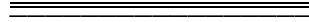
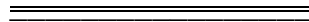


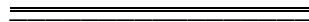
**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Recruiting, Hiring and Retaining Qualified
Law Enforcement Officers**



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



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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified law enforcement officers is one of the most cumbersome jobs for law enforcement executives. Finding the right individuals to fill those positions is a challenge, but it can be achieved if the right program is put in place. In years past, police recruitment was achieved with simple advertising that attracted several persons for a few positions. During that era, law enforcement recruiters chose to hire applicants with limited experience and education. In today's law enforcement, recruits must have the education and skills needed to perform in the 21st century. Recruiting and retaining qualified persons to serve as law enforcement officer positions has an impact on the law enforcement agency's brand. Law enforcement agencies should include incentives and adapt their methods of finding qualified recruits to match current times. The areas covered in this research include: employment incentives to attract qualified personnel, use of social media to attract applicants, use of employee referral systems and incentives to retain experienced officers. In addition, collaboration between law enforcement executives and the local government bodies is important to develop a strategic plan to implement incentive programs to recruit, hire and retain law enforcement officers.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult jobs that law enforcement managers experience is the recruitment, hiring and retaining of qualified law enforcement personnel. According to McKeever and Kranda (2000), "It is imperative then, to recruit, select and retain the kind of personnel who will bring to the department and to the community a strong commitment to and talent for the job" (p. 289). Most of the problem falls within the area of recruitment. Even though the job market is flooded with individuals who are interested in seeking law enforcement careers, many of those persons do not meet the minimum qualifications, have a poor background or questionable employment history. Finding qualified applicants for law enforcement jobs continues to be one of the biggest challenges for police managers. Woska (2006) stated, "From the 1960s into the 1990s, many young men and women with a high school diploma, in addition to individuals with a college education, were attracted to a law enforcement career" (p. 1). The only thing that needed to be done at that time was to simply place an employment advertisement in the local newspaper or on the public bulletin board at police agencies and interested persons by the hundreds would sign up to take the written exam or fill out applications to apply for open positions.

Finding applicants today is not that simple. Recruiting potential candidates to fill vacancies in the law enforcement profession today takes a bit more effort. Using employment incentives is a suitable method to attract new officers. Organizations in the private sector have used incentives for years to attract new employees. In the millennial era of Generation Y employment prospects, individuals seeking employment in law enforcement depend on technology to be notified of pending jobs openings. Social

media provides a technological means of being able to advertise to and attract persons interested in public safety jobs. Many people utilize Facebook or LinkedIn as methods to stay abreast of current events and to communicate with friends and co-workers. Others use social media for research to investigate a business for potential employment opportunities. Sharp (2012) suggested, "If the police hiring agency does not have a presence on Facebook, My Space or some type of police blog, it won't be seen by a Gen Y audience" (p. 59). In addition to incentives and social media, law enforcement managers could utilize employee referrals to attract police applicants. Referrals can provide a good mechanism to strengthen relations between law enforcement management and police employees to find quality applicants.

Finally, police agencies should utilize incentives to retain existing experienced law enforcement officers. These retaining incentives can be in the form of positive reinforcement, or provide training to further career development. Law enforcement agencies should include incentives and adapt their methods of finding qualified recruits to match current times.

POSITION

Employment incentives attract qualified law enforcement applicants. During the baby-boom era, applicants that were interested in working in the law enforcement field simply wanted to go to work and earn a paycheck. Applicants came to the organization with none or limited experience, but they approached the job with an eagerness to learn the profession. Today, law enforcement applicants are more educated and seek tangible and intangible incentives to accept employment. As a result, law enforcement managers of all law enforcement agencies, both large and small, are struggling to adjust

their methods of hiring to get a handle on this form of recruitment. Many of the large municipalities offer monetary incentives in the form of a sign on bonus to attract and recruit new officers. Cash bonuses can range anywhere from \$500 to over \$10,000, depending on the size of the agency and its available financial resources. Many smaller agencies cannot compete with paying a signing bonus because they do not have the financial resources to do so. Governmental bodies of small agencies should consider appropriating recruitment funds in their budgets to attract potential police applicants. This should be done to create competition with larger and neighboring police agencies.

There are many other barriers that hinder law enforcement agencies from being able to recruit new officers. According to the study, Recruitment and Retention Series, barriers that effectively hinder recruitment of police applicants include: applicant criminal history, lack of fringe benefits, job duties and agency residency requirement (Yearwood, 2003). Law enforcement managers are seeing more and more cases where recruits with criminal histories are applying for police positions. Applicants do not realize that criminal histories are carefully scrutinized. Although applicants think that minor criminal infractions will be overlooked, that is not always the case. As an example, agencies often review personal history statements for recent drug use. The decision to continue in the background process is weighed upon the most recent (type and frequency) of drug use. In some cases, applicants with serious misdemeanors and felony charges are automatically disqualified per state statutes governing Texas law enforcement officers.

Another benefit that police applicants look for are fringe benefits. Fringe benefits are important to applicants, especially those with young dependants. With the rising

cost of medical insurance, applicants are seeking employment with agencies that have a low employee contribution towards dependent coverage.

An effective method to increase a department's exposure to a shrinking pool of police applicants is the use of social media. According to a report, "Social networking (SN) has become the new online rage. Blogs, wikis, RSS feeds and social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have provided creative ways to recruit, engage, connect and retain employees" ("Social Networking," 2010, p. 2). In recent years, social media has become one of the leading tools that businesses use to attract customers to their brand and to attract potential employees. There are many social media outlets to consider including: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs. Facebook is the leading social media site that millions of people from around the world use to communicate with each other. Business organizations often publish their brands on Facebook to attract potential clients or employees. According Human Capital Institute ("Social Networking," 2010), Recruiters are most likely to use Facebook and LinkedIn — showing that these sites are useful for talent acquisition in the public sector, just as they have shown to be in the private sector" (p. 4). Law enforcement organizations currently use Facebook to display information about current crime trends, but they are now broadening their use of social media as a viable source to recruit new talent. Generation Y police applicants rely heavily on searching for employment opportunities using social media and other technological sources rather than reading traditional advertising publications such as newspapers or magazines. Shofner (2012) stated, "Agencies that resist joining social media communities can actually hurt their recruiting efforts by failing to build the trust of the new generation of job candidates" (p. 14). Police agencies

should development social media pages and create links on their websites for applicants to review their organizations from a social standpoint. With the use of social media, potential employees can quickly learn what an organization stands for before proceeding to the application process. However, first impressions of the organization's websites are important. Websites containing social media links that have an outdated appearance with stale information portray a negative image of the department's brand. That poor image may motivate potential applicants to move on to the next agency to apply for a position. Police agencies should make every effort to create professional social media sites, incorporate those within the departmental website and keep the information current and well-maintained. These efforts in the use of social media will provide an opportunity for the law enforcement agency to show the agency brand to potential candidates.

The use of an employee referral system is a good technique to recruit new police officers. Utilizing the judgment of existing experienced officers greatly enhances the department's chance of hiring good candidates for law enforcement officer positions. Orrick (2008) stated that, "Implementing an employee referral system (ERS) enables a department to make every officer a potential recruiter. In return, people who refer candidates who are eventually hired are provided some type of reward" (p. 18). It gives the employee a sense of being involved in the hiring decision making process. Once the existing employees learn that there is an incentive (tangible or intangible) to refer candidates for hire, there will be an interest for them to participate. Using tangible and intangible rewards are great ways to boost morale. Agencies that use this process usually do not give the referring officer a reward until the candidate completely makes it

through the hiring process. There are four steps to creating an employee referral program: identifying the reward for successfully recruiting a candidate, developing the process for making a referral, distributing a written policy outlining the program, and keeping the staff informed (Orrick, 2008).

The rewards for referring a candidate can be in the form of something tangible, i.e. cash or some other physical item of value. The reward can also be in the form of something intangible including: vacation/trip, paid day off, employee recognition. Developing the process of employee making referrals and distributing written policy for the employee referral program are tasks that should be completed in a coordinated effort between management and the employees. Getting employee “buy-in” for the selection process of the recruitment of new officers is paramount to achieving a successful employee referral program. Finally, it is important to follow-up with the staff to keep them informed on the hiring progress of the candidates in the referral process.

Referral programs offer law enforcement agencies better stability and less employee turnover. According to a report, “43% of new employees hired through a referral program were on the job three years later” (“Employee referrals,” 2013, p. 5). Employee referrals provide law enforcement managers with the tools needed to recruit and retain qualified applicants.

Finally, departments must implement incentives to retain the newly hired and existing veteran officers. Heading off turnover and retaining personnel is a difficult task for law enforcement agencies. Smaller agencies experience more difficulty in retaining officers over larger agencies because of limitations in pay and advancement. In order to reduce this trend, Koper (2004) stated agencies may consider “improving pay and

benefits, recruiting officers with the right skills for community policing, changing job roles to enhance officers' satisfaction, improving career development, changing residency requirements, and creating incentives for retirement-eligible officers to remain with the agency" (p. 17). Officers leave their employment for many different reasons including: higher pay, career advancement, inflexible schedules, retirement and numerous other reasons. Working in the law enforcement field can be an exciting and rewarding experience, but when the job becomes mundane it is difficult for a person to do their best. There has to be some career building incentives to keep the officers focused on continuing to maintain their current employment status. One way for law enforcement managers to accomplish this task is to provide positive reinforcement to officers. When officers do a good job, they should be recognized by their supervisors.

Encouragement for good behavior is one of the biggest morale boosters in law enforcement. The Baby-Boom and Generation X employees do not look for positive reinforcement from supervisors to do their jobs. They simply like to come to work and do their jobs and leave with no incentives, other than getting paid. However Generation Y employees coming up in the millennial age expect words of encouragement for doing a good job. The real truth of the matter is that positive reinforcement is important. Wiley (2012) stated, "*Employees want* 'a pat on the back' and they want their views to count. Essentially, they want to be recognized and appreciated as valued team members—particularly by the person who should be most familiar with their work" (p. 45).

Another incentive to retain experienced officers is to provide educational incentives and career development opportunities. In today's highly technological environment, police officers must take advantage of continuing their education to

sharpen skills and prepare themselves to operate in 21st century law enforcement.

According to Wiley (2012), "Employees want to be given opportunities to develop their skills and to advance their career" (p. 47). Sometimes officers approach their supervisors and ask to go specialized in-service schools, but are usually told that it cost too much or that it is not in the budget. Law enforcement managers should make every effort to request to have funding allocated by their governing bodies to support continuing education for their officers.

COUNTER POSITION

Sluggish economic conditions in today's financial world are causing private and governmental organizations to reduce costs in their operating environments. Even though there are many benefits to providing incentives designed to bolster employment interest in a law enforcement agency, there are a few obstacles that may negatively affect its formation. First, many law enforcement agencies are not doing well financially and do not have the means to offer incentives. When given the choice to keep a police officer on the payroll or eliminating a non-essential program, the non-essential program will most likely be eliminated. According to a report, "a May 2010 survey conducted by the National League of Cities, 71 percent of city officials surveyed reported making cuts to personnel in order to deal with the fiscal implications of the current economic conditions. This number increased to 79 percent of survey respondents by the October report" ("The Impact," 2011, p. 12). Adding a hiring incentive program to the budget would add to the financial problems of local governments.

Secondly, applicants may elect to go with a larger agency regardless of incentives. When entering the criminal justice field, many people set their goals to work

as investigators in specialized divisions such as Vice/Narcotics or the Criminal Investigation Division (CID). The smaller departments may have these divisions, but do not have the resources available to accept and train new detectives on a frequent basis. According to James Rector, “opportunities for advancement are greater in a larger department than a small department” (as cited in Martinez, 2006, p. 12). Smaller departments find themselves missing out on being able to recruit qualified persons with the goals of advancing their law enforcement careers from the mundane tasks of writing tickets and taking calls for service.

There are many ways that law enforcement managers can work to development incentive programs. First, a plan can be developed to implement a special revenue fund dedicated to recruitment activity. To accomplish this, the law enforcement command staff should collaborate with the local government management staff and other government department heads to discuss the importance of creating an incentive plan to attract qualified police officers. Once a consensus is reached among the group, the adjustment process to the budget lines items can be proposed. After the information is compiled, it could be presented to the elected officials for consideration and approval. Once the incentive plan is developed and approved, it should be carried out each fiscal year. According to Dwayne Orrick, “We have to start recognizing in law enforcement that employees are not expense, but rather an investment” (as cited in Moore, 2011, p. 35). Investing in human capital is one thing that departments should practice more frequently. If properly utilized, these efforts will pay off considerably, making the agency more attractive for qualified applicants.

Secondly, applicants that select to stay with a smaller agency will have the opportunity to receive more broad experience that could be utilized for career advancement. Smaller agencies don't have the same resources that larger agencies have to support the first line police officers with major crime scene investigations such as aggravated robberies, sexual assaults, shootings, major burglaries, etc. Larger agencies normally call out specialized divisions to handle such calls for service. Smaller agencies rely on the expertise of their first line police officers to investigate such crimes from start to finish. Officers in larger agencies may work in Patrol for several years before they offered an opportunity to transfer to a specialized division. The police officers in a smaller agency will gain more practical experience in these areas and will have a better opportunity for career advancement.

Gibbons (1995) stated, "As the pool of qualified police applicants dwindles and the opportunities for advancement within agencies decline, administrators may be forced to alter their views of career development" (p. 16). Executive staff members in smaller law enforcement departments should offer their employees every opportunity to seek more education. Having highly educated public servants working in their department help to brighten the law enforcement brand and strengthens the level of trust that the public bestows in them.

RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement executives should consider implementing incentives to attract new talent to their organizations along with modifying their recruiting methods to achieve that goal. Recruitment is an important function that should be taken seriously and handled carefully in every law enforcement organization. The role of police officers

in today's law enforcement profession is a crucial one that requires finding the right educated individuals who have a passion to serve the public without prejudice. Using employment incentives, social media employee referral systems and the use of incentives to retain experienced officers are all significant in attracting and hiring qualified police officers. Today's law enforcement practice requires the expertise of educated individuals and the use of cutting edge technologies to solve the crimes of the 21st century.

As a plan of action, law enforcement managers should approach their governing bodies and explain the importance of providing funding for a police recruitment incentive program to assist in the department's hiring and retention efforts. Once a budget is set and the law enforcement agency receives approval from the elected body, a group should be setup within the department that consists of management staff and at least one employee from each division to assist in developing training programs for all police personnel. Construction of the group in this manner will create a strong working bond with all divisions within the department. It also gives each member personal ownership in the project, prompting them to do the very best job that they can. After the program is setup and implemented, it should be evaluated regularly to check its effectiveness and need for future modifications.

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