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Recruiting and Retention: How to Recruit and Retain Quality Police Professionals in Today's
Changing Job Market

An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

The issues that have been addressed by this paper are common to police agencies across the United States, regardless of size. The recruitment and retention of quality police officers is a problem that faces most departments in today's changing job market. This will remain a growing concern for departments across the nation, if traditional methods are continued at their present pace.

Research was conducted to point out what different types of methods need to be explored by agencies interested in changing their current practices to more progressive techniques. This was accomplished by reviewing current literature, Internet job-sites, and past/ future predictions of law enforcement professionals from around the nation. Results showed that there were several areas that needed to be addressed by these departments. Administrators need to realize that they were dealing with a different generation of employees known as Generation X. This generation of employees has a different set of values than their parents. They are a generation that is going to question the hierarchy in many ways. Examples of these questions may be, "What is your agency going to do for me as an employee?" or "Why should I remain with this agency when there are other agencies that pay more and are open to employees ideas?" These questions will need to be addressed by administrators during the initial recruitment process and continue to be reinforced throughout the employee's career with the organization.

In conclusion, agencies throughout the United States will have to be proactive in their recruiting and retention efforts. This will be accomplished through using the latest technology, salary and benefit packages, and instilling a sense of job satisfaction in their potential and current employees. Organizations that have the insight to plan for the future will have to include their employees in decisions that will dictate the way they perform their jobs.

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Introduction

The focus of this project is common to all police agencies large and small, throughout the United States. Recruiting and retaining quality police professionals in today's changing job market is an issue that plagues all facets of the law enforcement profession. The hiring and securing of employees interested in a job as an officer is a major concern for police administrators across the country. A study of these diversified agencies and the means by which they attract and keep officers is essential in understanding the needs of our present and future personnel.

Research will be conducted through a review of the relevant material. This includes books, journals, periodicals, Internet resources, and employment classifieds. The books and journals will be used to show past trends and predictions from various authors. The periodicals, Internet resources, and employment classifieds will show these same predictions as well as show some current methods and trends.

It is believed that the research will reveal several key areas career-minded individuals will be seeking in the future of this profession. Salaries and benefits will have to be competitive among police agencies in comparison to private industry. Continuing education programs and training will be used to keep employees informed of recent changes and case law. Availability of the latest technology to enhance efficiency and encourage creativity in the workplace is necessary to keep up with ever changing trends. Job diversity within an agency will allow administrators the ability to use personnel in specialized areas that will peak their interests and stifle monotony. Employee participation in discussions, planning, and adoption of changes within their department will reflect upon their status as employees. All of these areas lead to employees having a feeling of job satisfaction in the pursuit of their careers.

Without the implementation of major strategies for change in the human resource process it is expected that the issue of not being able to recruit and retain professional police employees will only get more critical. To eliminate this trend, cooperation with and support of agency administrators by their governing bodies is a must on salaries, benefits, and technology enhancement. Agencies that have the creativity and foresight to implement these changes will be a step ahead of those that refuse to acknowledge the problem. Agencies that are unresponsive to the needs of their employees will continue to use their fruitless efforts of recruiting based on tradition, prestige, and job security. The majority of employees in the present and future work force will be less interested in the deep traditions, prestige of the badge, and governmental job security in the coming years. They will be more concerned with what is going to stimulate interests in the career as well as what will benefit them financially during their tenure and retirement. With these changes on the horizon, the attitudes of many different agency administrators and governmental entities will shape the future of our profession and dictate the success or failure in the field of recruiting and retention of employees.

Review of Literature

Relevance of material in this area needs to be broken down in to the two main issues: Recruitment of new personnel and retention of current personnel. With this in mind, the researcher has found that the two areas mirror each other in numerous perspectives and needs which may dictate the outcome of this research. A major focus of the material deals with identifying who the current employee or potential employee is and what they expect out of a career in law enforcement.

The current job market is dealing with a group of employees who has been identified by many researchers as "Generation X (Xers)." There are several differences in opinions as to which age group of individuals actually defines this generation, but for purposes of this research a broad range has been chosen from author Douglas Coupland's definition of the group of people born between 1961 and 1981 (Brand,1999). Coupland states that these individuals grew up during a period of peace, relative prosperity, and technological advances that have changed the economy. Many Xers grew up playing video games, watching MTV, and mastering the computer. Not one has been drafted. Xers are pragmatic; they define themselves as self-reliant, results-oriented, and skilled at multi-tasking (Coupland, 1991 as cited in Charrier, 2000).

Recruitment of these so-called Generation Xers should be focused on their needs as employees and the needs of the agencies recruiting them. This trend was predicted by authors Anthony Moriarty and Mark Field (1994) where they predict trends in what employees and departments will be looking for in the future such as hiring the best fit person for the job, education of officers, ability to communicate through interpersonal skills, increasing technical skills, and less authoritarianism. These general themes accompanied with the lifestyles of this generation seem to be where the present and future of our profession is pointing. In contrast a recent symposium was held at the 205th FBI National Academy where 264 command staff officers representing the United States and 24 other countries were represented found that salary, benefits, job security, career development, and job satisfaction were ranked as the top five items that new employees wanted. The order in which they ranked changed between large and small agencies (Vest, 2001). These factors seem to dictate what these employees are looking for in entry level salary and benefits packages and job diversification which will keep their minds challenged and off of the internet looking for a better or comparable job at other agencies and

their private counterparts which are recruiting these same individuals. Rebecca Kanable (2001) gives an example by Rafilson who said, "I think the type of job has a lot to do with it. If you had the choice of being a police officer for \$40,000 or working in the private sector with the same salary and 9 to 5 hours, off on holidays, and a pleasant, peaceful environment, which would you chose?"

Recruitment of these Generation Xers is only half of the problem in today's changing job market. There have been numerous research papers written on the subject of retention by various law enforcement professionals. To understand the basic concept of retention we need to understand exactly what it is. Retention is the act of keeping employees through various programs. Past research shows many areas that law enforcement has been aware of and has done little to change. In 1987 two different Independent Study Projects were conducted by California law enforcement professionals as part of the requirements of their Command College. The piece of their research that is useful to today's issues is their prediction of how the future would look. Lipson (1987) stated that police-management needs to develop new work methods that will satisfy the need of the employee and organization. While the focus of his research was on agencies with less than fifteen officers, Sands (1987) identified the need for added job incentives to be competitive with larger agencies, longevity pay, and specialized work assignments which lower the officer's needs to move to larger agencies to obtain their goals. The goals must be written, with constant input from the officers and commitment, implementation and support of these goals by the administration. Without these proactive type programs administrators find themselves dealing with the issue of turnover. Turnover was defined by Brumfield (1996) as employees leaving or expressing the desire to leave the workplace.

These predictions of the past still seem to be true today. The same problems that have hindered agencies from recruiting these individuals has lead toward a trend of keeping them satisfied with their current positions. The disparity in salary and benefit packages throughout the law enforcement profession is astounding. This leads to agencies that can provide the expected salaries and benefits to be ahead of those who are not able to provide these needs to their employees. Larger agencies seem to have the advantage in this area due to availability of funding and active recruiting from smaller agencies that already employ experienced officers. Many agencies offer lateral transfer programs to experienced officers. This leads to the smaller agencies losing highly trained and experienced officers from their workforce. In a statement made by San Francisco Police Chief Fred Lau he said "It is not poaching; it's recruiting from a strong, experienced applicant base (Zamora, 2000)."

Another part of this problem is that many large agencies have the benefit of more diversified areas such as investigations, SWAT, motorcycle patrol, community based policing, victim's services, etc... These different areas keep officers interested and challenged in their pursuit of a long-term career. Collective bargaining or police associations also help gain more benefits that are appealing to officers of these larger agencies. This type of negotiation process in 2001 recently allowed the Houston Police Department to gain a twenty two percent pay increase over the next three years that would make them competitive with their counterparts in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. This was made possible through the efforts of the Houston Police Officers Association, which represented the officers in negotiations with the City. (American Police Beat, Sept. 2001) The negotiation process will also benefit the city in many other ways as part of the "meet and confer process" called for enhanced educational

benefits, raised promotional standards, more efficient disciplinary process, overtime reduction, and physical fitness programs for it's officers. (Young, 2001)

Although these large agencies have several distinct advantages, many small agencies can use different means of recruiting and retaining employees. Many of these agencies are community based policing agencies and need to appeal to persons with that type of personality. These agencies need to be competitive in salary and benefits with their neighboring agencies, be willing to start the hiring process all over again if not satisfied with top candidates, and allow the employees to make decisions and feel like a part of a team (Hoffman, 1993). In a recent correspondence with a salary review committee, Sheriff Bob Holder of Comal County, Texas (2002) stated that salaries of his employees should be "at least equal to" salaries paid to employees in the same positions of the New Braunfels, Texas Police Department. These two agencies are the major law enforcement agencies within the county and share the same type responsibilities. In addition to the same type responsibilities they have the same cost of living expenses, due to the community where they work, and raise their families.

Methodology

Research was conducted using available literature such as books, past research papers, journals, periodicals, newspapers, and Internet resources. This method proved to show past predictions of trends of other authors and researchers are currently happening in todays changing job market and what changes some agencies are implementing to attract and retain personnel. The Internet resources were a prime example of how today's generation is able to "surf the web" to enhance their research of different aspects of criminal justice such as job opportunities and benefits of the career which may be found on sites such as Lawenforcementjobs.com,

Monster.com and BestJobsUSA.com. These sites coupled with others such as Learning Express.com which helps potential employees practice for police entry exams online show how this generation uses technology to their advantage (Brandon and Lippman, 2000). These resources were able to lead to other links on the web that also dealt with how private industry uses different strategies to recruit and retain their employees. The issue of recruiting and retention of these employees is going to be at the top of administrators and their governmental entity's lists of priorities if they are truly interested in operating a professional police organization that will be a benefit to the citizens and communities they serve. This material was very helpful in highlighting the problems faced by agencies and what could be done to alleviate some of these problems. Journals, periodicals, newspapers, and Internet resources were used to show the correlation of past predictions and today's current trends, which seemed to be on target with today's changing job market. This led to the most current form of information available due to research being conducted nationwide by a variety of agencies and individuals facing similar problems. Some of the sources showed how law enforcement could use private industry suggestions for recruiting and retention of this generation of employees, which government agencies lose to others due to more progressive recruiting and retention concepts.

Findings

The problem that faces law enforcement agencies in today's job market is not a new one, but one that needs to be addressed in a proactive manner. Many agencies have given up their traditional ways of recruiting and retaining officers and followed in the footsteps of their business counterparts. Employees can pick and choose where they want to work, changing jobs, and even careers with unprecedented ease (Bottom Line Secrets Interview # 20516, May 2000).

This statement shows how the business community thinks about it's potential employees and leads to several areas which are basic to both business and governmental employment. Each agency must develop their own strategy for recruiting and retaining such employees. The agencies will have to decide what their goals are and how to best meet these goals with the assistance of their employees. The autocratic style of leadership in police agencies is starting to diminish in creative and progressive agencies that have recognized these needs of their employees. These agencies have rethought their recruiting processes, broadened their field of applicants without sacrificing quality, and targeted groups that in the past have been overlooked such as women, and minorities. Several examples of these aggressive recruiting campaigns can be found throughout the country.

- The Austin, Texas Police department was looking to fill 76 patrol officer vacancies in 2001. They wanted to attract as many applicants as possible through recruiting ads in movie theatres, bumper stickers on cruisers, cash register receipts, radio station announcements, and attendance of recruiters at job fairs inside and out of the city. (Stanley, 2001)
- The New Jersey State Police used a targeted campaign to recruit young women and minorities into their agency. They used a slogan of "our career suits all kinds of people" which was developed by an advertising agency. They focused radio-spots on Hip Hop, R&B, Top 40, and Latino stations as well as ethnic and youth oriented television such as BETV, MTV and Lifetime. They ran newspaper ads in 20 college newspapers as well as advertised on billboards and public transportation throughout the area, which advertised their State Police website. The website showed the diversification of their agency in different fields such as highway patrol, and forensics. This led to 15,000 application

requests and an applicant pool of 30 percent minorities and women which was up from 15 percent two years ago. (Police, March 2002)

- A recruiting poster from the Michigan State Police which featured the words Trooper, Wife, Mother was found on the Bureau of Justice Assistance Bulletin entitled Recruiting and Retaining Women: A Self Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement. (NCJ 1888157, June, 2001)

These types of campaigns coupled with advancements in Internet recruiting show how being progressive and changing the traditional ways of doing things can be an effective tool in the pursuit of quality employees from diversified backgrounds.

The issue of salary disparity among law enforcement agencies is something that hinders both the recruitment and retention problem. Charles Sebesta (2002) of the Sheriff's Association of Texas writes that many Sheriff's Office's in Texas are experiencing a 33 percent turnover rate among deputies and jailers leaving the rural counties for better paying jobs. This is not only a problem in small agencies but larger ones are also experiencing salary disparity (see Figure 1).

Comal County Sheriff's Office	\$27,279.16
Houston Police Department	\$31,439.00
New Braunfels Police Department	\$32,997.78
Arlington Police Department	\$39,204.00
** Amounts taken from Internet and newspaper classifieds	

Figure 1. Starting Salary Disparity in State of Texas

With the different ranges in salaries, it is easy to see how experienced officers are also lured away from their agencies. Retention of these employees is the responsibility of the agency administrators and their command staff. Proven methods of retention have been demonstrated by some agencies and businesses. If the money is not available, or not attainable from the governmental body then the modern managers must use other methods to keep their employees such as putting less emphasis on money, being leaders that employees expect, building employee skills through training, challenging their minds through giving them meaningful work and authority to make decisions (Bottom Line Secret Interview #27959, Dec 2000).

Discussion/Conclusions

The recruitment and retention of quality police professionals has been a problem for agencies large and small throughout the United States. In order for agencies to survive in this ever changing job market they will need to adjust their ways of attracting and keeping this group of employees known as Generation "X". This change will be accomplished through non-traditional recruiting methods, increased salaries and benefits to be competitive among other agencies and private industry, and a breakdown of the hierarchal way of conducting decisions that have been practiced by most administrations in the past. These Generation X employees are the workforce of the future. They are cautious, independent, techno-literate and comfortable with change. These qualities make them suited to the flexible-high performance work environments that forward organizations and departments are moving toward (Tulgan, 1996 as cited in Messer, 2001).

Without the necessary adjustments, it is predictable that many agencies will continue to have the problem of recruiting officers and retaining the ones they already employ. There are

very few agencies across the United States that can boast that all of their employees are satisfied with their salaries, benefits, decisions of administration, and sense of being a part of a team instead of just a pawn in a big game of chess. Most people would take the opportunity to improve their career and way of life if someone else offered a better option. Thus, the ability of an organization to adapt is critical to its ability to respond to the needs of its employees of today and tomorrow. This task can be accomplished through strategic planning for the future that involves the persons that will be affected by that plan (Kowaltschuk, 1994).

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