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JCSP 40

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has a paid ceiling strength of 68,000 Regular Force personnel. In order to maintain this fighting force, the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) is tasked with enrolling 4000 to 5000 new recruits each year. Although CFRG can enrol Canadian citizens between the ages of 17 and 52, the vast majority of new recruits are between the ages of 17 and 25. The recruiting process and standards have changed over the years to meet the needs of the service; however, the overall main goal of CFRG is to attract the right person for the right job at the right time. During the two world wars, attracting recruits was relatively easy as enlistment was a chance for citizens to serve their country and fight a common enemy. In other more peaceful years, joining the military was viewed as a chance to learn a trade or obtain an education. Today's target recruiting audience, those Canadian citizens aged 17 to 25, are known as Millennials and they present a unique challenge in terms of identifying a reason for them to join. A subsequent challenge the CAF faces regarding Millennials is that the CAF must provide meaningful career opportunities to ensure they remain valuable members of the CAF for an extended period of time. The CAF, and more specifically CFRG, are working towards developing strategies to entice this generation to join a modern fighting force; however, CFRG lags behind the times in its efforts and its ability to meet the needs of this new generation.

DISCUSSION

CFRG must attract, process and enrol a sufficient number of potential recruits throughout the year to meet the intake requirements of the CAF. In order to attract sufficient applicants to fill our ranks, recruiters must first identify who are the people we

are looking for. Today, this is the Millennial generation and it is important that CFRG recruiters understand the needs and expectations of a Millennial. Without understanding the makeup of a Millennial, it will be difficult to connect with them and reassure them that a career in the CAF will satisfy their needs. Recruiting for the CAF has changed over the years, but the overall recruiting process remains fundamentally unchanged. All applicants for the Regular Force must pass an aptitude test, be medically fit, be found suitable in a screening interview and have no legal or financial issues. What needs to change, and is slowly changing, is how CFRG attracts the best candidates for a career in the CAF. Many years ago the Royal Navy used press gangs to fill their ships with sailors. Another method of filling our ranks came through the legal system when some people appearing before a judge were given the option between going to prison or joining the military. Throughout most of the history of recruiting, the military relied on the brick and mortar concept. This is the concept where the military has recruiting offices located throughout the country and Canadian citizens are encouraged to visit and obtain information at these locations. The screening for enlistment is also conducted at these various locations. CFRG trains and employs recruiters at the Sergeant rank level to attract Canadian citizens to apply for careers in the CAF. Years ago, this meant visiting local educational institutions and setting up an information booth to provide information to the public. Recruiters also attended career fairs and other community events but the concept was the same. Recruiters would set up an information booth to provide information to those asking questions. Hard copy pamphlets were the main source of information and audio visual equipment consisted of a laptop and a large in-focus machine. This method of attracting young Canadians to apply for the CAF worked well

in the 1990's. However, it does not meet the needs or expectations of today's Millennials. Many of the staff working in recruiting offices are many years older than the current generation of new recruits joining today. Some recruiters have children the same age as these Millennials we want to attract. Even so, many recruiters do not fully understand them as a generation.

In order for CFRG recruiters to attract today's Millennials it is important to first understand what a Millennial is and what their employment and career expectations are. Millennials are often referred to as Generation Y and according to Wikipedia, Millennials are identified as being between the ages of 15 and 25 as "Researchers and commentators use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to the early 2000s"¹ as the period of birth for them. Having established the fact that Millennials are in the age bracket that the CAF is trying to attract (17-25), this generation of Canadians must be clearly understood if CFRG is to provide the correct messaging, and present a positive image to attract this generation for enrolment. If the CAF is to truly provide meaningful career opportunities for these Millennials, the CAF must understand what they are looking for in a career and provide these opportunities. In Canada, there is no mandatory period of service to the military for citizens. Therefore, the CAF needs to understand the traits of this generation in order to fill its ranks with sufficient volunteers. According to Jean Twenge, she "considers Millennials, along with younger members of Generation X, to be part of what she calls "Generation Me."² Many of today's youth exhibit this attitude in so far as they believe they should have whatever is they desire from cell phones to automobiles.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials>

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials>

This attitude is also evident in the CAF today as our members know their entitlements and are quick to point out if they are owed something. Younger CAF members strongly believe they are entitled to more without necessarily doing any extra work. Twenge also “attributes Millennials with the traits of confidence and tolerance, but also identifies a sense of entitlement and narcissism”³ According to a survey reported on by Bibby, “More than 8 in 10 teens say that traits such as *trust* and *honesty* are “very important” to them, while close to the same proportion say the same thing about *humour*. More than 6 in 10 maintain that they place very high levels of importance on *concern for others* and *politeness*. A majority also view *forgiveness*, and *hard work* as extremely important. Speaking of civility, even *cleanliness* is widely valued.”⁴ These traits of honesty and loyalty are characteristics that the CAF is looking for in its members and this provides a positive sign for attracting this group of individuals to our organization. The concern Millennials place for others is a positive sign that the CAF will maintain its positive image in the world of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance. Aside from understanding the personal attributes of Millennials, understanding their career goals is also very important. According to a response from a survey of a large number of Millennials, “Almost everyone expects to pursue a career, and the vast majority expect to not only get jobs when they graduate but to get the jobs they want. Three in four are expecting to go to university.”⁵ In terms of a work environment, Gilbert states “Millennials are well educated, skilled in technology, very self-confident, able to multi-task, and have plenty of energy. They have high expectations for themselves, and prefer to work in teams, rather than as individuals. Millennials seek challenges, yet work life balance is of utmost

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials>

⁴ Bibby, Reginald W. "Canada's Emerging Millennials." *Transition* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2009). Page 3.

⁵ Ibid. Page 5.

importance to them.”⁶ This information clearly illustrates that Millennials are a generation that are self-confident, highly educated and interested in careers that will meet their personal needs as much, if not more than those of the organization they join. Another factor to consider when confronting the challenges of recruiting Millennials is the impact of multiculturalism in Canada. Many of today’s Millennials are first generation Canadians. One survey “found that while a majority of first generation participants were fluent in their home languages, many had lost it by the third generation”⁷ The follow-on effect with this group of Millennials, is that many of them are Allophones and experience difficulty functioning in either of Canada’s official languages. The difficult task facing CFRG is trying to communicate in the Millennial’s language of preference, designing aptitude tests that do not discriminate against a particular culture, and convincing the ethnic community that the military in Canada is viewed in a positive light. This is often extremely difficult as many immigrants moved to Canada to escape the military of their previous country. One final area worth considering regarding Millennials is related to their skill in technology as previously mentioned above. Millennials are more comfortable with a cell phone than a land-line and utilize social media in order to pass and receive real-time information. “For starters, three out of four own a smartphone. They also thrive on social media, using it as a source of current affairs apart from networking.”⁸ The passage of information is important in the CAF and according to a recent survey “a whopping 60 percent of the sample size said that they relied on social media for keeping up to date with current affairs and news — not surprising for a generation that always

⁶ <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/the-millennials-a-new-generation-of-employees-a-new-set-of-engagement-policies/>

⁷ Driedger, Leo. "Multiculturalism: Sorting Identities, Rights, and Conflicts." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 43, no. 1/2 (2011). Page 225.

⁸ <http://digiday.com/brands/millennial-media-consumption-habits-debunked-5-charts/>

likes to be connected.”⁹ These are important factors when we investigate the use of social media within the CAF and CFRG and how this impacts our ability to influence the Millennial generation.

Canada is not the only country facing challenges regarding the enrolment of Millennials into their military. Canada has a number of allies and not only do we develop tactics for wartime operations based on our shared experiences, we also can develop other policies and procedures based on each other’s experiences. We need look no further away than to our neighbours in the south, the United States of America, who may be viewed as our closest ally. The American military must also find a way to connect with its citizens and entice the Millennials to join their forces. Each branch of the service must recruit to meet its needs and the US Army devotes great attention to Millennials and their use of social media. “Social media is an integral part of Army and Department of Defense operations.”¹⁰ The American military does not just say this – they put action behind their words. According to Bruce Jasurda, chief marketing officer of accessions command for the U.S “The U.S. Army is becoming more open and honest with potential soldiers.”¹¹ The US Army maintains a site where a soldier’s stories can be told first hand and citizens interested in joining the American military can ask questions directly to serving members. I have also personally witnessed the use of social media by recruiting staff for the US Army and their basic training centre. The US Army recruiting centre encourages applicants and new recruits to develop and update their Facebook page or other social media site. The US Army will conduct local training prior to the actual date

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <http://www.army.mil/media/socialmedia/>

¹¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/marketshare/2010/10/05/the-u-s-army-on-recruitment-in-the-social-media-age/>

a new recruit departs for their basic training and during this period of time, trainees update their Facebook status and share their stories with their friends. This also provides an opportunity for future soldiers to communicate with other future soldiers from around the country who they will soon meet at basic training. The US Army also encourages the use of social media during basic training. Recruits are provided time to update their status and communicate with family and friends relating stories of the day. This provides that real-time passage of information to concerned loved-ones. Long gone are the days of writing letters home to family members. Another longtime partner with the Canadian military is the United Kingdom. We share a number of similarities with the UK and both countries share common values. In the UK “The British Army recruits up to 20,000 people each year. Their target audience is 14-24 year olds who are statistically the most comfortable with social media, often using it as their main communication tool.”¹² The British Army has developed a Facebook site which:

- Links to online and telephone recruitment offices.
- Allows potential recruits to ask general and specific questions about life and training in the British Army.
- Shows videos of serving soldiers and officers who talk about aspects of army life and training.
- Increasingly uses online gaming to attract candidates, as it allows people to demonstrate skills they may not have realised they have which are relevant to the Army.
- Links gaming experience to the British Army website to show type of jobs available that match demonstrated skills.¹³

They also utilize a Twitter account “which enables potential recruits to communicate with

¹² <http://www.ctp.org.uk/resettlement-guide-article/using-social-media-in-417933>

¹³ <http://www.ctp.org.uk/resettlement-guide-article/using-social-media-in-417933>

serving personnel.”¹⁴ It is clear that militaries around the world have understood the importance and value of social media in terms of attracting new recruits to their militaries. This is exactly what the CAF needs to do to recruit and retain Millennials.

CFRG has realized that it must update its recruiting practices to meet the expectations of today’s Millennials and to be competitive with civilian corporations. In approximately 2012, CFRG initiated its Recruiting 2016 action plan. This was designed to modernize recruiting for the CAF and set the conditions for success in terms of meeting the Strategic Intake Plan (the number of new recruits to be enrolled each year). The first modernization of the new-look recruiting environment that appeals to Millennials was brought about through staffing and budgets cuts. CFRG was forced to close 12 of 38 recruiting detachments across the country. To compensate for this, CFRG enhanced the ability for people to apply on-line for a career in the CAF. Millennials who are very tech savvy, could now apply to join the CAF without being required to visit a recruiting office. This increased the accessibility to all Canadians while appealing to the traits of Millennials. Another key area that CFRG commenced updating its image was in terms of audio visual equipment. It has taken a few years, however, CFRG is close to providing its recruiters with tablets and in-focus machines that are no bigger than a wallet. Recruiters will also have the ability to store their presentations in “the cloud” as opposed to having a requirement for internal memory in their electronic device. Recruiters will also be able to utilize their tablets to give interested citizens the opportunity to conduct a search on-line of an occupation that interests them. The application process now utilizes a centralized control and decentralized execution concept. Staff at CFRG Headquarters communicate and provide information to potential recruits through e-mail accounts. This

¹⁴ Ibid.

is resulting in a quicker passage of information to and from applicants in the process. Understanding the need of self-importance to the Millennials, CFRG is working on developing a Customer Relations Management cell which will interact with applicants in the recruiting process. This team and its responsibilities have not been fully developed as of yet, however, it is clear that applicants in the recruiting process must receive feedback and updates on a regular basis. This will ensure that applicants feel important. The final section that is being developed with CFRG is a Social Media cell. Presently working in North Bay, Ontario, this team will be transitioning to Canadian Forces Base Borden to work within CFRG Headquarters. Previous attempts to have live chat sessions between recruiters and applicants failed due to lack of personnel and funding, however it is hoped that this new venture into the social media realm will pay dividends in terms of attracting Millennials to enrol into the CAF. CFRG has established a Facebook and Twitter account to provide information to prospects who may have questions regarding a career in the military or about the recruiting process. Recruiters are beginning to utilize the LinkedIn capability that the internet provides in order to find prospect for professional occupations where the CAF is facing challenges in maintaining sufficient numbers of qualified personnel. The Social Media cell will assume these roles. A couple of areas where CFRG still does not present a modern, technically advanced image relates to our booking and testing procedures. Most people can buy tickets to events and book airline flights through the internet. Presently, applicants must contact a recruiting office to book a test or interview. Although our aptitude test is electronic it must be conducted on-site in one of our recruiting offices or remotes. Other civilian organizations can provide a link for potential employees to complete an on-line test; the CAF is not yet there.

CONCLUSION

Millenials are a unique generation of Canadians and recruiting them into the CAF requires a change in recruiting tactics. CFRG is transitioning to develop strategies and technologies through Recruiting 2016 to appeal to the Millenials. However, as potentially successful this may be, CFRG is too late to be a leader in this field. By the time CFRG fully implements 2016 and tackles the issues relating to the Millenials, Generation Z will become the target audience for recruiting and it may be too late to develop effective recruiting practices to be ahead of the civilian sector. CFRG must strive to look towards the future as opposed to looking at today if we are to be a leader in the war for talent.

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