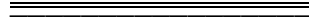
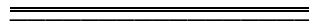


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Sabbatical: A Human Capital Strategy



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies should consider sabbatical as a part of their human capital strategy. The total national turnover rate of full time sworn police officers is too high (Wareham, Smith, & Lambert, 2013). Recruiting, screening, selecting, and training are difficult and cost time, effort, and money (Evans, Christopher, & Stsoffel, 2000; and Weisberg & Kirschenbaum, 1991 as cited in Wareham, Smith, & Lambert, 2013). The lessons learned from academic institutions as well as private and public organizations demonstrate that well designed and implemented sabbatical program lowers turnover rate by improving retention and mitigating burnout (Yardley, Thie, Brancato, & Abbott, 2004; and Davidson et al., 2010). Being creative about eligibility, application, selection, support, and follow-up is important when law enforcement agencies develop a sabbatical program as a part of their overall human capital strategy because everyone is competing for scarce resources in the current era of doing more with less.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction1
Position3
Counter Position7
Recommendation9
References14

INTRODUCTION

The word, sabbatical, comes from Latin, sabbaticus, Greek, sabbatikos, and Hebrew, shabbat, which means ceasing. The main concept behind sabbatical originated from Genesis 2:2-3 in the Bible where God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day (Ge. 2:2-3 New International Version). This sabbatical concept also appears in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 where all the work is to be done in six days, but working is not allowed on the seventh day (Dt. 5:12-15 New International Version). Leviticus 25:3-4 also states, "For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards" (Lev. 25:3-4 New International Version). The thinking is that resting the field every seventh year by not planting stops the gradual declining yield by allowing the soil to renew itself and become more fertile (Friedman, 2013). In the traditional sense, then, one year of sabbatical is meant to be taken every seventh year to revitalize oneself (Friedman, 2013).

Although sabbatical has its origin in religion, it is widely utilized in academies. Sabbatical has been a long standing tradition in academic institutions in the United States since the 1880s (Reuler, 1989; and Talbott, 1995 as cited in Friedman, 2013). Charles Elliot at Harvard University started using sabbatical first in the late 1800s as an incentive to attract faculty members by granting one academic year off with half pay or one academic semester off with full pay for every seven years served (Gilbert et al., 2007; and Carr & Tang, 2005). Over the years, sabbatical not only became prevalent in academic institutions, it also evolved to a way of providing professors an opportunity to

take extended time off from their teaching and administrative responsibilities in order to start novel research, catch up on developments, and produce publication (Davidson et al., 2010). There is a need for professors to remain current because the half-life of college education is about 3.5 years (Carr & Tang, 2005). Thus, sabbatical is considered an important component of personal and professional development (Davidson et al., 2010).

Non-academic institutions also have taken notice of the benefits of sabbatical. About half of the top 100 American companies, considered as the best place to work, provide various forms of sabbatical or similar leave programs (Bounds, 2000 as cited in Carr & Tang, 2005). Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, n.d.) has a sabbatical program administered by the FBI Leadership Development Unit in the Leadership Development Institute, which allows FBI personnel to engage in professional study and research that are important to the bureau on full time basis (FBI, n.d.).

In short, sabbatical is investment in human capital. People are the most valuable resource. Thus, recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining the right people for the right position are critical if the contemporary law enforcement agencies are to meet the challenges in the modern era and succeed. The lessons learned from the academic institutions as well as private and public organizations demonstrate that well designed and implemented sabbatical helps improve retention and mitigate burnout. Law enforcement agencies should consider sabbatical as a part of their human capital strategy.

POSITION

One of the benefits of sabbatical is improving the retention rate. The turnover rate among law enforcement agencies is high. Wareham, Smith, and Lambert (2013) analyzed the data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey in 2003 and the Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA) in 2008. Then, they determined that the total national turnover rate of full time sworn police officers was 10.8% in 2003 and in 2008 (Wareham, Smith, & Lambert, 2013). They also discovered that the turnover rates were highest in smaller agencies, municipal agencies, in the southern regions, and in rural areas (Wareham et al., 2013). The 10.8% total national turnover rate of full time sworn police officers consisted in part of about 1% through retirements and 7.5% by voluntary resignations (Wareham et al., 2013). Other reasons, such as death and involuntary separations, were responsible for the remaining 2.2% (Wareham et al., 2013). In a blunt term, quitting the department accounted for 70% of the total national turnover rate.

The significance of the turnover rate is that it has negative consequences for the law enforcement agencies. Recruiting, screening, selecting, and training are difficult and cost time, effort, and money (Evans, Christopher, & Stoeffel, 2000; and Weisberg & Kirschenbaum, 1991 as cited in Wareham et al., 2013). Moreover, experience and expertise are lost when a tenured sworn police officer leaves a department, and the learning curve for a new sworn police officer is substantial (Wareham et al., 2013).

Sabbatical leave could help increase retention by lowering turnover rate. Yardley, Thie, Brancato, and Abbott (2004) completed analysis of the sabbatical leave programs for the United States Navy Surface Warfare Officers (SWO) to determine whether these

programs helped the Navy retain more of its SWOs. The Navy had a problem retaining its SWOs because their career path required them to spend extended periods out at sea, which limited the amount of time they could spend with their families or take care of their personal needs. The Navy implemented sabbatical leave programs for the SWOs, which allowed them to take extended leaves, to improve the retention rate. The Navy commissioned a study to determine the efficacy of its sabbatical leave programs. Yardley, Thie, Brancato, and Abbott (2004) completed the study and concluded that the Navy's sabbatical leave programs increased the retention rate among the SWOs. Improving the retention rate also reduced the number of new accessions, which lessened the training need (Yardley et al., 2004). In sum, the sabbatical leave programs transformed the SWOs into a better qualified and trained as well as a more motivated and experienced force that was closer in numbers, which met the need of the Navy (Yardley et al., 2004). The sabbatical leave programs, more importantly, were also thought of as the right thing to do for the Navy because they took care of its SWOs (Yardley et al., 2004). Simply put, the sabbatical leave programs say the Navy valued its SWOs.

The total national turnover rate of full time sworn police officers is too high. High turnover rate results in high costs of recruiting, screening, selecting, and training as well as less capable police force. The analysis of the sabbatical programs for the SWOs in the Navy serves as the case study, which demonstrated that sabbatical increased retention rate. When sabbatical is carefully considered and properly implemented, there is nothing that prevents the law enforcement agencies from reaping a similar benefit of improving the retention rate as the Navy has.

Another benefit of sabbatical is mitigating burnout by affording people to recharge. The testimonials from those who have taken sabbatical are positive. Some described their sabbatical as the best period of their life (Temple, 2012). Others stated that they not only felt refreshed and rejuvenated, but also found a renewed sense of passion and commitment to their work after returning from sabbatical (Carr & Tang, 2005).

Burnout is a stress reaction among police officers that comes from demanding and emotional interpersonal interactions on the job (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Burnout results in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Maslach, 1982; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; and Demerouti et al., 2001 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Thus, burnout is an issue in law enforcement profession because emotionally exhausted police officers who depersonalize the public would not perform effectively (Bakker & Heuven, 2006).

Police officers experience emotionally demanding and emotionally charged situations daily because they experience dark sides of humanity, such as death, destruction, illness, and violence during their shift (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Burke, 1994; and Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Contrary to the popular belief, research findings do not support the notion that these demanding and emotionally charged situations result in burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1988 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006). What the studies demonstrated is that burnout results from the stress related to the job, such as workload, and poor supervision and leadership (Brown & Campbell, 1990; and Kip, Euwenma, & Schaufeli, 1999 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006).

Law enforcement, as a profession, involves “emotion work,” which requires police officers to control their feelings and regulate their expression (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). To put it in a more specific term, “emotion work refers to the psychological efforts necessary to express organizationally desired emotions during interactions with the public” (Morris & Feldman, 1997; and Zapf, 2002 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006, p. 426). Emotion work means police officers must suppress the emotion they are feeling inside and at the same time outwardly demonstrate the emotion their department expects them to exhibit (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). For example, police officers may internally feel angry toward one of the parties involved in a verbal dispute, but they must suppress their anger and act dispassionately toward everyone at the same time to preserve the perception of neutrality in order to settle the dispute.

“Emotional dissonance” occurs when there is a conflict between the emotion a person is feeling inside and the emotion the person is showing outside at the same time because the outwardly demonstrated emotion is required or deemed appropriate as a part of the job (Zapf et al., 1999, 2002 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Emotional dissonance is harmful because studies demonstrated that suppressing true emotions and feelings have negative consequences to health (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). One of the consequences of emotional dissonance is burnout (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Heuven & Bakker, 2003; Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, & Holz, 2001; and Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, & Isic, 1999 as cited in Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Bakker and Heuven (2006) concluded that emotional demands of law enforcement creates emotional dissonance that leads to burnout, which decreases police officers’ performance because burnout manifests itself as exhaustion and cynicism.

Swenty et al. (2011) examined a dozen articles on sabbatical and found that people described themselves as revitalized and renewed after their sabbatical because the experience was refreshing and gave those in the middle of career an opportunity to unleash creative energy. Swenty et al. (2011) also concluded that sabbatical decreased burnout, increased productivity, and increased job satisfaction. Sabbatical could also prevent burnout by affording an opportunity to learn and grow (Friedman, 2013). Continuously growing throughout the career by being a lifelong learner helps mitigate burnout by preventing stagnation (Espeland, 2006). As the founder of McDonald's, Ray Kroc (1992), once said, "As long as you're green you're growing, as soon as you're ripe you start to rot" (p. 6). In sum, sabbatical is beneficial because it decreases negative well-being and increases positive well-being (Davidson et al., 2010).

COUNTER POSITION

One of the criticisms of sabbatical is that it does not provide any professional growth. Some people even reported not doing anything to further their professional growth while they were on their sabbatical (Carr & Tang, 2005). This argument against sabbatical may appear to have merit. For example, Mamiseishvili and Miller (2010) attempted to find out who was awarded a sabbatical leave in the academic institutions, due to mounting controversy about sabbatical leave, by analyzing the 1999 and 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) data. They concluded that academic institutions used sabbatical leaves more as a reward for performance and achievement rather than as a tool for professional growth (Mamiseishvili & Miller, 2010).

However, well-designed and administered sabbaticals can provide meaningful professional growth and renewal that benefit all parts of organization (Gilbert et al.,

2007). The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) examined their sabbatical leave programs among the community colleges in California and concluded that sabbaticals were prevalent and played a critical role in providing professional growth (Gilbert et al., 2007). Contrary to some claims, the ASCCC also learned that virtually all requests for a sabbatical only for rest and relaxation were denied (Gilbert et al., 2007).

Another criticism of sabbatical is that it lacks accountability. Miller, Bai, and Newman (2012) examined the sabbatical application and operation policies of 75 academic institutions and found that 93% did not have any statement about the purpose of their sabbatical leave program and only 57% required the applicants to submit a detailed plan for the sabbatical leave. In other words, the academic institutions did not expect much from their faculty members on sabbatical leaves (Miller, Bai, & Newman, 2012).

Nevertheless, accountability can be effectively addressed by incorporating it into a well-designed and administered sabbatical program. Again, the ASCCC discovered that wide differences in policies on sabbatical leave programs, and how they were administered resulted in great disparities in participation (Gilbert et al., 2007). The ASCCC studied the important parts of successful sabbatical leave programs and made recommendations to broaden participation (Walton et al., 2008). One of the recommendations was ensuring sabbatical applications have a clearly and specifically stated set of objectives and outcomes during the selection process to provide the sabbaticals a focus as well as a way to evaluate them later in order to determine whether they accomplished their intended objectives and outcomes (Walton et al.,

2008). Knowing exactly what the purposes of the sabbatical are is critical because they provide the justification for the extended leave (Friedman, 2013). Another recommendation was thinking outside of the box to come up with creative activities that were to occur during the sabbaticals to generate professional growth, which reinvigorated and renewed commitment (Walton et al., 2008). Additionally, having a post-sabbatical reporting process ensured sabbaticals met their objectives (Walton et al., 2008).

RECOMMENDATION

Sabbatical should be a part of human capital strategy in the law enforcement agencies. First, sabbatical leave programs improve retention. High turnover rate results in high recruiting, screening, selecting, and training costs (Evans et al., 2000; and Weisberg & Kirschenbaum, 1991 as cited in Wareham et al., 2013). High turnover rate also leads to less capable police force because experience and expertise are lost (Wareham et al., 2013). The analysis of the sabbatical leave programs for the SWOs in the Navy demonstrated that carefully considered and properly implemented sabbaticals increased retention rate (Yardley et al., 2004). The law enforcement agencies should consider sabbatical as a part of their human capital strategy to reap the benefit of increasing the retention rate as the Navy has. Second, sabbatical leave programs also mitigate burnout. Burnout, which results from emotional dissonance, manifests itself as exhaustion and cynicism (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). These negative consequences decrease performance because exhausted and detached police officers are less effective (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). A plethora of studies and testimonials indicated

sabbaticals reinvigorate people, renew commitment, and provide growth (Temple, 2012; Carr & Tang, 2005; Swenty et al., 2011; and Espeland, 2006).

Sabbatical leave programs are not without criticisms. First, some argue they are used as reward, not for professional development. For example, the analysis of the 1999 and 2004 NSOPF data indicated that academic institutions used sabbatical leaves to reward for performance and achievement, not as a tool for professional growth (Mamiseishvili & Miller, 2010). The ASCCC, however, examined the sabbatical leave programs among its community colleges and concluded that sabbaticals were a critical part of professional growth and virtually all requests for sabbatical to rest and relax were denied (Gilbert et al., 2007).

Second, others also argue that sabbaticals lack accountability. The examination of the policies on sabbatical leave programs from 75 academic institutions showed that 93% did not have any statement about the purpose of their sabbatical leave program and only 57% required the applicants to submit a detailed plan for the sabbatical leave, which suggests these academic institutions did not expect much from their faculty members on sabbatical leaves (Miller et al., 2012). Nevertheless, a clear and detailed set of objectives and outcomes, creative activities designed to generate professional growth, and a post-sabbatical reporting requirement built into well-designed and implemented sabbatical leave programs can ensure sabbaticals are productive (Walton et al., 2008).

People are the most valuable resource. Recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining capable people are critical if the law enforcement agencies are to succeed in the modern era. The lessons learned from the academic institutions as well as private

and public organizations demonstrate that well designed and implemented sabbaticals help improve retention and mitigate burnout. Thus, sabbatical is an important investment in human capital the law enforcement agencies should make.

Law enforcement agencies should consider eligibility, application, selection, support, and follow-up when they incorporate sabbatical into their overall human capital strategy. The overarching approach should be providing the maximum length of time as often as possible to the most number of people opportunities to totally immerse themselves in all-expense paid activities of their choosing that provide personal and professional growths while retaining full pay and benefits to the extent possible. In the current era of doing more with less, the aforementioned approach represents an important mindset all agencies should maintain rather than a realistic plan.

First, a person typically becomes eligible to take sabbatical after a certain number of years in tenure. The key could be analyzing the data to determine exactly when providing sabbatical would contribute to improving the turnover rate. For instance, if the data show that the officers in an agency usually resign due to burnout after five years in service, having the officers become eligible for sabbatical when they have five years in service may be a way. Another way of determining eligibility could be having all personnel compete for a set number of slots per year. An agency could also allow everyone to accumulate certain number of sabbatical days per year similar to sick or vacation time.

Second, there should be an application process for those who are eligible to take sabbatical. The most important element in an application process should be a written plan, which must include a goal as to exactly what a person wants to accomplish and a

detailed list of activities that directly contribute to achieving the goal. Simply put, sabbatical should not begin until a clearly stated end that will help the person grow personally and professionally is articulated.

Third, a selection process should consist of a committee, representing the full spectrum of the agency to foster participation, who reviews the applications to ensure the goal is realistic and the activities are appropriate. The selection committee should also serve as an advisory board. Over time, the committee members should become the subject matter experts who not only actively provide encouragement, but also offer guidance on all matters pertaining to sabbatical.

Fourth, there should be a comprehensive support system in place when the law enforcement agencies implement their sabbatical. This system should consist of financial support as well as education and training programs on sabbatical. One way of providing financial support is by allowing all eligible personnel to take their sabbatical while retaining full pay and benefits and advance payment or reimbursement for the expenses associated with sabbatical. Another way is developing a matrix, which consists of various combinations of full, partial, or no pay, benefits, and paid expenses. All agencies should also identify outside funding sources.

Finally, follow-up is important to make sure that the person who completes his or her sabbatical met the goal. Follow-up should include a plan that provides time to reflect on the lessons learned from the experience and documenting them on a written report, which should be submitted to the selection committee for review. The follow-up should also include regularly held meetings where those who completed their sabbatical are given an opportunity to make a presentation about their experience. This type of

follow-up allows others to learn and generate ideas on what they may want to accomplish in their sabbatical.

In the current era of doing more with less, everyone is competing for scarce resources. The overarching approach should be providing the maximum benefits to the most people to the extent possible. Thus, being creative about eligibility, application, selection, support, and follow-up is important when law enforcement agencies are developing a sabbatical program as a part of their overall human capital strategy.

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