in at the lower levels so long as leaders are willing to take the time to explain the “why.” A recommended technique would be the “Golden Circle” technique to be a great or inspiring leader described by TED Talk orchestrator and author Simon Sinek (see Figure 2).<sup>67</sup> The Golden Circle technique is a way of infusing the “why” in strategic messages. Members of previous generations are more focused on saying the “what” and “how,” but very few expound on the “why.” Utilizing a technology example, consider the response to an Apple Computer Company pitch that went like this, “We make great computers (what). They’re beautifully designed, simple to use, and user-friendly (how). Would you like to buy one?”<sup>68</sup> That message would be uninspiring to a Millennial. However, the manner in which Apple really communicates is “everything we do we believe in challenging the status quo, we believe in thinking differently (why). The way to challenge the status quo is by designing products that are beautiful, simple to use, and user-friendly (how). We just happen to make computers (what). Want to buy one?”<sup>69</sup> This form of communication provides both their employees with inspiration to

where they're not coming to work for a paycheck but to contribute and in creates a consumer environment where people will buy anything from them because the consumer believes in apple's vision as well.

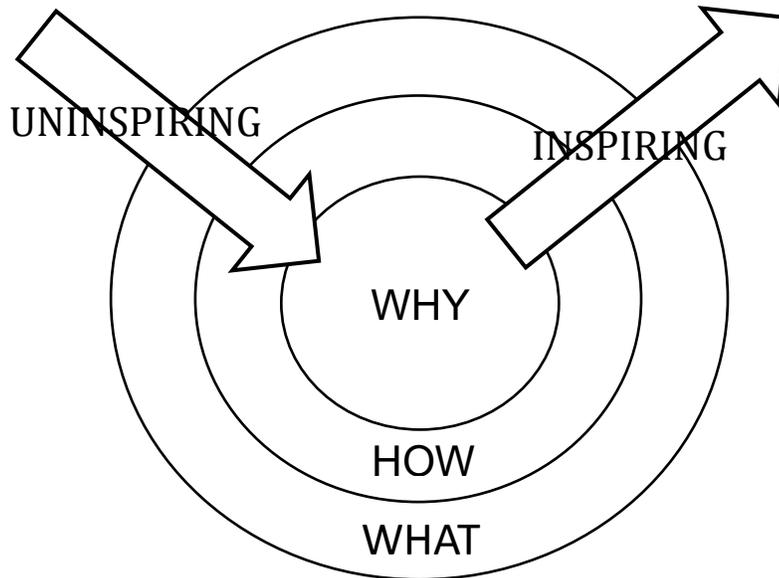


Figure 2. Golden Circle Technique<sup>70</sup>

Translating that to the military, leaders must give Millennials messages that engender their “buy-in” as individuals rather than assume a natural sense of collective good. Whereas previous generations of military service members could be told to execute a given mission and they would move out accordingly, Millennials require a greater understanding of why they are doing what leaders are telling them to do. It is how they are motivated. Because they are not work-centric and believe in a more balanced life model, a solid understanding of why is critical to effective and efficient execution of the task overall.<sup>71</sup> If Millennials are additionally afforded an opportunity to provide input on the solution to the “why” it may further strengthen their resolve for support of the task.

Mission command is a mechanism that offers approaches similar to the Golden Circle method. Mission command is not new but is clearly at the forefront of current military training and professional development. While exactly how to exercise it may be debated, what is clear how it should be applied with respect to Millennials is that it is a concept of having or providing shared understanding and trust for accomplishment of a given mission in accordance with a given commander's intent.

Mission command is just as much of a senior leader's responsibility as it is the responsibility of the Millennials being led. It is critically important that senior leaders resist the urge to reach down into formations led by Millennials and lead it for them. While technology has nurtured Millennials through life it also presents a significant temptation for leaders above them to exercise potentially very damaging forms of micromanagement. Senior leaders now have the ability to be able to monitor, and in some cases actually be able to watch and listen to, multiple operations in occurring separate areas from one single location. The temptation is to change how those operations are being conducted because it is not the way that they, the senior leader, would conduct them. Just because technology has given senior leaders the ability to reach down in such a manner does not mean that they should. Already leery of confrontation, Millennials would tend to feel alienated and withdraw rather than actively resist micromanagement.

As noted before, Millennials are physically active, just not as competitive. However, by nature and by design the military culture breeds competition. Once the gravity of the profession is understood the employee transitions to a professional. Therefore, it is the researcher's belief that competition amongst military Millennials is

inevitable and greater effort should be focused on the more intangible aspects of cultivating Millennials.

The unchanging violent nature of war requires those in the profession of arms to have mental toughness. Mental preparedness or toughness will be the largest hurdle to overcome with Millennials in the military. Building this capacity must start at the onset of indoctrination into military service. Recognizing the notion of dignity and respect for service members and as a rule of life, the enemies of the U.S. do not abide by that same notion. Addressing mental toughness for service in the military is a key concern. Currently the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery is given to prospective military applicants to assess their aptitude for military service. That test has been adjusted in the past to accommodate for cultural, social, and societal trends.<sup>72</sup> Since the early stages of the war in Afghanistan there has been a cry for more and more Special Operations Forces (SOF) and for conventional forces to demonstrate the same mental toughness qualities due to the more dynamic nature of the modern battlefield. For entry into SOF units, potential members take a battery of psychological tests to assess their suitability for service in those units; they constitute the standard measures for the required qualities of mental toughness sought in all Soldiers now. Therefore, similar tests should be given to all prospective service members to assess their mental capacity for success in the service. That is not to say that the military should have everyone thinking exactly alike. One of the reasons for success of the military has been the ability to critically think about solution to complex problems. However, there must be a baseline of mental toughness established that can be built upon through indoctrination into and service with the military. The fact of the matter is that service members must be

taught early that adversity is inevitable. Therefore, and albeit controversial, a recommendation is to set the stage for building mental toughness by eliminating some of the dignity and respect that has infiltrate service entry programs.

Millennials also have to learn to function in a highly competitive environment, but not see competition and teamwork as incompatible. When one trains to compete in any type of physical competition the body must be pushed in order to strengthen it. The harder it is pushed during training the easier it is during the competition and the greater the likelihood of winning the competition. That same concept applies to, and is a recommendation for, training the mental toughness of Millennials.

At the same time, Millennials also have to be exposed to adversity and learn to handle it (of course, short of abuse or mistreatment). A simple illustration of this would be Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape training conducted by U.S. military forces. Certain aspects of the training are designed to build resilience in Soldiers so they can face situations under which they face severe adversity such as mistreatment or disrespect. However, the whole point of the training is to prepare the individual for the mental adversity that might be encountered during a captivity situation. Michael Durant commented that "there were absolutely learning points from survival school that I believe helped me get through a number of situations"<sup>73</sup> commenting on his time in captivity during the conflict in Somalia in 1993. Building that capacity for resilience is the responsibility of senior leaders.

Finally is the recommendation to partner senior leaders with Millennial service members in order to generate a greater understanding of the task and purpose, the "why" of a given mission, task, or purpose. It is common in military organizations to view

the competency of ones headquarters with skepticism. Rationale for the production of orders and guidance is often viewed in wonderment, especially when the headquarters is at least one echelon above the immediate headquarters level. It has been noted how connected Millennials are in social media circles, further noting that technology based learning is their forte. In the military however, nothing beats learning like experiencing it. Partnering leaders with Millennials in a ride along program similar to those established in police departments would allow Millennials to see what senior leaders are managing and why senior leaders sometimes make the decisions they do. By nature, Millennials would then post in their social circles their experiences, conveniently shaping their opinions as they translate that rationale into language that Millennials can understand. In time, senior leaders would understand how to transmit their intent more effectively and Millennials would be more receptive to at intent.

The possibility does exist for a negative interaction experience resulting from such things as a personality conflict. However, that risk can be mitigated with a selection board process. This researcher has experience with an organization that utilized a senior and junior lash-up with great success, getting junior service members to see strategically and seniors to gain an understanding of how the junior service members see the world. An additional byproduct of such interaction is a Millennial perspective on complex leadership problems with potential solutions not previously considered.

### Conclusion

As one command sergeant major put it, "This here tribal costume ain't for everyone."<sup>74</sup> That is to say that not every person that is eligible to serve in the military can or should serve in the military. The Millennial generation is firmly entrenched in

today's military force structure. Despite Millennials being less patriotic, less mentally tough, and more individualistic in their views, the time is rapidly approaching when the Millennials will be the senior leaders of the nations' fighting force.

Senior leaders must prepare Millennials to lead and succeed at the highest levels. Especially in the environment of a downsizing Army and sequestration, the Army must train to and uphold the standards that have allowed those whose calling is the profession of arms to succeed when the Nation calls on them. As General George Washington stated, "There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well prepared to meet an enemy."<sup>75</sup> Achieving preparedness today is clearly different from achieving it in past generations, but then again each generation has had its differences, and the Army has adapted throughout. Implementing the recommendations here will help ensure today's Army, populated heavily by Millennials, will be ready for the next fight.

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