Best Practices Guide

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments
Technical Assistance Program

Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel

by W. Dwayne Orrick

Best Practices Guide for

Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel

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Recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified applicants to meet the staffing needs of an agency is the most fundamental human resource process in a police department. The success of the department's recruitment efforts impacts every other function in the agency.

For years, law enforcement agencies offered good, stable employment. A readily available workforce enabled many police leaders to ignore the importance of recruitment. Today, employers nationwide, including police departments, report having difficulty attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified employees. There are a number of factors both inside and outside the organization contributing to this condition.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of the issues that impact an agency's ability to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified persons who are a 'good fit' within a police agency and the processes to successfully attract these individuals. In addition, factors contributing to increased levels of employee attrition and processes for developing a high retention environment will be identified.

Recruitment

Police departments are service organizations. The quality of their service delivery is directly linked to the quality of personnel they recruit, hire, and retain. Failing to recruit and retain personnel that 'fit' with the agency will have a direct impact on the organization's ability to serve their community. The process of attracting potential employees is more complex than merely convincing a large number of persons to submit an application for employment. To be more effective, agencies must view recruitment in a comprehensive manner. Before a department begins to recruit officers, the number of officers and the needs of the department should be identified through a staffing analysis and a review of the average turnover rates.

Once the number of employees that are needed is identified, the core values of the organization and the unique aspects, or 'employer brand', should be clarified. This information is critical for establishing the caliber of officers needed and what the department has to offer employees. In addition, leaders must designate specific individuals to act as official department recruiters, but every officer can be enlisted to help with the search. Finally, the process of actually recruiting employees should make use of a variety of recruitment strategies.

Staffing Analysis
To determine the number of officers required to serve the needs of the community, the department should conduct a staffing analysis. There are several formulas available for projecting the number of employees needed. Assuming the department receives appropriations to fund additional positions, the projected need is added to the number of current vacancies. At the same time, the average turnover should be determined. To estimate the anticipated vacancies, planned and unplanned turnover must be considered. Planned attrition includes persons who are known to be leaving the department in the next 12 –18 months (i.e. retirement). Reviewing the average number of persons who resigned in the past 24 – 36 months can be used to estimate the number of unplanned turnover. Combined, the staffing projection, current vacancies, and estimated turnover provide recruiters with the approximate number of new officers that will need to be recruited.

Identifying Core Values

The process of identifying the core values of a police department is often viewed as being the 'softer' side of law enforcement that has little affiliation with 'real police work.' However, the statement of core values is actually the bedrock of the department's operations. Serving as its constitution, the core values clarify why the department exists, what it represents, and how it conducts itself. While there are many similarities between law enforcement agencies, there are distinct differences between each community's expectations and how its department provides services.

Every agency has a set of values, regardless of whether they have been formally articulated and pronounced. Identifying the core values helps to determine what beliefs an individual should possess to fit well within the organization. This is important because many leaders have been led to believe that a person who passes the various selection procedures is the most qualified person for the department. In reality, an officer who works well in one department may not fit well in another.

The core values establish the standard for evaluating the recruitment and selection of employees.   When organizations fail to identify core values and make them an integral part of the recruitment, selection, and operational procedures, they tend to repeatedly make the same hiring mistakes. [1]

Finally, when employees' personal values are similar to those represented by the police department the individual is more likely to identify with the agency's purpose and be anchored to that organization. [2] This results in lower attrition rates.

Developing an Employer Brand

As agencies place greater emphasis on recruiting and retaining employees, they should examine their employer brand. An employer brand communicates the message of what it is like to work in the organization. Every department has a reputation as a place to work that may be positive or negative. For example, a department may be well-known for providing higher salaries, maintaining excellent performance standards, or having the best equipment available.   At the same time, a department may also be known for poor relationships between management and line officers or low salaries and benefits.

Agencies that develop a strong, positive employer brand have a special allure as a great place to work and are considered employers of choice. [3] This designation gives agencies a competitive advantage when recruiting officers. As a result, departments are more likely to have a greater number of high-quality candidates apply for positions. Branding also helps lower the cost-per-hire and increases the level of retention by initially attracting candidates who are more likely to be a good fit for the department. [4]

As departments seek to develop a strong employer brand, they should go through a facilitated process to gain employee participation, identify what candidate's desire, assess the department's current brand, and clarify the agency's unique characteristics.   Having completed this process, agencies can work to develop the department's desired image. Once established, a strategic plan to move from the current brand to the desired image can be developed. This process is not easy and cannot be accomplished overnight. Once the desired brand is created, the agency must constantly work to maintain it. In addition, they must ensure how the employees act and the public's perception of the department are synonymous with the brand. Agencies that successfully complete this effort find they have better relations in the community, successfully recruit top quality candidates, and are in a stronger position to retain quality candidates.

Recruiter Selection

Many agencies fail to recognize and subsequently stress the importance of the recruitment function. As a result, those persons who would probably be the best individuals for the position do not submit their name for consideration.   To overcome this, organizational leaders must develop a perception throughout the department that recruitment is one of the most important functions in the agency.

To ensure the recruiting function is considered an important function and an organizational priority, individuals should be formally assigned the responsibility of specific recruiting functions. In a larger organization this may require a team of officers. In smaller agencies, this responsibility will likely be completed by one individual on a part-time basis. Regardless, a thorough process of identifying, selecting, training, and evaluating recruiters should be completed.

Persons assigned as recruiters must be among the brightest in the department and the position should be viewed as a sought after position. Individuals must possess the social astuteness to read non-verbal signals from others' body language and adjust their responses to meet the needs of the individual. At the same time, the recruiter must be able to assess the potential candidate's ability to meet the department's employment standards. The best recruiters are known, liked, and respected as credible individuals throughout the community. They are always seeking opportunities to sell the agency and establish new networks.

Once officers are selected as recruiters, they should be provided with training to ensure their success. In some cases, this training can be provided internally. If the department is starting a new program, it may be necessary to seek training outside the department.

Finally, objective performance standards should be established to measure the recruiter's success and hold them accountable for meeting these standards.

Recruitment Techniques

If departments continue to use the same recruitment processes they have always used, they will continue recruiting the same types of employees, with the same results. In order to recruit diverse, high-quality candidates, departments must upgrade their recruitment programs and employ a variety of recruitment techniques to reach this new group of candidates.

Employee Referral System (ERS) - When law enforcement agencies search for a suspect, they do not have one person to conduct the hunt for the entire department. Instead, every available person is tasked with helping to conduct the search. So why should an agency have one or two persons doing all of the recruiting? Every officer in the department is a potential recruiter.

Employee referral systems are the _most_ effective recruitment techniques available. Much of the success of referral systems is attributed to officers doing some form of informal assessment of the individual to determine if he or she can perform well within the organization before approaching them or making a recommendation to the agency. In addition, millennial employees voice a desire to work with their friends. Research has consistently found that officers who are recruited through employee referral systems are more likely to succeed in the selection process and be retained by the agency. Having learned about the agency first hand from an officer, referred candidates have a more realistic view of the job they are coming in to.

When beginning an ERS, guidelines for the program's operation should be established. First, officers should be informed of the department's personnel needs and goals, and have them focus their efforts on addressing these needs. Second, a process must be established to track officers' referrals. To prevent them from becoming frustrated and discouraged, employees who make a referral should be provided periodic updates of the candidate's progress. In addition, the agency must continually communicate the need for new recruits, benefits for recruiting a new employee, and about officers who have successfully attracted a new recruit.

In many departments, officers who refer a candidate who is hired by the agency receive some form of bonus. A determination should be made of the type and value of the bonus. The bonus may be a non-cash award

such as days off or a gift (i.e. television, laptop computer, etc.). Other departments provide cash payments ranging from 100 to 5,000 dollars; a sort of "finder's fee". When providing cash bonuses, many departments provide one-half upon employment of the recruit and the second half when the individual completes their probationary period. This installment program maximizes the motivational benefits of the program. In addition, the referring officer is more likely to serve as a mentor to help the new employee succeed.

Finally, employees are likely to attract other people who are similar to them. If the department does not have a diverse workforce or has a dysfunctional culture. Implementation of this system may perpetuate these problems. Under these circumstances, leaders may limit the use of an employee referral system.

Internet – The Internet is the second most effective approach for recruiting potential candidates. It is available to potential applicants 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is less expensive and easier to customize than many other recruitment techniques. Making use of the Internet also provides agencies with greater opportunity to expand their brand message and eliminate their dependency on traditional media.

The department website allows the agency to communicate the services they provide, project a solid image, and describe various career opportunities. Recruiters and leaders should assume that all serious job seekers will examine the department website to research the agency and learn about its operations. Because of this, the site should provide an accurate reflection of the department's personality and values.

To provide an informative, high impact website, designers must maintain a dynamic and interactive site. The use of photographs and video bring the site to life. These images should be representative of the department and demonstrate diversity in the workforce. The website should include a prominently positioned link entitled 'Career Opportunities' that lists available jobs, requirements for each position, and a description of the selection process. Access to this link should be possible within three clicks. When composing an Internet announcement, designers should avoid using traditional job descriptions. Position announcements should capture the reader's attention with the image that the department is a great place to work and enables the individual to do meaningful work. The agency may consider including testimonials from employees of what attracted them to the job and what they enjoy about working with the agency. The most effective sites make it possible for individuals to download and submit applications. It is also suggested the page include a link to email the recruiter as well as a direct phone number. All requests for information should be answered within 24 hours.

Another alternative is to use on-line employment sites such as the IACP's Discoverpolicing.com. Many state law enforcement agencies, municipal associations, United States Military, and state labor departments also provide websites for posting vacancies at no cost.

Third, departments should work to develop and maintain a strong presence in social media including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. These programs provide greater interaction with potential candidates and increase the opportunity to peak their interest

News Media – The impact of social media has radically changed role of the traditional media - radio, television, and newspapers. The influence of newspapers and classified ads have experienced the greatest decline. Transitioning to a digital format continues to cause rapid and dynamic changes in how the traditional media seeks to meet consumer needs. Law enforcement agencies must continue to work with the media to leverage the latest information sources to serve their communities, present their brand image, and attract officers.

Law enforcement agencies have an advantage over other employers in that they have frequent access to reporters. Using these relationships, agencies can work to publish human-interest stories about officers and the department's recruitment efforts. These articles are a great way for the agency to bring attention to the department as well as provide greater details of career opportunities.

Former Officers – Many departments are finding they have a group of officers who compose the core of their operations. At the same time, another group of 'transient' employees, who may leave and return to the agency one or more times before they begin to completely identify with the core group and become long-term employees.

High performing officers who left the agency for 'greener pastures' often find the opportunity that pulled them out of the department did not provide them everything they expected. If given the opportunity many will jump at the chance to return. Recognizing they really belong with the department these persons often return to become long-term employees.

'Boomerang' officers provide many advantages for both the department and officer. The department and the officer are familiar with each other, so there are fewer risks for each. The officer is familiar with the department's expectations and operational procedures, so the transition is smooth and training is limited. These officers have explored other alternatives and appreciate the opportunities within that particular agency more. They are likely to spread this to other officers who are considering other opportunities and potentially limit turnover.

Target Female Candidates – Women are the most under-represented protected class in law enforcement today. While they make up 51% of the population[1], they occupy only 11.6% of positions across the nation[2]. This is not to suggest all women would make good officers any more than to say all men would make good officers. Nor should departments lower legitimate hiring standards to attract more women, this would only discount the value quality candidates bring to the workplace. Generally female officers possess many unique characteristics that make them exceptional officers. For example, women officers are more likely to be better educated. In 2013, women earned 61% of associate and 57% of bachelor degrees.[3] They are less likely to use force, excessive force, or be named in a lawsuit than male officers.[4] In addition, they have better oral communication skills and are more empathetic than men. As traditional gender roles continue to evolve, increasing the focus on female candidates will offer an abundant source of highly qualified and capable employees. Failure to do so will adversely impact agencies to reach their recruiting goals and serve their communities in the future.

Viral Recruitment – Top quality candidates are likely to be associated with similarly qualified persons. While recruitment efforts may not be successful with one individual, the candidate may likely associate with another person who would be open to opportunities offered by the agency. Recruiters should provide good candidates with several copies of brochures and other recruitment materials. If the person is not interested,

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[1] U. S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau, Age and Sex Composition: 2010, "Table 1 Population by Sex and Selected Age Groups: 2000 and 2010", (May 2011), p. 2, http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf

[2] Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports -2013, Table 74: Full-time Law Enforcement Employees by Population Group, Percent Male and Female, 2013 (http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/table-74/table_74_full_time_law_enforcement_employees_by_population_group_percent_male_and_female_2013.xls), (October 2014).

[3] Perry, Mark J., "Stunning College Degree Gap: Women have earned almost 10 million more college degrees than men since 1982", American Enterprise Institute,(May, 2013), http://www.aei.org/publication/stunning-college-degree-gap-women-have-earned-almost-10-million-more-college-degrees-than-men-since-1982/ (Accessed: May 22, 2015)

[4] Lonsway, Kim, Margaret Moore, Penny Harrington, Eleanor Smeal, and Katherine Spillar, "Hiring and Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies", National Center for Women and Policing, (Spring 2003), p. 4.

ask them to pass the agency's materials around to friends and colleagues. Recruiters can also encourage candidates to share recruitment links and information on their social media accounts. Other departments are asking applicants to list several friends who they think may be interested in becoming a police officer. This information is then forwarded to recruiters to conduct follow-up interviews.

Career Fairs – There are a variety of job fairs available for recruiters to meet with potential recruits including law enforcement, military, college and public events. Many departments have experienced limited success with participating in job fairs. Despite this, participating in career fairs provides departments with many benefits. Persons attending the events are seeking a career change and are looking at all the different opportunities. Because of this, recruiters have the opportunity to meet larger numbers of potential candidates at once. At the same time, the competition for job seekers attention is great, allowing job searchers to be easily distracted.

Working at a booth at a career fair requires recruiters to have a positive attitude and active listening skills. When talking with job seekers, recruiters only have a few minutes to talk with interested persons before they move on to the next booth. To prepare for this, recruiters should practice approaching and interacting with potential candidates. In addition, a system should be established for rating potential leads at the event and, following the event, the effectiveness of its recruitment potential.

Religious and Cultural Organizations – Networking with various religious organizations has proved very effective for police departments in attracting successful candidates, particularly minorities. In larger communities, some church and religious organizations operate job centers or other career preparation services. These organizations have close relationships with their members, and partnering with them can help break down trust barriers and add credibility to your recruitment efforts

Youth and Apprentice Programs – One study found that 50% of new recruits knew they wanted to be an officer in the 12th grade[5]. To capitalize on this, agencies should consider developing long-term recruiting programs that will identify and nurture those persons interested in law enforcement and anchor them to the agency. Various programs including summer day camps, Explorer posts, internships, and community service positions serve as a realistic job preview for these future officers. At the same time, participation in the program gives the agency an opportunity to interact with individuals and observe their personalities and work ethic. As a result, many of these programs result in the successful recruitment of participants.

Turnover

External Factors

The employer-employee relationship is a product of the market economy. Such that, during economic downturns or recessions, there are fewer jobs available for the employees. During these periods, employers have greater control of the relationship. Conversely, when the economy is doing well, employees have more opportunities and greater control of the relationship. During the recent economic recession, some agencies were forced to cut staffing or make reductions in force. During this period, incumbent officers had fewer employment alternatives and agencies experienced lower turnover rates.

As the economy rebounds, experienced officers who postponed retirement now have new opportunities for second careers. Others who become dissatisfied with the progress of their careers may seize newly found opportunities. Unfortunately for the agency, the first persons to leave are often the best employees simply because they have better skills and abilities to offer new employers.

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[5] Switzer, Merlin E. "Recruitment and Retention: Best Practices Update", California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, April 2006, p. 40.

This problem is compounded by a number of factors. Departments that were not permitted to fill vacancies have fewer seasoned officers to take the place of senior staff and fewer persons view law enforcement as a viable career. In the next five years, the exodus of baby boomers will dramatically reduce the number of persons in the labor market. Together with a recovering economy, these conditions will result in heavy competition for talent talented candidates. If agencies do not take aggressive steps to mitigate this issue, a serious imbalance will likely form in many departments between the number of experienced officers and newer recruits. Over time, agencies with higher turnover and less experienced officers will suffer a reduction in productivity and lower quality of service delivery.

A number of studies have documented the level of turnover and contributing causes. Still, little research has been done to establish a benchmark of 'acceptable' or 'normal' turnover rate for law enforcement agencies.

- In 1999, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement reported 14 percent of state and county officers and 20 percent of municipal officers left within the first 18 months of employment.[7] Between 1983 and 1997, the state of Alaska averaged a 35 percent turnover in its Village Public Safety Officer positions. [8]

- In 2003 the North Carolina Department of Criminal Justice assessed the level of turnover in municipal and sheriff's officer positions and found attrition in municipal agencies ranged from zero to 87 percent with an average of 14.2 percent.[9] At the same time, sheriff's personnel had a turnover rate of zero to 60 percent with an average of 12.7 percent.[10]

- A study of attrition of Vermont law enforcement agencies between 2001 and 2006 found counties averaged 8.9 percent, while municipalities experienced 8.25 percent.[11]

- A 2010 staffing study conducted by the Glendale (AZ) Police Department analyzed many inter and intra agency factors in addition to turnover. According to the study, sworn personnel departures decreased by 32%, from 25 to 17 departures between 2008 and 2009.[17] The turnover rate for sworn personnel dropped from 6.0% in 2008 to 4.2% in 2009.[17] Three of the 17 departures in 2009 were voluntary resignations, which led to a voluntary turnover rate of 0.7%, down from 2.2% in 2008. The voluntary turnover rates in the department were slightly above the 0.4% national rate as reported by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2010.[17]

Law enforcement attrition is a complex and difficult issue to manage. In many instances, the turnover occurs in trends. To identify these trends, agencies must track when officers resign from the department. Using this information, charts can be developed to help illustrate the severity of the problem and how to coordinate retention efforts at critical times. Before an agency can determine the retention strategies to be initiated, it is critical to know the specific reasons why officers are leaving an agency. As departments seek to find the causes for attrition, officers must have an integral role in the process. One of the most important areas to clarify in this phase is to ask employees what is important to them and their opinion of why employees are leaving. Several techniques can be used to capture this information, including confidential surveys, personal interviews, exit interviews, and focus groups.

Internal Factors
Salary – The most frequently cited reason by police executives of why officers leave is salary. There are a number of reasons for this claim. In many cases the level of salary, benefits, and working conditions offered by local and state governments trail those found in the private sector or nearby agencies. Second, employees who do not want to burn bridges with an employer frequently tell their bosses they are receiving a better salary in their new position. Third, if the individual is making more money in his or her new position, it is easy to say they left for a higher salary. Finally, relying on salary increases allows executives to give a simple

answer to a potentially complex problem without making any hard analysis of the problems or conditions within their agencies.

Money is not a motivator, but absence of money is a de-motivator. When an individual does not have enough money to pay his or her expenses, salary becomes more important. As a general rule of thumb, persons who are struggling to pay their bills will leave for less than a 5 percent increase in salary. Unhappy employees will leave for 5 percent, and satisfied employees generally require a 20 percent increase before they consider resigning. [13] The issue of compensation is more inclusive than just salary and includes a number of benefits such as health insurance, vacation, retirement, schedules, and equipment. Deficiencies or perceived inequities in any of these areas can contribute to turnover.

Poor Supervisors or Leadership – People do not leave jobs, they leave managers.[14] The number one internal factor affecting an employee's decision to stay or leave a job is the relationship with their immediate supervisor. One of the greatest crises facing law enforcement agencies in the near future is the failure to develop leadership potential of officers throughout the entire organization. Too often persons are promoted to a supervisor position and not given any training of how to effectively perform their new responsibilities. As a result, they treat employees the same way they saw their supervisors treat officers years before.

Poor Job Fit – Another contributor for officer attrition is a poor person-job fit. Even though the individual has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the job, many do not like the work or fit within the agency. Several states have found that at least 25 percent of officers leave their department within the first 18-36 months on the job. Field training officers or supervisors often hear the officer say, "This job is not what I thought it was." This same person may work very well in another department; they just do not work well within that particular agency.

Higher Ordered Needs – In recent years, the police profession has placed emphasis on the professionalism of working within law enforcement agencies. Departments spend enormous efforts attracting better-educated, well-rounded individuals. As a result, today's applicants are looking to satisfy higher-ordered needs of belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization. This translates into officers wanting to feel a part of the organization, be proud of what they do, and make a difference. Despite this, the organizational culture of some agencies has not evolved beyond the survival mentality aspects of police work. Basic and advanced training classes emphasize the need to go home at the end of the day as their measure of success. This is not to minimize the dangerous aspects of a career in law enforcement or the need to exercise appropriate care in performing their duties in a safe manner. The officers being recruited today are seeking challenging work environments and problem solving opportunities. When these needs go unmet for an extended period of time, it causes internal conflict for the individual. As a result, when these individuals are placed in an environment that constantly focuses on the lower-ordered needs, the individuals will soon look for work environments that offer those opportunities and conditions.

Role Conflict - Many departing officers note the disparity in the interpretation and consistent application of policy between supervisors as a leading cause of their dissatisfaction. For example, a chief may hear officers state that how they perform a task varies according to their shift assignment. Some may take this to mean every shift does different things because of the type of activity that occurs. Instead, these officers are voicing displeasure with doing the same thing differently depending upon their supervisor. Over time, they develop a perception there is no consistency in the operations and no matter what they do it is wrong.

Dysfunctional Organizational Cultures – Many agencies are still characterized by silo management styles, hierarchical organizational structures with a dependence on strict operational procedures. This compliance, rule-based environment is based upon a transactional leadership style. Employees today are seeking an intrinsically motivating work environment. To accomplish this, leaders must engage the minds and hearts of their officers. Officers must take ownership of the various projects in which they are assigned to participate.

When leaders fail to do this, they are limiting the organization's success and contributing to the attrition problems within their agency.

Generational Differences – Generation theory proposes there are four stages in a cycle. Each stage is identified as being a different cohort or generation. The 'personality' of each generation is developed by the events occurring in society during the formative years. The manner in which each generation treats and raises children differs because of changes in values and perspectives. These changes ensure the cycle continues its evolution. No generation is really any better or worse than another; each is different with its own strengths and weaknesses. The secret for leaders is to be aware of these differences and develop the leadership strategies that are needed to reach out to the individuals at their current level of development.

Lack of Career Growth or Better Opportunities – Officers often cite limited opportunities to grow or 'move up' as a reason for leaving their current position. This is particularly true for millennial employees. For years, larger agencies have successfully used more opportunities in a larger agency as a way to poach exceptional officers from smaller departments.

Inadequate Feedback – Providing frequent feedback is a critical link to having a contented workforce. Employees want to know how they are performing and are anxious to improve. Supervisors who do not provide frequent feedback allow poor work habits to form that result in unnecessary mistakes, citizen complaints, and managerial problems.

Inadequate Recognition – Positive reinforcement is the easiest, least expensive, and best way to improve good performance. When individuals do not receive this recognition, the exceptional performance will likely diminish.

Inadequate Training – Police officers' work environment is constantly changing and providing new challenges. Today's officers view training as an opportunity to improve their skills and make them more effective. Training is critical for providing officers with the skills they need to achieve their personal career objectives. When officers do not receive sufficient training, they make more mistakes, lose cases, and feel less confident. This also causes more lawsuits, negative publicity, and poorer organizational performance. Agencies that ignore this need are failing to meet the individual's desire to improve. If the department does not provide these opportunities, officers will look for agencies that will.

Equipment – Officers consider the type of equipment they receive as being indicative of their value to the community. For example, if all of the patrol units have 150,000 miles, officers have to share portable radios, or computers are slow and in need of replacement, the department may be viewed as having little concern for its employees. At the same time, keeping officers equipped with well-functioning cruisers and upgrading or replacing equipment on a regular basis will result in the department more likely being viewed as being an attractive employer.

Retention Strategies

The overarching goal of any department's retention efforts should be to maximize factors pulling employees into an organization while limiting the factors pushing employees out of the department.

As agencies attempt to identify the reasons for employee attrition, they should also try to determine the reasons why others stay. By surveying and conducting 'stay' interviews with high performing veteran employees, the agency can likely determine factors that influence their decisions to remain in the agency. As part of this process, the goal is to determine factors that are pulling individuals into the agency as well as individual traits in persons who are more likely to stay and fit within the agency. The agency should identify what employees want and provide it.

Successful retention begins before the officer is selected. The selection process should be considered a two-part process. In the first stage, processes are designed to identify individuals who pass minimum qualifications. Standard selection devices to eliminate individuals who do not meet minimum established standards typically include: preliminary interviews, basic skills exams, physical ability tests, and background investigations. In the second phase, qualified personnel are evaluated to identify those candidates who fit with the agency.[15] While most agencies perform very similar activities, every department has its own personality or organizational culture. Too often it is assumed the person who scores the highest on selection exams are the best persons for employment. This pursuit of a fair system limits the agency's ability to attract those persons who are more likely to stay with the agency.

Behaviorally Based Interviews – One of the best techniques to determine if an individual identifies with the agency is the use of behaviorally-based interviews. These interviews are based upon the premise that past performance is the best indicator of how an individual will perform. Interview questions focus on critical tasks or values within the agency. Individuals are asked to describe incidents they have been involved in and how they responded. For example, if the agency has a core value that all persons are treated with dignity and respect; an individual may be asked to "Describe a situation in which you had to interact with a person in a work-related situation who you felt was acting in an unreasonable manner. How did you respond to this person? What did you learn from that situation?"

Agencies should avoid the use of questions such as "Where do you want to be five years from now?" or questions that allow the individual to provide a rote or prepared response. The behaviorally based question requires the individual to explain how they've responded in the past and what he or she may have learned from the experience.

Realistic Job Previews – Too often departments trying to attract recruits focus all of their attention on the positive, sensational, or exciting aspects of law enforcement. To ensure a strong 'employee-job fit', departments should provide a realistic understanding of what it is like to work in the agency. Realistic job previews may be provided in several formats, online, through video, or in-person. This preview may be accomplished by a supervisor providing a candid description of what is required of new officers. Some departments require potential applicants to complete an established number of ride-alongs before a conditional offer of employment is provided. IACP's Discover Policing program offers a series of realistic job preview videos for use in recruitment. Regardless of the approach used, both the agency and the recruit should have an accurate perception of what will be required of the individual and what each will provide in return.

Compensation – To attract and retain good employees, departments must provide competitive salaries that match or exceed the market average. Compensation, however, means more than just salaries. Compensation packages include benefits other than salary including health insurance, retirement, leave, schedules, and equipment. As people mature, the priority of different benefits change. Because of this, compensation must be considered on a sliding scale. For example, officers who are under 35 years of age generally place greater emphasis on salary, while officers over 35 place increasing levels of emphasis on other benefits such as retirement.

Training – Today's employees view training as a highly regarded benefit and an issue of career development. Departments should bombard their officers with training opportunities. Quality training should be designed to ensure officers perform to established competency levels and build their confidence. A variety of techniques should be used including computer-based programs, roll-call training, classroom lectures and discussions, self-paced programs, practical exercises, webinars, micro training, and scenario-based exercises. Officers who receive increased levels of training feel valued and are more likely to stay.

Feedback – "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." [15] For feedback to be meaningful, it must be timely, specific, behavioral, and job-related. A basketball or football coach does not wait until the end of the year to correct a player's performance. They pull the player to the sideline, explain what they need to improve, and keeps the guidance focused on the game. The same is true for the best police leaders. By immediately reinforcing good behavior and addressing poor performance before it becomes a problem, supervisors make sure their officers are working at peak performance, building their self-confidence, and anchoring them to the department.

Supervisor Development – With poor relationships between employees and their immediate supervisor being a leading cause for employee attrition, it is critical for leaders to make supervisor selection and development a priority. This training should be provided prior to their appointment to a supervisory position. Second a field training program, should partner high performing, seasoned supervisors with newly appointed supervisors to teach them how to apply their new skills. Third, comprehensive performance standards should be developed and required of all supervisors. Individuals who fail to meet the established standards should be given a reasonable period of time to correct their behavior or be replaced.

Recognition – Feeling valued is a basic human need and good behavior which is recognized is more likely to be repeated. Leaders must seek out opportunities to recognize good behavior through personal contact, regular meetings, passing information on to senior leadership, and informal gatherings. Supervisors frequently use letters of commendation, achievement, recognition, and thank you notes.

Morale or pride meetings provide opportunities for social interaction to improve communication and trust among officers. During these meetings, supervisors can announce officers who achieved advanced certifications, are being promoted in the career ladder, or performed well in various instances. These meetings also provide a good opportunity to highlight creative or innovative procedures to address a problem. The entire focus of these meetings is on the positive activities being completed by officers and the department.

Career Assessment and Counseling – In an effort to determine the specific training and work experiences officers need to improve their individual performance and anchor them to an agency, they should submit to a combination of assessment tools. There are a number of processes available for organizations to complete these assessments, including paper and pencil assessments, 360° evaluations, assessment centers, and mentoring programs. Using information gathered from these development programs and diagnostic exams, leaders should work with the individual to compose a personalized development plan. This plan may include work experiences, training, formal education, and the need to prepare them for short and long term career objectives. This plan should include benchmarks for evaluating progress along with responsibility assignments for the officer and the department.

Dual Career Ladders – Traditionally in law enforcement agencies, the only way to move up was to assume a supervisory position. Unfortunately in many smaller agencies these vacancies only become available when someone leaves. Law enforcement today is much more challenging and broader than ever before. Many persons who are great officers do not have the personal attributes to be, or interest in becoming a supervisor. This does not minimize their importance to the organization. At the same time, experienced officers note that there is no way for the public to differentiate a ten-year veteran from a one-year rookie. To address these concerns many departments are developing alternative career opportunities for officers as a reward for increased levels of training and experience. As persons reach established levels, they are provided with increased salaries along with increases in rank designation (i.e. private, private first class, or Officer I, Officer II, Intermediate Officer).

Enhanced Work Experiences – While training is important for developing staff, the more senses that an individual uses when learning a new skill, the more likely that skill is to be retained. One of the best ways to learn a new task or skill is by actually performing in the job. There are a variety of ways to provide expanded work, including job shadowing, job rotation, and cross training.

Committee/Task Forces – Appointing individuals to work on committees and task forces demonstrates that the department respects their opinions and abilities. This process also provides officers with a valuable opportunity to work with others, develop networking skills, and learn new techniques to perform their jobs. Task forces and committees may be internal to the agency, community-based, regional, or state-wide in focus, offering opportunities to broaden the officer's perspective.

Teaching – Officers who develop an interest or expertise in an area can share their knowledge by teaching classes to other officers. This instruction helps to solidify their knowledge base and establish them as recognized experts.

Environmental Strategies – Agencies with a strong employee retention program have an organizational environment with high standards of performance. Unsuitable personnel are removed and the work is intrinsically motivating.

One of the most effective measures for developing a strong retention environment is to hold employees accountable when they are not performing to reasonable standards. Officers know who the mediocre officers are who are not performing to standard. These persons should be given a reasonable opportunity to improve their performance. Those who can not or will not perform to established standards should be removed. Leaders are often amazed at how a few cynical officers can adversely impact an entire unit.

Finally, leaders must develop an environment that constantly reinforces how officers are serving a purpose greater than themselves. This sense of meaningfulness forges an inseparable bond among officers.

Provide a Team Environment – We refer to law enforcement agencies as departments, suggesting they are set apart from others. In reality the agency is a team with each unit providing special activities toward successful accomplishment of its mission. A team can only be as strong as its weakest member or unit. Team members care about each other, want everyone to be their best, and support them in their personal journey toward excellence. Officers spend more time with their co-workers than they do with their families and need to know that the people they work with care about them on a personal level. It is easy for leaders to get caught up in the day-to-day operations and not contact persons who may be experiencing personal hardships such as health problems or family emergencies. Scheduling time to visit or call individual officers guarantees it gets done and provides the officer with a sense of belonging and reassurance.

Departments may also build a caring environment by providing access to various services and classes such as health/wellness screenings, offering gym memberships, smoking cessation classes, stress management classes, and financial planning, to name a few.

Responding to Departing Officers

In the past, when an officer submitted their resignation, supervisors congratulated the individual on their new position and wished them well in all future endeavors. In some instances, the employees were told they could leave work and draw their accumulated leave during the final two weeks. This approach sends the message, both to the departing officer and others within the department that officers are not valued and can be easily replaced.

To curb the churn of attrition, organizational leaders should develop a process of responding to officers who may be considering other employment opportunities. To accomplish this, supervisors must identify employees who may be considering leaving. In some cases, the first indication an individual is leaving is when they submit a letter of resignation. In most instances, however, persons will send subtle clues they are considering other opportunities. As adults mature, they enter transitional phases in which they re-evaluate

their lives. During these times, individuals are more likely to make significant changes. These phases may be linked with the birth of a child, graduation of children from high school or college, divorce, or purchase of a new home.

Other possible signs an employee may be considering other employment opportunities include:

- Prolonged disappointment of being passed over for a transfer or promotion;
- A close friend went to another job and is perceived as having better opportunities;
- Individuals reviewing personnel/training records to update their resume; or
- Making inquires of human resources about early retirement or transfers of benefits.

When a supervisor learns an officer is considering other employment opportunities, he or she should take time to meet privately with the officer. Depending on the relationship, the supervisor may feel comfortable asking the individual directly if he or she is considering alternative opportunities. The officer may mention they are considering another offer.

When responding to a departing employee, the supervisor should conduct an exit interview. Remember that changing jobs is an emotional time for the officer. Ask the individual to describe their new job. If the officer asks any questions, the supervisor should respond candidly and honestly.

When the opportunity is presented, the supervisor should inquire about potential challenges the officer perceives they may experience with the new position. Also the supervisor should ask about the factors that caused the officer to look for alternatives or that may have lured him or her away.

If the supervisor is aware of problems within the other agency, it would be appropriate to suggest that every department has many of the same problems, just in varying degrees. The supervisor may comment on opportunities that they currently have that are not available in other departments, such as career development, training, salary, equipment, and good relationships with fellow officers.

If the individual chooses to leave the agency, remind them that they will always be a part of the agency and offer to help in any way possible in the future. Remind them that they will always have a home in the department and will be missed by fellow officers. After the individual has been gone for about three to six weeks, the supervisor or another officer who had a close relationship with the officer should give them a call. It is an important gesture to check and see how things are going: indicate that the officer is still considered a valued employee who would be welcomed back into the department, and that they should not hesitate to reconsider their decision to leave.[16]

Summary

Never before has the recruitment and retention of police personnel been as critical or as challenging for police organizations as it is today. To address these challenges successfully, law enforcement leaders must examine the process in an entirely different manner. This process will require a constant review of the labor market, compensation systems, leadership, recruiting techniques, supervision of recruiters, employer brands, leadership and operational management systems, and retention systems. Quite simply – when recruiting and retaining personnel, every detail is important and deserves attention.

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