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RECRUITMENT & RETENTION:

TARGETING THE RIGHT GENERATIONS

by

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Preface

This research project seeks to determine if Air Force recruitment and retention programs should be custom-tailored specifically for each distinct American generation targeted for recruitment and subsequent retention. In the business and political arenas, much has been written on research to tailor advertising and marketing to attract, recruit, retain, or sell to large groups of people, segmenting by generation to match message and program to target generation. In the military Services' arena, I found recruitment and retention research applying a generational perspective mostly within Army circles. Therefore, perhaps this research paper is unique in applying a generational theory to analyze Air Force recruiting and retention.

I am indebted to Senior Master Sergeant Dennis Drogo, Chief of Enlisted Accessions Policy (HQ USAF/DPFMA), for tracking down and compiling Air Force retention rates and recruiting goals/actuals since 1955. Joan Phillips, Air University librarian, provided much appreciated assistance in general research. My research advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Sharon Branch, provided much needed guidance and focus in the specific research topic at hand.

Abstract

Success or failure of recruitment and retention programs depend upon whether they resonate (or not) with the target audience. However, could it be they resonate differently depending upon whether they fit hand-in-glove with the generation then in young adulthood? If they do not fit, then both message and program require re-tailoring based upon the newly arrived generation's personality and preferences.

This research methodology applies a generational perspective to recruiting and retention: a rifle-shot at a specific target generation, not the shotgun approach sometimes used. The underlying generational theory seeks to generalize—the root word of generation—about large groups of people moving through time together, being affected by the same events at similar ages, and therefore forming shared attitudes, values, and beliefs to shape a generation's personality and preferences. Theory seeks to explain the past and predict the future. Using historical trend data, this research theorizes about past recruiting and retention shortfalls and successes from the 1970s to 2001. As the Services fail to achieve retention, and especially recruiting, goals now and in the future, they will be forced to reexamine their programs until new lessons are learned, messages and programs are retailored, and success is reestablished. And, the cycle may be expected to repeat itself unless the Services employ new tools—perhaps including a *generational perspective*—to anticipate, recognize, and cut short any divergence between program and target (generation).

So, the question is not only "is the USAF attracting, retaining, and taking care of its (current generation of) people?" This is often attempted by further funding and refining the historically tried and proven. But, has every American twenty-something in history behaved the same way? No, so the question must continue: "and is the USAF emphasizing what the new generation of Airmen value now?" Taking the line from an Oldsmobile commercial further: this is not your father's Air Force (and it is not your father we seek to recruit).

Chapter 1

USAF Recruiting and Retention Background

Experience teaches slow, and at the cost of mistakes.

—James A. Froude

Overview

In this chapter, the research project begins with a discussion of the importance of recruiting and retaining the military-inclined. Chapter 2 follows with an overview of Air Force recruitment and retention results during the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and the beginning of the 2000s. In Chapter 3, a generational theory is introduced to summarize and explain the different perspectives of each generation of young adults during the same 1970s-2000s time period. The time period is then broken down and analyzed by segmenting the specific generations then in their recruiting and retention windows: the Boomers in the 70s, Generation X (a.k.a. the Busters or the Xers) in the 80s and 90s, and the new "Millennial Generation" (a.k.a. Generation Y or Generation Next) in the late 1990s until today. Due to the paucity of Air Force-only research using a generational framework for analysis, research gathered from the other Services is used to complement Air Force-only data. In Chapter 4, specific recommendations are made to enhance success in recruiting the new Millennial generation just beginning to enter the force while simultaneously retaining both the Xer and Millennial generations. Chapter 5 concludes the matter in

calling for "generationally suitable" recruitment and retention programs for each distinct generation in the force.

Importance

The Air Force executes its core competencies not only by employing its weapon systems, but also by recruiting, training, and retaining highly skilled Airmen to design, support, and operate them. Therefore, it is unsurprising the Air Force Strategic Plan lists as the first Quality People metric "Recruit and Retain the Force to Execute Air Force Core Competencies."[1] So, too, "force modernization has increased the demand for capable, well-trained individuals."[2] Recruiting and retention, therefore, are the cornerstone for sustaining an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) and supply the lifeblood of our readiness. The draining of our lifeblood by attrition, as indicated by lower retention rates, "depreciates recruiting and training investments and disrupts unit cohesion."[3] Furthermore, attrition is expensive, costing an average of $35,000 for each trained Airman lost.[4] As a former Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) indicated, "This argues for recruitment of those who are most likely to adapt to military life and stay the course [and] the high school diploma has been a reliable indicator of "stick-to-itiveness."[5]

Much past research on attrition "suggests 'creaming' the applicant pool by recruiting individuals having the personal characteristics associated with high retention probabilities."[6] However, a dearth of data and research exists on whether the "right people are going and staying."[7] Intuitively, one would expect to find a more "pro-military" mindset among both recruits and stayers. Samuel Huntington favors just this approach, analyzing the professional military mind:

People who act the same way over a long period of time tend to develop distinctive and persistent habits of thought. Their unique relation to the world gives them a unique perspective on the world [and] this is particularly true where the role is a professional one. A profession is more narrowly defined, more intensely and exclusively pursued, and more clearly isolated from other human activity than are most occupations. The continuing objective performance of the professional function gives rise to a continuing professional *weltanschauung* or professional "mind." The military mind, in this sense, consists of the values, attitudes, and perspectives which inhere in the performance of the professional military function and which are deducible from the nature of that function.[8]

1970s

1970s recruiting and retention opened the decade with an unpopular war and draft; shifted in 1974 to an all volunteer force (AVF) with boosted pay; lingered in the malaise of the "hollow force" and American humiliation during late 70s and Iranian hostage crisis; and foreshadowed the coming DESERT ONE debacle.[9] Additional factors disfavoring Boomer (born 1943-1960) military service included an unfavorable view of the military among the most vocal of their peers.[10] Other economic factors, a sharp recession in 1973, the "misery index", and "stagflation" provided impetus favoring military service.[11] However, pay lagged inflation and retention became increasingly problematic despite relaxing standards.[12] On the other hand, cuts in force structure allowed recruitment, at least, to keep pace.[13] Then, in FY79, USAF missed its recruiting mark for the first time since AVF, adding to a growing problem.[14]

Table 1. USAF Reenlistment Rates, 1970-1979

FY	Recruits	1st Term	2nd Term	Career Enlisted
1970	100.2%	16%	N/A	87%
1971	98.2%	20%	N/A	91%
1972	100.7%	33%	N/A	94%
1973	101.2%	20%	72%	97%
1974	100.9%	31%	73%	97%

1975	102%	40%	75%	97%
1976	100.7%	37%	67%	91%
1977	100%	39%	69%	95%
1978	100%	41%	65%	93%
1979	98%	38%	60%	91%

Source: HQ USAF/DPFMA*, Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001*, February 2002.

Note the steady improvement from a remarkably low level in first- and second-term retention from 1970 to 1975, excepting a blip in 1973, a year of significant economic and political turmoil. Retention dips across the board in 1976, ticks up for a year, then drops off notably for career and especially second-term Boomer airmen. Note, also, generation Xers (born 1961-1981) began entering the force in 1978, and in 1979, USAF missed its recruitment goal for the first time in a decade—in the very first full year the new Xer generation began to flow into the force.

1980s

1980s recruiting and retention opened the decade at a low point in both personnel and equipment readiness; shifted to big buildup in both; flexed new-found strength in Grenada and Panama; faced down the Communist threat; and foreshadowed the end of the Cold War and a popular victory in the Gulf.[15] Additional factors favoring Xer (born 1961-1981) and Boomer military service included society's very favorable view of military service and significant pay hikes.[16] On the other hand, a booming economy provided impetus disfavoring military service.[17] Despite increasingly high standards,[18] a jump in the total number recruited and sharply higher retention rates continued throughout the decade.[19]

Table 2. USAF Reenlistment Rates, 1980-1989

FY	Recruits	1st Term	2nd Term	Career Enlisted
1980	100%	36%	63%	92%
1981	100%	43%	72%	94%
1982	100%	57%	81%	95%
1983	100%	66%	83%	96%
1984	100%	62%	80%	96%
1985	100%	54%	78%	96%
1986	100%	58%	77%	96%
1987	100%	62%	79%	97%
1988	100%	50%	79%	97%
1989	100%	59%	77%	96%

Source: HQ USAF/DPFMA, *Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001*, February 2002.

Note the USAF quickly recovered to meet its recruitment goals throughout the 1980s. Further, after being stuck below a 40-41% ceiling for over a decade, first-term reenlistment broke out in 1982 up into the 50-60s percentage range. After bottoming out in 1979 at 60%, second-term reenlistment progressed upward to the low 80s percentage range until steadying in the upper 70s percentage range by the mid-1980s. In 1985-86, both first- and second-term airmen retention dipped before rebounding and steadying. Both first- and second-term retention rates ended the decade approximately 10% off from their respective high points achieved in 1983.

1990s

1990s recruiting and retention opened with a popular war and victory in the Gulf; sparked hope for a "peace dividend" to be reaped at the expense of military funding; suffered a significant downsizing to include a "reduction-in-force;" and followed with a sharp jump in operational (OPSTEMPO) and personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) due to the highest number of global interventions in American history.[20] A demoralized American

military entangled in global operations seemingly without end (from Bosnia to patrolling no-fly zones over Iraq);[21] plus an emboldened adversary ridiculing ineffective American responses to Somalia and to terrorist bombings of American installations and ships foreshadowed America's vulnerability and the eventual struggle against anti-American terrorism. [22] "Since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, more than a few political pundits have attributed Osama bin Laden's calculations about U.S. resolve—and guts—to the 1993 debacle in Mogadishu."[23] Additional factors disfavoring Xer military service included society's employment of the US military in non-traditional "peace operations," a less favorable view of military service, and a lack of significant pay raises throughout the decade.[24] While the 1990-91 recession provided an impetus favoring military service, a booming economy provided a countervailing impetus disfavoring military service during most of the 1990s.[25]

Table 3. USAF Reenlistment Rates, 1990-1999

FY	Recruits	1st Term	2nd Term	Career Enlisted
1990	100%	51%	69%	94%
1991	100%	59%	77%	95%
1992	100%	59%	76%	96%
1993	100%	61%	82%	96%
1994	100%	60%	81%	96%
1995	100%	65%	78%	96%
1996	100%	59%	76%	95%
1997	100%	56%	71%	94%
1998	100%	54%	69%	93%
1999	95%	49%	69%	91%

Source: HQ USAF/DPFMA, *Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001*, February 2002.

Note the quick across-the-board jump in the recession year 1991 and the immediate flattening at relative high retention rates until a drop off in 1997-1999. After achieving a

floor of at least 59%, first-term retention rates dropped to 49% by decade end, the lowest level seen since 43% in 1981. After achieving a floor of at least 76%, second-term retention rates, too, dropped significantly—to 69% by decade end, the lowest level seen since 63% in 1980. Lastly, after achieving 100% recruitment for nine years straight while recruiting Xers, USAF missed recruitment goals in 1999—the very first full year the new Millennial generation (born 1982-2003) flowed into the force. The last time such an event occurred, it was in 1979—the very first full year the then-new Xer generation flowed into the force.

2000s: The Beginning

Millennium recruiting and retention opened the decade with high-level concern, as demonstrated by the establishment of an Air Force Recruiting and Retention Task Force in 2000 and a declaration of "war on its recruitment and retention problems."[26] "Recruiting and retention represent the Air Force's number one priorities," said Ms. Carol DiBattiste, under secretary of the Air Force, [noting] "this task force demonstrates senior leadership's commitment."[27] Thereafter, senior leaders' focus on recruiting and retention only increased with a new American war on global terrorism. Factors favoring military service include renewed societal appreciation of homeland defenders and first responders, including the military.[28] Further factors providing impetus for military service include an apparent recession, albeit a brief one, and the biggest jump in defense spending and military pay since the 1980s.[29]

Table 4. USAF Reenlistment Rates, 2000-2001

FY	Recruits	1st Term	2nd Term	Career Enlisted
2000	101%	52%	69%	91%

| 2001 | 100% | 56% | 69% | 90% |

Source: HQ USAF/DPFMA, *Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001*, February 2002.

Note recruitment and first-term retention rates have rebounded to levels commonly seen in the late 1990s. Similarly, second-term retention rate remains at 69%, unchanged from the late 1990s. However, career enlisted retention rates have not rebounded since 1999, and in fact, remain at 90-91%—a level not seen since 1971, 1976, and 1979.

So, just who are the Boomers, Xers, and Millennials composing today's force? Margot Hornblower, a noted expert on the subject of viewing Americans through a generational lens, notes "Politicians trolling for votes, churches seeking converts, *military services recruiting soldiers*, [italics mine] moviemakers looking for viewers and magazines for readers: hardly a sliver of society is exempt from the need to understand and, indeed, cater to [the] generation."[30] Each is treated differently by advertisers and business managers and is pursued via programs narrowly tailored to the taste of the target generation. Should Service recruitment and retention programs do any less? Now, the very concept of a "generation" will be analyzed.

Notes

[1] Department of the Air Force, *Air Force Strategic Plan, Volume 2, Performance Plan*, *Performance Plan Annex, Performance Measure Detail* (Washington D.C., February 1999), iii.

[2] James R. Hosek, John Antel, and Christine E. Peterson. *Who Stays, Who Leaves? Attrition Among First-Term Enlistees* (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 15, No.3, Spring 1989), 389.

[3] Ibid, 389.

[4] House Committee of Armed Services, *Statement of Honorable Rudy De Leon Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) before the Military Personnel Subcommittee: Sustaining the All-Volunteer Force (Military Recruiting and Retention)*, 106th Cong., 2nd Sess., 8 March 2000, 6.

[5] Ibid, 4.

[6] Shelley Perry, James Griffith, and Terry White. *Retention of Junior Enlisted Soldiers in the All-Volunteer Army Reserve*, (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 18, No.1, Fall 1991), 112.

[7] Hosek, 405.

[8] Samuel P. Huntington. *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 61.

[9] Curtis L. Gilroy, Robert L. Phillips, and John D. Blair. *The All-Volunteer Army: Fifteen Years Later*, (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 16, No. 3, Spring 1990), 332.

[10] William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 311.

[11] Lt Col Neil Yamashiro. *Generation X*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, April 1998), 5.

[12] *Air Force Times*, "Services Tap Lower Mental Groups", 10 March 1980, 8.

[13] Samuel P. Huntington. *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 200.

[14] Personnel Readiness Office, Air Staff, "Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001," HQ USAF/DPFMA staff study, February 2002.

[15] Gilroy, 332.

[16] Strauss, 333.

[17] *Air Force Times*, "Recruiting falls short for first time in 8 years," 20 March 1989.

[18] "Fewer recruits to be trained each year," *Air Force Times*, 12 March 1990.

[19] Gilroy, 337.

[20] Maj Scott Lempe. *The Drawdown: Impact on our ability to recruit, retain and sustain the force of 2001*, (Montgomery, AL: Air Command and Staff College, March 1997), 19.

[21] Oliver North, "Listen to the Troops," *Townhall.com*, 13 March 2001, on-line, Internet, 18 March 2002, available from
http://www.townhall.com/columnists/ollienorth/20010313.shtml.

[22] Tony Karen, "Bin Laden rides again: Myth vs. Reality." *Time Magazine*, 20 June 2001.

Notes

[23] *Detroit News*, "Black Hawk Down assaults senses, but narrative misfires," 18 January 2002.

[24] Leonard Wong. *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2000), 2.

[25] "USAF People: recruiting, retention, and demographics," *Air Force Magazine*, 10.

[26] "AF task force to combat recruiting, retention problems," *Air Force Print News*, 16 March 2000.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *The Californian: North County Times*, 10 October 2001.

[29] Editorial, Wall Street Journal, 22 February 2002.

[30] Yamashiro, 1.

Chapter 2

Not Talking About Your Generation

There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1936

Generational Theory

Societies throughout the ages and including today tend to segment both time and people by generation. The Apostle Peter spoke to "a chosen generation."[1] Decades earlier, Jesus spoke to another: "a generation of vipers."[2] Today the generational perspective remains popular in advertising, marketing, politics, and history.[3] Samuel Huntington posits a "recurring generational cyclical process of change."[4] Tom Brokaw, at the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, praised the World War II generation thusly, "I think this generation is the greatest generation any society has ever produced."[5]

So, just what is a generation and how is it determined? It is <u>not</u> determined by segmenting people by birth year based upon arbitrarily selecting calendar years—round numbers, say 1900 or 2000. Neither is it bounded by simply drawing lines based upon a large (or small) number of births in a given time period (baby boom or bust). It <u>is</u> determined by age location, by segmenting those of similar age traveling through time together—a conclusion reached by many (including Strauss and Howe, leading experts

on generations and upon whose work much of this research's generational framework is founded).[6] To understand the conclusion, one must first understand the "building block of generations: the 'cohort.' Derived from the Latin word for an ordered rank of soldiers, 'cohort' is used by modern social scientists to refer to any set of persons born in the same year; 'cohort group' means any wider set of persons born in a limited span."[7] "What makes the cohort group truly unique is that all its members—from birth on—always encounter the same national events, moods, and trends at similar ages. They retain, in other words, a common age location in history throughout their lives. History affects people very differently according to their age [and] age location is what gives each cohort group a distinct biography."[8] Our society reinforces age location in that "the more tightly age-bracketed the social experience, the more pronounced the ultimate cohort identity. From kindergarten through high school, almost all pupils in any classroom belong to the same birth year. In nonschool activities, children participate within two- or three-year cohort groups…cohort membership forges a sense of collective identity and reinforces a common personality."[9] However, "generations can be imprecise at the boundaries … and, of course, people born just on one side may really belong on the other."[10] So then, "a GENERATION is a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality."[11]

So, just what is a "peer personality?" "The peer personality of a generation is essentially a caricature of its prototypical member. A generation has collective attitudes about family life, sex roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future. The reason, in the words of Italian historian Giuseppe Ferrari, is that a generation 'is born, lives, and dies'—together."[12] To determine a generation's peer personality, one must

analyze its common experiences as they move through time together, facing the same trends and historic events at similar ages and being similarly shaped by them. Next, one must discover their shared common beliefs, behavior, and attitudes—shaped by these same trends and historic events. So then, "a PEER PERSONALITY is a generational persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation."[13]

It is these beliefs and behaviors common among peers in a generation that form the basis for generational theory. Once a generation is recognized, analyzed, and understood, then messages and programs may be crafted to better resonate with the targeted generation given its peer personality and attitudes about the Air Force. "Current approaches to recruiting are based on what worked in the past, but the past may not resemble the present or future—at least when speaking about generational differences."[14] Unfortunately, the Services recently scaled back the availability of a tool used to determine youth attitudes and note subsequent changes. This tool, the Defense Department's Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS), was administered annually until recently.[15] It is YATS and tools like it that could cue the Services to the emergence of a new generation with a different collective youth attitude, including the new generation's attitude toward military service. This research identifies changing youth attitudes over the last three decades as evidence for applying a generational perspective in military recruitment and retention. Next up is a discussion of the most famous and talked-about American generation: the Boomers.

Boomers

Strauss and Howe delineate the Boomer generation as born 1943-1960.[16] "The Boom birth-years precede the demographic 'baby boom' by three years at the front edge, four at the back"[17] because those born in the early 1960s do not share similar experiences, attitudes, and beliefs commonly associated with Boomers. A generation imbued with high expectations, the Boomers are seen as an idealist generation, righteous, fiery—told from the beginning they were special and would change the world. As babies, Boomers were the center of adult society's attention. Boomers are seen as inner-focused and interested in themselves personally and their generation: as *The Who* succinctly put it, they like "talkin' 'bout my generation."[18] Their outer-focus centers primarily upon tearing down society's institutions and rebuilding them in their own revolutionary image.[19]

This research reveals society produced the following in their honor:[20]

1. Dr. Spock's baby-care books stress loving freedom in modern child-rearing;
2. *Lost in Space* stresses the active participation of children in the wonderful future;
3. In cartoon, *The Jetsons* stresses the wonderful future for youngsters;
4. *The Candidate* reflects the heroic idealism Boomers expect politically;
5. Woodstock and *Hair* stress rebellious freedom in Boomer young adulthood;
6. *All The President's Men* stresses truth-telling virtues resonating with Boomers;
7. *The Big Chill* illustrates idealistic Boomer disappointments in a story of mid-life angst;
8. In war, *The Green Berets* stresses idealistic Boomer heroism while *Apocalypse Now* stresses idealistic Boomer disillusionment.

Generation X

Strauss and Howe delineate the Xer generation as born 1961-1981.[21] Generational analysis indicates that, while the demographic baby boom continued into 1964, the first Xer cohort actually arrived in 1961 because those born in the early 1960s did not share similar experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of the Boomers.[22] Felicity Barringer of the

New York Times sums Xers up as "a lost generation, an army of aging Bart Simpsons, possibly armed and dangerous."[23] A generation imbued with low expectations, Xers are seen as a survivalist generation—street-smart, old beyond their years, physical, competitive, showy, distrustful, reactive—a generation sensing from the beginning "that adults were simply not in control of themselves or the country."[24] Xers are the "most aborted generation in American history,"[25] stricken the most by parental divorce—latchkey children left to fend for themselves.[26] As babies, Xers were seen by adults as a burden, costly, in the way of careers and freedom. Xers are seen as inner-focused, primarily upon getting ahead and taking care of their families and themselves.[27] Their outer-focus centers primarily on protectiveness—rebuilding failing society's institutions to benefit their own families' future.[28]

This research reveals society produced the following in their honor:[29]

1. Baby-care books stress parental convenience, reassuring parents that kids can adapt and overcome with little insulation from the adult world and flourish in maximum freedom;
2. *Rosemary's Baby* in 1968 begins decade-long, child-as-Devil films such as *The Exorcist* and Damien in *The Omen*;
3. In cartoon, *The Simpsons* and *Beavis & Butthead* stress youngster incorrigibility;
4. The report *A Nation at Risk* provides evidence of expected political challenges stemming from Xer troubles;
5. *Risky Business* and *Paper Moon* stress street-smart, competitive risk-taking (with more than a touch of the criminal) in Xer childhood;
6. *The Breakfast Club* illustrates Xer trouble-making in a story of teenage angst;
7. *Rambo* and *Red Dawn* stress survivalist virtues resonating with Xers in young adulthood;
8. In war, *Top Gun* stresses Xer-against-the-world success while *Black Hawk Down* stresses Xer tactical success (survival) in spite of national strategic failure.

Millennial Generation

A Naval Postgraduate School study delineates the Millennial generation as born 1982-2003[30] (refining Strauss and Howe's interim delineation of "1982-?").[31] A

generation imbued with high expectations, the Millennials are seen as an historic generation, civic-minded, obedient, scoutlike—told from the beginning they are special, that the sky's the limit.[32]   Strauss and Howe, in *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* note "[n]ot since the Progressive era, near the dawn of the twentieth century, has America greeted the arrival of a new generation with such a dramatic rise in adult attention to the needs of children. Never before in living memory has a generation been so celebrated, from conception to birth to preschool through elementary, middle and high school."[33] As babies, Millennials were the center of adult society's protective attention—perhaps best seen in the explosion in child protective equipment and in the arrival of the ubiquitous "baby on board" vehicle stickers in the early 80s, just as the Millennials also arrived on the scene. Millennials are seen as outer-focused and interested in working together as a team to rebuild society, locally and globally.[34] Their inner-focus centers primarily upon a desire for personal safety and the pressure they feel to succeed, to live up to high expectations of parents and society.[35]

This research reveals society produced the following in their honor:[36]

1. Dr. Dobson's *Dare to Discipline* book stresses back-to-basics child-rearing;
2. *Three Men and a Baby*, *Baby Boom*, and *She's Having a Baby* in 1980s begin a decade stressing cuddly-baby films;
3. In cartoon, *Bob the Builder* stresses institution-building and *Shrek* reflects a Millennial desire for togetherness to overcome class distinctions;
4. DoD's 1998 *Youth Attitude Tracking Survey* provides evidence of expected military recruitment challenges stemming from "the propensity for today's youth to consider military service [which] is at an all-time low"[37] of 13%;
5. *Jurassic Park* and *The Lion King* reflect Millennial children's concern and interest in nature and the environment;
6. *Titanic* illustrates the Millennial desire for togetherness (to overcome class distinctions) in a story of teenage angst;
7. *An American Tail*, *Oliver and Company*, and *The Land Before Time* stress civic virtues resonating with Millennials;[38]
8. In war, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Gladiator* stress working together in battle to save lives.

Now that each of the three generations composing the force today have been introduced and analyzed, each decade of recruitment and retention will be analyzed from a generational perspective. Next is a break-down by decade in which each generation was the target for recruitment and/or retention: recruiting and retaining the Boomers in the 1970s, retaining the Boomers and recruiting the Xers in the 1980s, retaining the Xers in the 1990s, and recruiting the Millennials in the late 1990s until today.

Notes

[1] The Holy Bible, 1 Peter, Chapter 2, verse 9.

[2] Ibid, Matthew, Chapter 23, verse 33.

[3] Lt Col Neil Yamashiro. *Generation X*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, April 1998), 1.

[4] Samuel P. Huntington. *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 139.

[5] Tom Brokaw. *The Greatest Generation*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1998), xxx.

[6] William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 518.

[7] Ibid, 44.

[8] Ibid, 48.

[9] Ibid, 49.

[10] Ibid, 59.

[11] Ibid, 60.

[12] Quoted in William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 63.

[13] Ibid, 64.

[14] Maj Andrew G. Wilcox. *Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs*, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, March 2001), 2.

[15] Ibid, 4.

[16] Strauss, 299.

[17] Ibid, 301.

[18] Ibid, 299.

[19] Lt Col Neil Yamashiro. *Generation X*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, April 1998), 6.

[20] Strauss, 300.

[21] Strauss, 317.

[22] Strauss, 335.

[23] Quoted in William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 317.

[24] Ibid, 317.

[25] Ibid, 324.

[26] Yamashiro, 9.

[27] Yamashiro, 12.

[28] Strauss, 413.

[29] Strauss, 318.

[30] Wilcox, 23.

[31] Strauss, 335.

[32] Ibid, 342.

[33] Quoted in Maj Andrew G. Wilcox. *Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs*, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, March 2001), 22.

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[34] Strauss, 299.

[35] Wilcox, 36.

[36] Strauss, 336.

[37] RADM Fred L. Ames. "Recruitment Advertising," *US Coast Guard Flag Voice 30,* 30 March 1999, p. 1, on-line, Internet, 14 May 2002, available from http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/flagvoice/fv30.htm.

[38] Ibid, 338.

Chapter 3

Recruitment and Retention: Analysis by Generation

The generation is the most important conception in history.

—Jose Ortega y Gasset

1970s: Recruiting & Retaining the Boomers

Pundits in the 1970s noted the American military did not have twenty years' experience fighting in Vietnam; it had one year's experience—twenty times. Although this claim concerns 13-month rotation policies in the combat zone, it also relates to attrition via low retention. Retention was problematic throughout the decade, as seen in Table 1, Chapter 1.[1] A demoralizing experience in Vietnam conflicted with Boomer idealism[2] while "the hollow force" of the late 1970s severely eroded a Boomer's desire to be part of an under-achieving military without prestige.[3] The primary tools the Services emphasized to buttress retention (and recruiting) were educational benefits (the "highly popular GI Bill [from] 1973-1976"[4]) and increased pay.[5] Both resonated with the Boomer generation's desire to achieve, to be recognized, and to be rewarded for it.[6]

This war will not be over by the next commercial break.

—U.S. military spokesman to reporters in Operation DESERT STORM

1980s: Retaining the Boomers; Recruiting the Xers

Retaining the Boomers: The USAF's "Aim High" and the Army's "Be All You Can Be" messages resonated with the Boomer desire to experience, to improve, to achieve, to find oneself, "to be" and self-actualize—to aim high and be all they can be.[7] With respect to more tangible retention factors, the boomers valued the increased pay in the 1980s and, especially, the Montgomery GI Bill.[8]

Recruiting the Xers: In "1979, just after an Iranian mob had swarmed into the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, a University of Georgia student center gave a special screening of the movie *Patton*. The students gave the film a standing ovation, hanged an effigy of the Ayatollah, and then ran through the streets chanting anti-Iran slogans. That year, a new breed of college freshman came to America's campuses."[9] The question is, did the Services recognize they, too, were recruiting a new breed?

Perhaps so. "One of the most interesting and successful organizational 'turnarounds' of the 1980s in the public sector occurred in [military] recruitment."[10] Xers joined the Services in large numbers and reenlisted at high rates despite competition from a booming economy.[11]

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.

—Vernon Sanders Law

1990s: Recruiting & Retaining the Xers

Then again, perhaps not. The USAF and Army suffered retention problems with their senior Captains and Majors, Xers all, in the late 1990s.[12] In FY98[13] and FY99,[14] the USAF missed all three of its retention goals in first-term, second-term, and career

reenlistment—again, Xers all. USAF conducted an AF Summit on Retention in 2000,[15] established a retention task force to make recommended changes, and immediately implemented initiatives.[16] In the Army, research revealed "widespread negative reaction to the 'Be All You Can Be' recruitment campaign"[17] among Xers in the force, stimulating Xer cynicism and lowering the morale of those already recruited. The Army research concludes the negative reaction as "attributable to perceived dissonance between promise and performance."[18] In fact, Xers prefer ad campaigns emphasizing physical and mental "challenge, patriotism, danger."[19] This research paper concludes the "Be All You Can Be" ad campaign stressed a message of self-improvement and self-actualization more suitable to the idealistic Boomers who crafted it than the survivalist Xers it targeted.

Given the drop in recruitment and retention rates in the late 1990s "and the apparent failure of recruiting to 'connect' with today's youth, the armed forces have been desperately searching for new ways to advertise and attract volunteers."[20] As a result, "within the past [two] year[s], all services except the Marine Corps have changed their recruiting slogans; the Army, Navy, and Air Force have found new advertising agencies; and all services have initiated new studies to better understand their target market."[21] In recruiting, both the USAF and Army scrapped their recruitment advertising—the USAF emphasizing teamwork where "no one [else] comes close"[22] with the Army emphasizing "an Army of One."[23] In regard to image and outward appearance, again, both the USAF and Army made uniform changes—the USAF introduced its new, modern logo (to include adding it to uniform accessories and buttons) while the Army introduced its new, black beret. Apparently, both Services sensed something needed "fixing" and made

changes just after the Millennials—born 1982-2003 according to this research—began coming into the 17-22 year old recruitment window in 1999. Nice timing.

> *Experience is that marvelous thing that enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.*
>
> —Franklin P. Jones

2000s: Retaining the Xers; Recruiting & Retaining the Millennials

But, for the Army at least, wrong message. Just as the Army inappropriately targeted Xers with a Boomer-friendly "Be All You Can Be" message in the 1980s and 1990s,[1] the Army repeats its mistake in targeting the Millennials with an Xer-friendly message. It is the young Xer recruit, not the Millennial, who should be attracted to "an Army of One" message, as it should resonate with the Xer peer personality and view of themselves struggling "me against the world" in Rambo-like fashion.[24] On the other hand, the Air Force's emphasis on teamwork is more likely to resonate with the Millennials due to their "achievement- and team-orientation."[25] Just when one figures it out . . . the rules change. So, what has changed and just what are the recommended changes to Service recruitment and retention?

Notes

[1] Personnel Readiness Office, Air Staff, "Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001," HQ USAF/DPFMA staff study, February 2002.
[2] William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 310.
[3] Curtis L. Gilroy, Robert L. Phillips, and John D. Blair. *The All-Volunteer Army: Fifteen Years Later*, (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 16, No. 3, Spring 1990), 335.
[4] Gilroy, 330.
[5] Gilroy, 333.

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[6] Leonard Wong. *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2000), 7.

[7] Strauss, 302.

[8] Gilroy, 330.

[9] Strauss, 317.

[10] Gilroy, 329.

[11] Personnel Readiness Office, Air Staff, "Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001," HQ USAF/DPFMA staff study, February 2002.

[12] "Retention Information," *Air Force Personnel Command*, 15 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 19 January 2002, available from http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/.

[13] "Retention remains AF Challenge," *AF News*, 16 August 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 19 January 2002, available from http://www.af.mil/.

[14] "AF holds summit to turn tide in retention," *Air Force Policy Digest*, February 2000.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Retention initiatives address Airmen's key concerns," *Air Force Print News*, 31 May 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 19 January 2002, available from http://www.af.mil/.

[17] Leonard Shyles and John E. Hocking. *The Army's "Be All You Can Be" Campaign*, (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 16, No.3, Spring 1990), 381.

[18] Ibid, 380.

[19] Ibid, 378.

[20] Maj Andrew G. Wilcox. *Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs*, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, March 2001), 2.

[21] Ibid, 2.

[22] "Air Force Unveils New TV Commercials", *Air Force Print News*, 23 August 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 19 January 2002, available from http://www.af.mil/.

[23] Wilcox, 2.

[24] Strauss, 322.

[25] Wilcox, 30.

Chapter 4

Recommendations

Experience is one thing you can't get for nothing.

—Oscar Wilde

Black Hawk Down: Xer Retention, too

Xers value personal mental and physical challenges.[1] Xers are highly competitive, seeking "X-treme sports," for example, and making up the bulk of players.[2] Service recruitment and retention programs should challenge Xers' "street-smarts" and stress the physical and mental challenges Service life offers—on the job. Off the job time is held sacrosanct by Xers due to the high value Xers place on time with the family and a "stable family life."[3] The Services must respect and address Xer family concerns, or the Xers will again demonstrate their historical tendencies to treat military service as just another job, just another stepping stone—and step out.[4] The Services should emphasize the small-town atmosphere and safety afforded Xer families living in an on-base community. Lastly, Service retention programs should stress how they value Xer "street-smarts" and how they need Xer elders to stay in to show young airmen "the ropes."

The Matrix: Millennial Recruitment

The Army's "Army of One" campaign is more suitable for the individualistic, survivalist and lone Xer[5] than the team-oriented and social Millennials.[6] It should be scrapped. Instead, as the Air Force does, recruitment and retention messages should emphasize teamwork and community.   According to research at the Naval Postgraduate School on "Recruiting the Next Generation," the two factors most likely to prevent a Millennial from the joining the Service are "its lack of relevance"[7] and fear for personal safety.[8]

To emphasize relevance, Services should stress their participation in a global community and each Service's role in protecting the environment.   Surveys show Millennials care "most passionately about the environment,"[9] one of their very few rallying cries as a generation so far. Other experts on the Millennial generation note their strong civic virtues and desire to rebuild America's institutions—together, not as an army of one.[10] Therefore, DoD should emphasize the need to rebuild America's military (institution-building). Outside of DoD, the US Coast Guard has already addressed the military's "lack of relevance"[11] issue directly with its "Jobs that Matter"[12] ad campaign, stressing protecting the environment and saving lives.

Lastly, the Services must address the Millennials' aversion to risk-taking and high concern for personal safety.[13] Air Force recruitment should go smoother since it is seen by the Millennials as "the safest and easiest" Service.[14]   Regardless of recruiting difficulty, once recruited, all Services must work on retaining Millennials.

Fighting terrorism is like being a goalkeeper. You can make a hundred brilliant saves but the only shot people remember is the one that gets past you.

—Paul Wilkinson

Crouching Tigers: Retaining Millennials

Again, emphasizing "jobs that matter" should take center stage in retention programs. Stress the Millennials' role in rebuilding the American military as a protecting and democracy-saving institution, protecting and saving lives, and protecting and "saving" the Earth. Other "millennial workplace demands are described as follows: access to technology, high compensation, responsibilities, information and continuous learning opportunities, and flexible work locations and hours."[15] Again, the Air Force is seen as having the inside track with Millennials as it is seen as having "the strongest grasp of the tangible, rational side."[16]

Hidden Dragon: A Warning

The biggest danger in future recruitment and retention programs lies in Boomer and Xer decision-makers crafting programs inappropriately projecting—onto the Millennial generation—the attitudes, values, and beliefs these decision-makers held when they and their generation were recruited and retained. The exodus of Army Captains in the 1990s—to an "all-time high of 10.6%"[17] voluntary attrition rate—may be traceable, in part, to a mismatch between retention messages and target generation.[18] For example, in a revealing statement underscoring a complete lack of appreciation for a generational perspective, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff stated "We know that many of their [Xer Captain] concerns are similar to those we [Boomers] had as junior officers; so share with

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them what it was like when you were a captain—when you stood in their shoes and faced similar hard career decisions."[19]

But, there are three pairs of shoes, not one: Boomer, Xer, and Millennial. And, only Xers and Millennials are in the retention window (age 20s and 30s). Therefore, a recommended "retention intervention" is to craft dual retention programs—one for Xers, one for Millennials—while these two very different generations are targeted simultaneously for retention. This is the case from the present to 2010. In 2010,[20] the Xer retention window closes as the new Millennial generation fully replaces the preceding Xer generation in the retention window—at which time one integrated (and generationally suitable) recruitment and retention program will suffice. Until then, each Service will require two distinct retention programs: one targeting Generation X—from the present until 2010—and one targeting the Millennial Generation—from the present until 2020.

The retention programs targeting Xers should stress military virtues and zero in on Xer "military-mindedness"[21] while the recruitment and retention programs targeting Millennials should stress civic virtues and zero in on Millennial "civic-mindedness."[22]

Notes

[1] William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 319.
[2] Lt Col Neil Yamashiro. *Generation X*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, April 1998), 10.
[3] Yamashiro, 12.
[4] Strauss, 332.
[5] Strauss, 317.
[6] Maj Andrew G. Wilcox. *Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs*, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, March 2001), 30.
[7] Wilcox, 124.
[8] Wilcox, 112.
[9] Wilcox, 46.

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[10] Strauss, 340.

[11] Wilcox, 124.

[12] "Jobs That Matter," *U.S. Coast Guard*, n.p., on-line, Internet, 14 May 2002, available from http://www.gocoastguard.com/.

[13] Wilcox, 115.

[14] Wilcox, 147.

[15] Wilcox, 45.

[16] Wilcox, 146.

[17] Leonard Wong. *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2000), 1.

[18] Wong, 6.

[19] Quoted in Leonard Wong. *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2000), 5.

[20] Wilcox, 20.

[21] Strauss, 326.

[22] Wilcox, 30.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Experience teaches.

—Tacitus
Annales

Recruiting, retention, and their integration together have sometimes plagued, sometimes vexed, and always challenged the Services to some degree. A generational microscope should be added to the Services' recruitment/retention toolbox. First, recruitment and retention programs should be "generationally suitable." At times, campaigns and programs crafted by (and popular with) senior decision-makers from one generation are unpopular (and deemed unsuitable by) the actual target generation. For example, Army research found that while Xers panned the Army's "Be All You Can Be" campaign (initiated in the late 1970s and continued until the late 1990s),[1] Boomer decision-makers understandably deemed it successful because Xer recruitment soared until the late 1990s. As a result, the Army kept the campaign for almost twenty years, even after changing advertising agencies in 1987.[2] Thus, Army researchers were surprised to find Xer soldiers indicated "that they ignored the ads, laughed at them, or [were] slightly irritated by"[3] the campaign, a campaign widely viewed as successful and used to recruit Xers from 1978 to 1999! Therefore, it appears the Army "succeeded" in recruiting Xers during their recruitment window (age 17-22) throughout the 1980s and

1990s *despite* a message deemed most unsuitable by the Xers themselves. Second, recruitment and retention programs should be "well-integrated," or they may work at cross-purposes. For example, the Army's "Be All You Can Be" recruitment campaign did have "a deleterious effect on active duty [Xer] soldiers' morale, degree of commitment to the military, and reenlistment consideration."[4] Just as the rooster's crow does not make the sun rise in the morning, recruitment (or retention) success does not necessarily mean the recruitment (or retention) message is on target!

When recruitment/retention are obviously not optimal, recruiting and/or retention may become job one—especially after they become chronic.[5] This research reveals that the Services suffered shortfalls as soon as a new targeted generation entered recruitment or retention windows—the Services eschewed a generational perspective, insisted on applying lessons learned from recruiting and retaining the previous generation, and continued to tailor recruitment and retention programs unsuitable to the target generation. For example, this research suggests the dip in first-term retention rates from 1979-81[6] (Tables 1 and 2, Chapter 1) and 1998-2001[7] (Tables 3 and 4, Chapter 1) is traceable, in part, to the arrival on the scene of the first cohorts of Generation X[8] and the Millennial Generation,[9] respectively. Additionally, this research indicates the Services' rapid recovery in recruitment and retention rates from 1982-1997,[10] is traceable, again in part, to the Services' increased familiarity with and expertise in recruiting and retaining a self-reliant, military-minded[11] generation: Generation X.

Therefore, part of the success in recruiting and retaining Xers was their military-mindedness, not brilliant Service recruitment and retention programs. In fact, the deck was apparently stacked in the Services' favor: the Xers tended to favor military service

due to their generation's peer personality. "By a two-to-one majority, [Xer] men preferred military to civilian public service . . . Starting when the first [Xer] cohort reached age 19, the armed forces began a dramatic three-year rise in the quality of new enlistees. [Xers] are the best educated generation of soldiers in American history."[12] As a result, "1990 recruiting figures for the Air Force, Army, and Navy marked the highs for the decade."[13] After more than a decade's experience in recruiting and retaining Xers, the Air Force achieved its highest first-term retention percentages in 1995, the Army in 1997, the Navy in 1991, and the Marines in 1990.[14]

The Services often become more adept at recruiting and retaining the new target generation—until another generation reaches young adulthood, upsetting the Services' apple cart yet again. After successes during the early 1980s through the late 1990s, this again appears to be the case from 1998 to the present. And, the cycle may be expected to repeat itself—barring intervention.

This research seeks to cut short the cycle by heralding the present arrival—from 1999 to approximately 2020—of a new American generation of "Millennials" entering recruitment age, hopefully cueing the Services to re-tailor their recruitment and retention programs now to avoid successive disappointments later. If this research succeeds, Air Force recruiting and retention organizations may apply a generational perspective, plan ahead, and deftly cut over to pre-planned recruitment and retention programs as soon as a new generation with its different generational perspective arrives on the scene.

Notes

[1] Leonard Shyles and John E. Hocking. *The Army's "Be All You Can Be" Campaign*, (Armed Forces & Society, Vol. 16, No.3, Spring 1990), 370.
[2] Ibid, 370.
[3] Ibid, 379.

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[4] Ibid, 379.

[5] "AF task force to combat recruiting, retention problems," *Air Force Print News*, 16 March 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 19 January 2002, available from http://www.af.mil/.

[6] Personnel Readiness Office, Air Staff, "Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001," HQ USAF/DPFMA staff study, February 2002.

[7] Ibid.

[8] William Strauss and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1991), 318.

[9] Strauss, 336.

[10] Personnel Readiness Office, Air Staff, "Air Force Goal/Accession History and Reenlistment Rates, 1955-2001," HQ USAF/DPFMA staff study, February 2002.

[11] Lt Col Neil Yamashiro. *Generation X*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, April 1998), 16.

[12] Strauss, 326.

[13] "USAF People: Recruiting, Retention, and Demographics," *Air Force Magazine*, January 2001, 10.

[14] Ibid, 10.

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