**Professionalization and Leadership in the Millennial Era**

**By Michael J. Lindsay**

**op-ed**

Typically, when I write an article for the *Journal*, I aim to be somewhat academic. In this article, I unashamedly express several opinions that are not in step with current law enforcement practices. My observations are reported to stimulate thought, discussion and perhaps a few changes.

Leadership, as most know, is an ever-evolving science. Consequently, leadership approaches in this Millennial era will not only need to change substantially but will also need to include an entirely new line-officer leadership model in order to successfully guide law enforcement through the next several decades. Simply stated, these are different times and require different approaches.

Until recently, law enforcement had been mostly a blue collar occupation. With the exception of the investigators in a detective bureau, the need for higher level skills and intellectual abilities were pretty much minimal. Conversely, line officers historically viewed detectives and the detective function as somewhat questionable. Because of this, the police and detective functions often developed along totally different career tracks.

When Sir Robert Peel created the Metropolitan Police Department, for example, he wanted nothing to do with detectives because he believed that occupation was inherently rife for corruption. Even in subsequent years when the detective function in England developed to a high professional level, e.g., Scotland Yard, the two roles remained largely separate. Many administrators of the day thought real brain power was not needed for the patrol function.

Even today, the occupation of military policeman in the U.S. Army has not developed to a high professional level, probably because of its close association with the European model. This is not surprising considering the exposure the MP system had to the European model during WW I and WW II when the police and investigative functions where largely separate.

Line MPs, even today, are typically low ranking enlisted personnel and organized as a subordinate function to the command structure they serve. MPs cannot independently file charges against a soldier and they can conduct follow-up investigations only for misdemeanors or less serious felonies. They only have their arrest (apprehension) authority while on-duty, and they must turn in their firearms at the end of a shift. Until recently, the Navy did not even have a specialty career designation for law enforcement. Regularly enlisted sailors were simply rotated into and out of the Shore Patrol function. Consequently, most states still do not accept MP basic training as a substitute for that state’s basic law enforcement training.

By contrast, the Army Criminal Investigation Detachment (CID) and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)—both separate organizations from the military police function—receive extensive academy training, hold their arrest authority 24/7, and are organized outside the local commander’s authority. The CID can have enlisted personnel but most are at the Warrant Officer level. These organizations have been at a high level of competency for decades and are typically viewed as being on a professional plane with the FBI.

Although civilian police officers have had the potential—structurally and legally—to professionalize to the level of the CID, NCIS or the FBI, most did not take any real leaps in this direction until the late 1960s.

This rather long-winded examination of the development of the patrol function is made to demonstrate that not much was expected of patrol officers until very recently. But, Wow! Things have certainly changed today. The Civil Rights movement, draft resistance, the Viet Nam war, burning cites and prison riots in the 1960s initiated radical change in the way we view line officers. We began to realize what a huge influence a single line officer could have on a community, both good and bad. An even higher expectation for line officers today changes everything again.

Today line officers are expected to diagnose confrontational suspects to a degree that would make Sigmund Freud shutter. They must always use the precise amount of discretion that a judge would exercise after evaluating a defendant over a five week trial. And a line officer obviously must have a command of physical tactics that would make Chuck Norris and Bruce Lee envious. Line officers, in reality, have made huge strides since the 1960s, but we are again at a crossroads.

Unfortunately, this professionalization process veered sharply in a different direction after September 11, 2001. Our focus in many communities became decidedly more militaristic. This was natural in that we were under attack in our own homeland. Not since Pearl Harbor, the Civil War, or the War of 1812 had we had to fight on our own turf. The unfortunate thing about this shift of focus—at least for the police—was that most of our citizens were not enemy combatants. With this new attitude, officers viewed themselves more as soldiers than peace officers. Development in the social skills pretty much came to a halt in favor of more tactical training.

Law enforcement has always battled the *Us Against Them* mindset, but we then experienced a fresh infusion of this dangerous attitude. *Terry v. Ohio* was pushed to its limit in many communities, and officers occasionally stumbled over that line. Many trial lawyers, even before 9-11, considered *Terry* to be the worst Supreme Court decision of the century. Properly used, *Terry* gives modern police officers an effective tool in fighting crime. Unfortunately, the ease with which it can be abused is inviting to some officers.

In short, the soldier-patrol officer is probably the worst model that we could have adopted at that particular time. It not only gives the line officer an excuse to be detached and insensitive, but it encourages officers to be non-thinkers.

We, of course, train new officers this way at the academy. Why do we do that? Well, because we need to! As counterintuitive as this sounds, it is still the best way to start new officers into their careers, particularly Millennials. There have been calls for changing this approach by using non-stress academies and community colleges or by eliminating any aspect of paramilitary discipline. The problem with this is apparent when working with a generation that has been over-parented.

Besides traditional training areas that must constantly be reevaluated, there is also a new leadership area that needs to be developed which is very different than the typical leadership curriculum. This new leadership area has to do with instilling what I call “First Impression Leadership.” This is leadership for the lowest ranking members of the department. One might ask, what kind of leadership skills are needed there? These are certainly not leadership skills for running a shift or administering an agency.

In years past, this area was not a problem. Recruits largely arrived at the academy possessing many of these attributes. In today’s society, however, recruits are ill-equipped to make “small talk” in stressful situations. They have a sense of entitlement, and are accustomed to having many things done for them. They have not been stress-inoculated, and have not been trained to “take the lead” individually in projects or in tactical situations. All of these skills are needed to become a successful street officer.

Although a few might debate the point, the average Millennial has had zero training in discipline, following orders, taking charge or admitting individual responsibility. Here then is the dilemma. If paramilitary training leads to abusive officers, why should we continue in this mode? But if we do not instill the proper discipline, obligation and values in new officers, how are they going to meet the challenges of coping with the stresses of the street?

**A Few Possible Solutions –**

First, I believe—after having watched these conditions develop over the last 45 years—that shifting away from a paramilitary basic training approach is absolutely wrong. I know, first hand, that paramilitary training *done right* can mold officers into successful street tacticians without turning them into fire-breathing dragons. Paramilitary basic training should instill discipline and a sense of obligation to the community. It should not train officers to address citizens as if these citizens are first-day academy recruits?

These new approaches—blending paramilitary training with citizen-friendly strategies—are now being taught in some academies including several Indiana academies. These are the *taking the lead* skills. These require recruits to be individually responsible for assignments, groups or projects. These train new officers in face-to-face communication skills. Command presence (without the abuse), *Blue Courage* and *Policing the Teen Brain*, are all part of this effort to relate to the community and instill a sense of nobility in new officers.

Such efforts need to be continued at the department level, however, after graduation. This focus can be accomplished through tweaks in an FTO program. Having new officers be responsible for certain things at the department immediately after returning from the academy is one way to continue this effort. Grading them on being able to make small-talk with citizens or rewarding them for developing presentations to community groups are additional ways. Anything that makes a new officer responsible for something is a step forward.

On the administrative side, we have done some things that have probably been counterproductive. All departments today certainly need to be able to perform high level tactical maneuvers. Response team, active shooter training and op-plans are absolutely necessary today. But do all officers need to wear tactical uniforms for regular patrol duty? Here is where leadership needs to reevaluate what has occurred. Allowing ordinary patrol officers to dress tactically sends a dangerous message to both the public and the officer. It lends itself to self-fulfilling spirals.

Similarly, switching to high capacity side arms was a mistake in my observations. I know I will draw substantial criticism for this statement. This is not a preference for a revolver over a semi-automatic pistol, just a caution on high capacity magazines that has nothing to do with gun control arguments. Nevertheless, the image that firefights project when each officer discharges 18 or more rounds has hurt law enforcement. I clearly remember my first academy firearms instructor saying that 2 to 3 well placed rounds from a firearm like a .357 or .45 is more effective than laying down an entire field of fire—as often happens today.

The motivation to develop advanced marksmanship skills has been largely lost over the last 20 years. Competitions like the FOP pistol match and the Governor’s Top 20 matches flourished in years past. The 50 yard line has largely disappeared from most training. And why should an officer try to develop these skills to a high degree when officers typically carry at least three 18-round magazines?

Conversely, I have no problem whatsoever with all officers carrying a high capacity semi-automatic patrol rifle. The accuracy and stopping power of a rifle has the ability to conclude firefights quickly and is the opposite of what typically occurs in firefights using only high capacity, medium caliber side arms. These are all issues of leadership that can enhance or destroy a department’s image.

**Conclusions –**

Line officer leadership training in the Millennial era involves critical new skills not previously taught. These “First Impression” skills include talking your way through an explosive situation. These include being able to create an immediate plan at a potentially life or death situation and executing that plan. These include being individually responsible for projects, assignments and duties.

These skills are critical today. These skills are the new SWAT training for the Millennial era. Such skills are just as technical, just as dangerous, and just as important as the SWAT training of previous years. These are the new holy grail attributes and skills for good policing in the 21st Century.