RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND TURNOVER OF POLICE PERSONNEL

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RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND TURNOVER OF POLICE PERSONNEL

Reliable, Practical, and Effective Solutions

By

W. DWAYNE ORRICK, B.A., M.P.A.

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To

Tina

PREFACE

Police organizations need people and an organization cannot be what the people are not. The recruitment and selection of exceptional personnel are critical to a police agency achieving its mission. This is one of the most important responsibilities of a chief executive. Unfortunately, criminal justice agencies nationwide are experiencing difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. Consequently, this inability to attract and retain the number of quality of personnel needed negatively impacts the quality of service received by citizens. When I faced the crisis of increased levels of turnover in my department, I began to search for how our agency could help to reduce the attrition of officers and increase the recruitment of officers. As I began my search for answers, I soon found agencies around the United States and in other parts of the world were experiencing difficulty recruiting and retaining quality staff. As I continued on my journey, I soon realized–EVERYTHING MATTERS! This concept is emphasized throughout the book.

Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Police Personnel provides a systematic approach to addressing the issue of employee recruitment in criminal justice agencies. Emphasis will be placed on law enforcement agencies, but the process can be used in any type of criminal justice agency. The use of the terms law enforcement and criminal justice agency are used synonymously throughout the text. The use of the term police department is used throughout the book. Except when noted, no distinction should be drawn between police departments, sheriff's departments, or state law enforcement agencies.

Chapter 1 serves as an overview for the rest of the book highlighting issues impacting recruitment as well as discussing in detail the legal environment and need to develop a diverse workforce.

Before department leaders and recruiters can identify how to slow the attrition of officers and improve recruitment efforts, the agency must conduct a thorough organizational assessment. Chapter 2 outlines the need, benefits, and steps for identifying the department's core values, conducting an organizational assessment, and completing a staffing analysis. Most agencies do not routinely perform this systematic assessment. As a result, their hiring process is a mechanical process focusing on filling vacancies, not matching the department's needs with the candidate's capabilities. The findings from this assessment provide the foundation for reducing turnover and improving recruitment and retention.

Before recruiters can begin to attract new officers, they must be familiar with the types of candidates available in the labor market and the factors that interest and motivate these individuals. Chapter 3 helps the reader to identify the agency's labor market, understand the employee-employer relationship, and how to tailor recruitment efforts for individuals from different generations and at different stages of adulthood.

Every department has a reputation. The perception held by the public and potential employees improves or interferes with the department's ability to recruit and retain staff. Chapter 4, Marketing the Department, discusses the need and process for developing a strong employer brand. This brand image distinguishes the agencies from other employers and increases recruiter's ability to attract officers. This section also provides guidance on developing a transparent relationship with the media.

A variety of recruitment techniques are outlined in Chapter 5 including employee referral systems, poaching, electronic media, print media, and career fairs. In addition, a special section is included for improving minority and female recruitment. Many readers may choose to take a shortcut and simply extrapolate information to be used in their recruitment efforts. While this is acceptable, it will limit the success of their recruitment efforts and their organization. Because of this, the reader is encouraged to take the time to complete a comprehensive assessment of their organization and their recruitment processes.

Studies identifying the severity around the country and a formula for calculating the cost of the turnover are provided in Chapter 6 along with the factors contributing to high levels of attrition. At the same time, actions are outlined in Chapter 7 to build a strong organizational culture and slow the churn of turnover. To accomplish this, leaders must increase the factors that "pull" employees into the department and minimize conditions that "push" officers out of the agency.

Finally, the concept of mentoring has been used for thousands of years. Everyone has mentors. This focus of Chapter 8 is to capitalize on the mentoring process to guide employees through the different stages of their career. The supportive culture improves performance and increases the individual identification with the agency.

While the concepts of this text are theoretically based, emphasis has been placed on reliable, practical, and effective solutions for addressing the issues of recruitment, retention, and turnover of police personnel.

W.D.O.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Former Georgia Governor and United State Senator Zell Miller was very fond of saying, "If you see a turtle sitting atop a fencepost, you know someone else put him there." It is impossible for me to recognize and acknowledge everyone who has supported my personal and professional development. This attempt will inevitably result in my unintentionally overlooking to acknowledge someone. I have been very fortunate during the course of my career to have worked and been associated with many talented and dedicated persons.

Doctor Charles R. "Mike" Swanson and Doctor Jack Enter reviewed my initial proposals and provided encouragement, support and constructive recommendations. Over the years, Mike and Jack have served as my instructors, mentors, and friends.

Elaine Deck with the International Association of Chiefs of Police continuously provided e-mails containing suggestions with newspaper and magazine articles. In addition to her genuine friendship, Elaine has included me in many roundtable discussions and programs. Each of which have helped to make me a better person and police chief.

Chief Larry Hesser (Ret.) is a true visionary in the area of police leadership. Larry impressed upon me the need for strong leadership development within a police organization that is based upon the department's core values. He gave me unlimited access to his professional work, experience, and wisdom. Larry's guidance and footprint in the area of leadership development has made an indelible influence on American law enforcement community. His work will continue to improve many of the future generations of police leaders. I consider myself fortunate to be one of the direct recipients of this influence.

My longtime friend, Tony McClung, provided me with numerous newspaper and journal articles as well as participated in frequent discussions regarding the causes of turnover and improving employee retention. Michael Caldwell, of DeLong, Caldwell, & Bridgers, L.L.C., offered his legal expertise through his overview of the legal review. Our discussions regarding the development of a positive organizational culture and the benefit of recruiting quality personnel were thought-provoking and inspirational.

I also want to thank the City of Cordele Commissioners and officers of the Cordele Police Department for entrusting me as their police chief and public safety director. During the last 17 years, I received experience, training, and exposure to opportunities that are afforded only a few fortunate souls.

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RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND TURNOVER OF POLICE PERSONNEL

Chapter 1

RECRUITMENT

INTRODUCTION

The most fundamental human resource process in a law enforcement organization is the recruitment of a sufficient number of qualified applicants to meet the staffing needs of the department. The success of this program establishes the foundation for every other function in the organization. Recruitment is more involved and comprehensive than simply convincing a large number of persons to submit an application for employment. The topic of recruitment is extremely complex. Intervening variables prevent the development of valid and reliable behaviors that absolutely result in successful recruitment. Because of this, recruiters are unable to simply make one or two statements or complete certain tasks and fill the department's vacancies. As will be demonstrated throughout the text, when recruiting a potential employee, Everything Matters!

Historically, police organizations offered the opportunity for good, stable employment. Since most agencies experienced low turnover and sufficient numbers of applicants, there was little need for most departments to have an organized recruitment program. A readily available workforce enabled many police leaders to simply ignore the importance of recruitment. For years, departments reported having high numbers of applicants for every vacancy. It was not unusual for agencies to have twenty to thirty applications filed for every position. Today, however, the standards and demands of police officers are much different. Agencies nationwide are finding reduced numbers of persons applying for vacancies. The inability to fill the number of existing vacancies within many departments is reaching a critical point for many communities. Competition between applicants is lower with some agencies reporting less than three to five persons applying for every vacancy. Some departments have difficulty employing sufficient numbers of recruits to fill available positions within the department's academy classes. Compounding the problem, police agencies are experiencing increasing levels of turnover. Competition from other departments, homeland security agencies, military, and the private sector for persons who possess the abilities needed by police agencies mandate leaders aggressively reach out to attract the most qualified candidates.

Agencies have experienced more change in the last twenty years than in the preceding 100 years. As with all organizations, changes in society are requiring dynamic responses by police departments to keep pace with demands being placed upon them. As operational procedures change, department recruitment programs are forced to evolve in the type of candidate being recruited and the techniques being used to attract them. Unfortunately, as the changes have occurred, the recruitment processes in many departments have not evolved at the same pace.

In an increasingly mobile society with daily commutes in urban communities of one to two hours and thirty to fifty miles in suburban and rural areas are becoming commonplace. On an individual level, these extended commutes require more personal sacrifices. For police agencies, the willingness of employees to make longer commutes effectively expands the potential recruiting pool.

For years, officers worked foot beats alone or with one partner with no means of communications. In the event of a confrontation the only defenses officers had were their wits, brute strength, and a revolver. Strict height and weight requirements ensured officers were large, physically strong persons who "could handle themselves." The courts ruled these restrictions as unconstitutional. Today, technological advancements have provided officers a range of "less lethal" weapons including pepper spray and electro muscular disruption devices like TASER. In addition, departments are also teaching officers verbal communication skills to de-escalate a confrontation and avoid the use of force if possible. These advancements are opening up new opportunities for individuals who may have been interested in police positions but thought they were not qualified. At the same time, departments are seeking persons who possess the personality traits and interpersonal communication skills to employ these techniques in a responsible and reasonable manner.

Operationally, patrol techniques in most areas of the country eventually transitioned from emphasizing on foot patrols to predominately using mobile units. In recent years, however, agencies have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of mobile patrols. Some have employed the use of neighborhood foot patrols, bicycles, and other techniques to make a more personal and direct contact with citizens. The evolution from an incident based policing philosophy to a community policing philosophy has required agencies to reassess the personality traits and communication skills needed in officers.

One of the most influential tools for revolutionizing the delivery of criminal justice services has been the introduction of the computer. Computers have enhanced many service delivery strategies including dispatching services, report management systems, logistical support activities, and investigative processes. Computers have allowed agencies to automate and streamline processes and maximize staff time. Using a more comprehensive collection of data, agencies are able to modify their service delivery strategies utilizing a variety of techniques such as COMPSTAT and problem-oriented policing. To accomplish this, departments need to recruit personnel with capabilities to rationally analyze data and respond accordingly.

In addition, there is an increasing use of other scientific advancements. In the past, crime scene processing was limited to little more than diagramming and photographing the scene and processing for fingerprints. Today, law enforcement agencies are using DNA to track and identify offenders. Lasers and ultraviolet lights are being used for an assortment of crime scene analysis procedures including identifying and collecting fingerprints, trace evidence, and injuries resulting from child and domestic abuse. Computer forensic analysis is being used to investigate white-collar offenses, organized crime, and sexual predators. Toxicology results help to determine impact of illegal substances in a range of cases from illegal possession and driving while intoxicated to homicide investigations. Advancements in video recording and analysis are being used in a wide range of locations including mobile patrol units, high crime areas, and business activities. Similarly, investigators are using high-tech surveillance techniques to track communications and travel of suspects in complex investigations. While this list is not comprehensive, it demonstrates the increasing need and dependence of agencies on the development of analytical skills and scientific backgrounds of line personnel. These examples also illustrate how dramatically the demands of law enforcement personnel are changing.

The quality of the service provided by an agency begins with the caliber of the personnel recruited to perform those duties. Law enforcement agencies spend more resources and money on personnel services than any other function. These costs usually consume 75 to 85 percent of a department's budget, making employees the most valuable investment and resource. With this kind of investment, departments must attract quality candidates and make wise employment decisions. Leaders cannot just place warm bodies in vacant positions. They have to place the right people, with the right skills, in the right positions. If an employer hires marginal candidates, more extensive training and development will be required for the new officers. These remedial efforts have a ripple effect that is very costly and may postpone or eliminate other services being provided. In addition, the employer will more likely have other problems later including misconduct and attrition. These employment decisions may potentially impact departments for more than thirty years. The future of police organizations is being shaped by the current leaders' recruitment efforts and selection decisions. With the benefit of hindsight future leaders will measure the quality of today's leaders, their decisions, and their legacy.

Traditional recruitment efforts are providing a decreasing rate of return in attracting employees with the skills departments need. If agencies continue to use the same recruitment procedures they have always used, departments will continue to attract the same type of recruits they always have. To satisfy the increased demands for officers, departments must upgrade their recruitment programs.

A police department recruitment program cannot operate in a vacuum. Rather, this process must be an integral part of an agency's operations. Leaders must step outside their comfort zones to look at the issue from a different perspective. In order to be more effective, departments will need to address recruitment with a more comprehensive, holistic approach. When recruiting police personnel, *everything matters!* For the purpose of this discussion, recruitment includes "those practices and activities carried out by a department for the purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees."[1]

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[1] A. E. Barber, *Recruiting Employees* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications 1998), p. 5.