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**Officer Retention:
Stop the Revolving Door**

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ABSTRACT

Police departments are experiencing a high turnover rate of officers (Wilson, 2013). This is causing a revolving door effect on the agencies. Law enforcement agencies should identify and address the root causes of the revolving door of officers through their departments. Poor leaders, low compensation, increased performance expectations, and lack of job satisfaction are some areas that agencies can improve on to recruit and retain quality officer. The cost of high turnover to a police department is damaging. Retaining quality officers that are performing in an agency will not only benefit the agency's budget, but it will also increase the relationships between the officers and the citizens in the community. The number of qualified applicants is decreasing and the competition for these qualified applicants is challenging for most agencies. Police departments retaining quality police officers are the key ingredient to having a successful department.

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INTRODUCTION

Wilson (2013) stated that “Staffing police departments is a continuous challenge and one that has become more complex in recent years” (p.1). Recruiting and retaining quality officers is an ongoing problem that many agencies are facing. The number of qualified applicants is decreasing and the competition for these qualified applicants is challenging for most agencies. Police departments retaining quality police officers are the key ingredient to having a successful department. In referring to officer retention, it is retaining officers who are productive in their agencies. All police departments will experience some turnover for those officers that are not meeting the expectations of the department and those at retirement age. Leadership in the department can be the cause of several different negative factors that causes officers to leave an agency. The reasons qualified officers are not staying with these agencies vary from the amount of their salaries and benefit packages to job satisfaction. If agencies are not competitive with their salary and benefit package, they offer officers a reason to look elsewhere to make a living. It is costly to police departments to have a high turnover rate. There are expenses for recruiting, interviewing, training, and outfitting new officers.

Police departments having a constant revolving door of officers creates many negative effects on the entire agency. It adds to the stress of the remaining staff, which has to continuously train new officers. They also have few days off, due to covering shifts for the officers that have resigned. The community is also greatly affected by high turnover. Police officers need time to get to know who lives in their community and the public needs to get to know them. Understanding the different generations in the work force is an important tool in employee retention. Police departments should identify and

address the root causes for their high turnover rate and make the necessary corrections to reduce such turnover.

POSITION

It is costly and time consuming to experience high turnover in a department. There are many costs that can incur with replacing an officer. The cost alone that is in dealing with high turnover in a company is shocking. The cost to replace the employee is at least twice the amount of the annual salary that the employee that left the company was earning (HBSP, 2010, p. 8). Overtime is paid out to officer to cover the shifts or coverage is reduced (affecting officer safety) until these positions are filled. The personnel hours and funds spent recruiting new qualified applicants can vary. Police agencies spend money on advertising for new employees and spend time review the applicants. The department will have to spend more time and money testing and interviewing these candidates. Background investigations are an important part of the hiring process that takes time and funds to complete.

After the candidates are hired, there are training hours and money that must be spent to prepare the officer for their duties. The cost of the new officer's uniform, ballistic vest, and all duty gear are other expenses that will need to be met. Koper (2004) stated that amount of time spent on training an officer has increased due to the requirements of structured problem solving with community policing that have not been a part of traditional police trainings. The type of training for police officers has become more complex. Field training officers are the officers who train and mold new police officers in the department. Field training officers can experience burn out when a police department is having a high turnover of new recruits. The field training officer is under a

great amount of stress while training a new recruit. Not only is the field training officer responsible for training the new recruits but for their safety as well. After the field training officer spends the time and effort training them, it is difficult to watch that trained officer leave the department for another job. Then the field training officer has to start at ground zero with another new hire. Seizer (2012) had been turned down by three different field training officers in his department to train new recruits. He stated “They were exhausted, stressed, and did not feel appreciated” (Seizer, 2012, p. 3). Two of the three field training officers voluntarily turned in their FTO pins and expressed that they were burned out. The field training officer feeling the lack of appreciation comes from the new officer they just trained (who is leaving the agency) and the leadership of the agency. When the leadership fails to retain the newly trained officers, it is a disappointment to the field training officer (Seizer, 2012).

Domash (2002) stated that many people who want to come into police work do not stay. Instead they are taking jobs in the private industry. One reason for this is that the requirements that are needed to become a police officer are increasing and the amount of compensation has not. Police departments with high pay scales attract more applicants. Fair compensation is a desired element for employee retention.

The community can also be negatively impacted by high turnover in a police department. Community policing is the method and style of policing that agencies are focusing on. Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS, n.d.) defined community policing as a “philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social

disorder, and fear of crime” (para.1). With a higher turnover rate in a police department, fewer relationships are made between officer and the citizens of the community. It takes time to establish trust between the officers and the public. When an officer leaves the department, that officer takes the relationships that have been built along with them. With the technology that is in society today, people do not always trust police. The public wants to see evidence, such as digital video or DNA results. The police officer’s word alone does not hold as much weight as it did before all the technology that is now available. It is important for officers to get to know the members of their community and to gain relationships founded on trust. Police departments that are not retaining the officers who have built these relationships are losing that trust from the public when the officer resigns. Julseth, Ruiz, and Hummer (2011) cited that officers often perceive the public to have a negative view of the police department due to a lack of being able to identify the police that serve in their area. This could have a direct effect on the officer’s sense of job satisfaction.

Police departments have many different community programs. The success of these programs is highly dependent on the relationships that are made between the department and the citizens that are involved. Both the officers and the citizens invest their time with these programs. With a high turnover these programs are more of a challenge for the department. The less time the department spends with these programs, the less interest the community will have with them.

Another issue that causes good performers in an organization to leave is lack of job satisfaction. Branham (2001) said “They don’t see their work as important, or their contributions are not recognized and valued by others” (p. 12). This is a problem that

could be recognized as a fault of the leadership in the agency. Leaders have to be willing to reward and give recognition to those that are productive in the department. This is a major factor in reinforcing the employee's belief that they are vital to the success of the team. When this is done persistently in an organization, other members of the team will take notice and have more pride in their team. Officers want to have the opportunity to work with other admired and valued police officers. The dedicated officers that remain in a police department experience low moral with the revolving door of officers.

Having multiple generations in the work force has made it difficult in the recruiting and retaining of officers in police departments. The different generations make assumptions about the other because they do not understand or connect with each other. Peck Parrott (2013) stated, "All generations want respect, but may define it differently. All generations want leaders they can trust" (p. 21). There are currently four different generations in the work force Silent, Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. The Silent generation is the generation of people born from 1925–1942, during the Great Depression and World War II. This group of people lived through the Depression and feels lucky to have a job. They have respect for authority and tenure (Peck Parrott, 2013). The Boomer generation was born from 1943 – 1960. This was post World War II. This generation flocked to drugs and religion. Boomers sacrificed their time with family and home life for work. Work was very important to a Boomer (Peck Parrott, 2013).

Generation X is the group of people born from 1961 – 1981. This group of people was not shielded as children. They prepare for the worst because they can

imagine the worst will happen (Peck Parrot, 2013). The newest generation to hit the work force is the Millennials. They were born between 1982 and 2003. The Millennials were raised getting awards for just showing up. No scores were kept, no losers were in the game. The Millennials do not trust government (Peck Parrott, 2013). In comparing the work ethics of Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, Peck Parrott (2013) stated that Boomers “Live to work”, while Xers and Millennials “Work to live” (p. 11). These differences could affect the relationships between the officers in an agency. Leadership could misinterpret work ethics from these generations.

Leadership in organizations does not always communicate effectively with the different generations. Boomers like personal and face-to-face communication. Xers need direct communication and prefer email. Millennials want positive communication by the latest electronic means. Xers and Millennials both want immediate results in communication (Peck Parrot, 2013). Leadership that is not willing to adapt their way of communication will have problems retaining Millennials. Xers and Millennials are not loyal to the organization. This is challenging for police departments with keeping officers for an extended period of time. Xers and Millennials do not give credibility to others because of their tenure alone. Tenure is not important to these generations. They are looking for better opportunities for themselves and do not think it is a bad thing to work for several different organizations in their career.

Silents and Boomers are very loyal. They feel that Millennials have no work ethic. Millennials want more leisure time and less work hours. Xers and Millennials want a more flexible work schedule. This makes it more difficult for leadership who are

Silents and Boomers to motivate the younger generations. They see these employees as disloyal and lazy (Peck Parrott, 2013).

However, the way a police department is managed is an important factor with job satisfaction, community relations and generational differences. Having the right leadership in a department is crucial. Having bad leadership will run good people out of their current positions. Leadership can be defined as the influence that one has over another's actions and feelings. When the leadership in an agency does not take the time to develop their officers, the officers feel less valued.

Poor leaders with poor attitudes will cause high turnover (Johnston, n.d., para.1). They will infect a department. The officers who stay under that type of leadership can be influenced to become that same kind of leader. A new recruit can make career ending moves that were in the direction of a poor leader.

COUNTER POSITION

Some believe that high turnover in a police department can have good effect on the agency. High turnover can keep the department from getting complacent and lazy. New blood in an organization can keep the other employees engaged (Marcus, 2010, p1). Officers who stay with a department for a long amount of time may become stagnant and lose the focus of the goals set by the department. These officers need fear of being replaced by new blood as a motivator to continue to be productive for the department. New officers will bring fresh ideas to the agency and keep other officers on their toes.

Law enforcement is a high stress job without turnover. When the turnover is adding stress to the remaining staff, the department is not benefiting from those officers'

full potential. Seizer (2012) stated that high turnover is a cause of burn out with officers. Burn out then causes more turnover. This cycle is difficult to stop. An officer gets the sense of being a team member by the amount of time that they have invested in the department. High turnover keeps a team from learning to function together. When an officer buys in on the departments goals they will be motivated to see them through and to get results. The officer should be rewarded and told that his or her performance is making a great impact on the organization.

Some believe that high turnover in a police department can be good by keeping corruption from developing in the agency. The longer an officer is employed with an agency, the more likely they will be involved in some form of police corruption. With the officers revolving in and out of the department, it will not give time for these officers to get involved in corruption. Corruption starts with the leadership in the department and then moves down to the officers. Orrick (2005) stated that turnover allows the department to change the organization culture. The organizational culture is a shared basis assumption that has worked well enough to solve the problems encountered. This will give the organization a chance to train more correct and effective ways of performing their duties.

Corruption is actions that are taken by officers that are for their own personal gain. The amount of time spent in the department is not a factor with the start of corruption. A police officer can begin doing corrupt things on their first day of duty. A common practice in a police department is that officers tend to police themselves in agencies. Peer pressure can be a great motivator for officers. The more time an officer is employed by an agency, the more time other officers have to learn their habits and

behaviors. When leadership in a department has set clear policies and has procedures in place that will help guide all officers in the department to practice good work ethics and avoid all police misconduct. The longer a police officer works in one agency, the longer other officers or supervision has to recognize these actions. A corrupt officer can skip from department to department without facing any consequence for their actions. Police departments have a great chance of seeing and correcting these behaviors if the officer is with the department for a length of time. High turnover will not stop corruption. Corruption can occur with any level of police officer. Chambliss (2011) stated that corrupt leadership causes high turnover. Officer discretion that is unguided or misguided will lead to misconduct. This could end the officer's career. High turnover can keep an officer employed in law enforcement (by multiple police departments) that should have been weeded out because their corrupt actions were not caught in the short length of time they spent with each agency.

RECOMMENDATION

Police departments that are experiencing a high turnover of officers should focus on finding the cause of this issue. These issues need to be identified and addressed to improve officer retention in the department. Retaining quality officers in a police department is essential to the success of the agency.

Police departments that are not retaining their officers continue to spend this time, effort, and money over and over. When considering reasons why officer leave a department, Grote (2012) says "Money, in sufficient amounts, will keep people on your payroll. It may not motivate them but it will make them reluctant to leave" (p. 2). It is important to keep a police department's salary and benefit package competitive in the

recruitment and retention of quality officers because money is a priority. Employees receive their compensation in trade for their time and talents. Organizations need to understand this concept to be successful in employee recruiting and retention. When considering the cost of replacing an employee, police departments should present the cost to their governing bodies. The decision needs to be considered to raise the pay to retain the current officers when the pay is not competitive. A salary survey can give the department the information it needs to know if a pay increase will be effective. Other incentive programs can be introduced to the agency that will help retain and recruit officer.

Community relations would be improved with fewer turnovers. The longer an officer is with a department, the more time the community has to get to know the officer and build relationships. Police departments need to get the community involved with their officers. The citizens who show the department support will help the officer feel appreciated for the job they are doing. Citizens who are building relationships with the officers will give them the thanks and praise they deserve.

There are many ways to improve the working relationship with different generations. It is important for all leaders in an organization to receive training on generational differences. Leadership needs to keep up with cutting edge technology, provide continuous feedback, and mentor Millennials. Leadership also needs to understand that Millennials will be hesitant to take on responsibilities and promotions that will cut into their personal time. Providing all employees with generational training will improve the communication and relationships within the department. Field training officers need to be monitored for signs of burn out. The new recruit does not need to be

exposed to that type of negatively. A new recruit should rotate to several different field training officers in the department. This will give the field training officers a resting period from training and offer the trainee different perspectives.

Having the right leaders in place in a police department will make all the difference in retaining officers. Leadership in a police department needs to maintain good communication with employees. They need to coach and mentor young officers to help them grow to their full potential. Officers will stay longer in a department where the leadership is developing their officers. This will give the officers a sense of job satisfaction. Fiechtner (2013) says that leadership should work on team building "because teamwork is at the heart of every successful police department." She identified the five dysfunctions as trust, conflict, commitment, accountability and results. These five things should be a priority for every leader to improve the function of their team. Police officers want to be a part of a great team.

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