A CHANGING OF THE GUARD
Preparing the Next Generation of ASSP Leaders
By Wyatt Bradbury & Matthew E. Law

Something truly remarkable is happening at ASSP’s National Capital Chapter, and looking at the chapter officers’ web page only tells part of the story. While many chapters may struggle to engage Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2004), two chapter past presidents, Rob Matuga and Jerry Rivera, have another frame of thought. “At the National Capital Chapter, we want to make this a leadership hub for young safety professionals,” says Rivera.

Currently, the chapter’s president, president-elect, secretary, director and programs chair are all under age 40. Some members recently finished school and are still defining the type of safety professional they will become.

Some may see a fatal flaw in allowing Millennials to influence the direction of such a prestigious organization. However, Matuga and Rivera have quite the opposite opinion. “Right now, Millennials are the largest generation in the workforce. It is important to bring young members into chapter leadership positions as they are often looking for more advanced and meaningful opportunities,” says Matuga, 2016-17 chapter president. Matuga and Rivera, among others, have realized that their careers are far from over, but the direct benefits that come from these leadership positions are best given to young professionals who can launch their careers through these opportunities.

According to a recent survey, Millennials look for collaborative and consensual responsibility in their working environments and professional organizations. They are empowered by the opportunity to make an impact and willing to take on leadership roles if given the chance, rather than relying on a leadership structure based on seniority or age (DTTL, 2017; Happ, 2017).

“Our goal is to provide support and guidance to young professionals, who are often looking to be mentored. In return, they have added value to our chapter leadership,” says Rivera, 2014-15 chapter president. Millennials are often confident in their abilities to be leaders, but they also crave leadership development (Broussell, 2015; Happ, 2017).

Instead of fearing that our age or generational title might lead to unconventional ideas or challenge the system, nationally recognized safety professionals such as Rivera and Matuga embracethe opportunity to make it and will to take on leadership roles if given the chance, rather than relying on a leadership structure based on seniority or age (DTTL, 2017; Happ, 2017).

“Open your mind and be willing to try everything. Millennials bring energy and time, but they also need your wisdom, guidance and support.”

However, it is easier to discuss these ideas than put them into practice. It will not be without hard work and effort by both groups to understand, appreciate and begin passing the leadership baton. Once that transition is initiated, both groups must remain engaged with each other to ensure that the baton is not dropped during the critical handoff. Here are some guidelines to consider for both groups.

Experienced Generations
• Empower young leaders to create beneficial opportunities and embrace change when it happens. You are a resource and your influence will be evident in the great work accomplished by this generation.

Future Leaders/Young Professionals
• Be open to opportunities and willing to serve in any capacity. Even the simplest position can be made more efficient and presents an opportunity to be mentored and grow.

• Actively listen to older generations. Respectfully question and try to understand the process before trying to create change. This will help shape your ideas, combining them with the lessons learned from others and ensuring long-term success for the entire team.

• Engage peers and challenge them to serve as well. Leadership is perpetual; you must continually empower the next group of leaders to take charge and grow the organization.

This model is helping the National Capital Chapter succeed and ensures that future leaders will appreciate the work of previous volunteers. “If we are invested in the growth of the next generation of safety professionals, they will be more likely to develop a stronger relationship with ASSP,” says Rivera.

We welcome feedback and hope these ideas can help create new conversations and opportunities across the ASSP community. PSJ

References

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