

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

Nepotism in Law Enforcement

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Kevin Burleson**

**Missouri City Police Department
Missouri City, Texas
June 2010**

ABSTRACT

Police agencies in general are struggling to find good, quality applicants to fill their open positions within the department. Agencies such as the Missouri City Police Department have strict anti-nepotism policies keeping them from hiring family members. It is believed that strict anti-nepotism policies are limiting the applicant pool for police agencies to hire from. The research was conducted using surveys from various police agencies as well as material written both about public and private businesses. The findings showed there was no set standard among police agencies. Most agencies reported no issues with the hiring of family when it was allowed. The research showed that hiring family members can be beneficial, but policies must be in effect to keep family members from supervising one another.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	5
Findings	6
Discussions/Conclusions	7
References	9
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to determine if strict anti-nepotism policies are beneficial to a police department or whether they restrict the department's ability to fill staffing requirements with dedicated, qualified employees. Currently, the Missouri City Police Department has a strict anti-nepotism policy against hiring any immediate family members. Family member is defined as a spouse, parent, child, sibling, aunt, uncle, nephew or first cousin (City of Missouri City, 2000). Law enforcement as a whole is having problems filling vacancies and finding good, quality applicants. With strict anti-nepotism policies, many departments may be limiting their applicant pool but, at the same time, they may be protecting the department from future problems.

Dictionary.com defines nepotism as "favoritism shown to members of one's family, as in business; bestowal of patronage in consideration of relationship, rather than of merit or of legal claim." It has been documented that nepotism has created problems in the past and continues to create problems where it is permitted today. Anti-nepotism policies were a result of previous problems with favoritism and with the hiring and promoting of unqualified family members. The right policies in place for the hiring of family members can be beneficial to a department. The size of the department may factor in determining whether a strict anti-nepotism policy is needed.

Initial research of criminal justice sources showed little documentation of nepotism or favoritism from law enforcement agencies or studies. Research and main sources for information in regards to this project will be through interviews and surveys of police departments averaging 50 officers or more. Additional research will be conducted using business journals, university studies, books, and the internet. The

intended outcome of this project is to show that allowing family members to work in the same department can be beneficial if formal guidelines are established regarding hiring, responsibilities, reporting structure, training, and supervision. It is the author's belief that restricting the hiring of family members limits the applicant pool and the hiring of family members can benefit the agency by having a positive effect on individual performance and agency goals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An example of a strict anti-nepotism policy is as follows: An applicant may not be hired as an employee if that department already employs a person who is a family member of the applicant. The City of Sugar Land, in their personnel manual, defined a family member as a: husband, wife, mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, and other immediate family members. They further include significant others who live in the same household (City of Sugar Land Personnel Manual, 2005).

A less strict policy on nepotism was taken from the (City of Fort Worth's Personnel Manual, 2002): The appointment of any person in any position will be prohibited if such person is a member of another employee's family, where one employee would be in a supervisory capacity over the other. Most of the departmental policies reviewed had some type of nepotism policy, which ranged from very broad to narrow in scope. The majority of policies focused on the supervision of family members versus not hiring family members.

A fact learned by comparing police departments to American businesses is that many Fortune 500 companies are family owned and controlled. Some of the advantages businesses practicing nepotism are the following: high performance,

stability and long term commitment. It further stated that a relative may be just as capable or better in the job the current employee holds. The hiring of family members can improve employee performance as well as retention (Bush-Bacelis, 2010).

There are also some disadvantages in practicing nepotism. When a company or department hires or promotes an incompetent family member, other employees may feel mistreated or disrespected, which can result in poor morale or distrust (Bellow, 2003). Nepotism can also bring to light problems within the family, which could carry over to the agency. Bellow further stated that the practice of nepotism may even cause a company to lose valued executives and make it difficult to attract and retain high-quality newcomers.

Nepotism is not a new phenomenon in business. With more and more families relying on multiple incomes for their standard of living, issues regarding nepotism must be carefully observed to ensure a good business strategy is developed. Allowing nepotism can be successful if applied appropriately, but it also can be problematic if no standards are set. According to Bush-Bacelis (2010), companies have a trend of recruiting and hiring relatives. However, police departments do not appear to have this type of recruiting or hiring practices. There is a time honored tradition in law enforcement where family members follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents when choosing careers. It is not uncommon for several generations of family members to work for the same department. This is more predominant in larger cities and departments where they work side-by-side as public safety officers (Adams, 2005).

The general rule is that no employer should be condoned for hiring or evaluating employees on the basis of anything other than merit, the converse is that employees should not be penalized simply because they desire to work in the same industry or for the same employer as their family member (Adams, 2005). When one grows up around a business or vocation, it is easy to develop an interest in the field. A desire to please or imitate one's parents can also exert a potent influence. Successors have a powerful advantage other people do not enjoy (Bellow, 2003). Doors are opened for them and opportunities are provided that might not be available to all. A family member must be willing to take advantage of it and act on it. It is believed that Americans increasingly feel that there is nothing wrong with hiring a relative so long as he or she is qualified. Some even say that pulling strings to help relatives who are qualified is not really nepotism and is expected (Bellow, 2003). History has shown us that nepotism in itself is neither good nor bad, how it is practiced is what matters.

Adams (2005) stated that the court's decision in *Bumbuca v. Township of Edison* held that an employer cannot be held liable for engaging in nepotism no matter how large or small the company and even if the employer is a public entity. A decision that concluded nepotism was illegal could possibly stop employers from hiring employees of family members even if those individuals were well qualified for the position for fear of liability due to the appearance of nepotism. The courts further suggested that employers take voluntary measures to insure that employees are hired, evaluated, and compensated based solely on merit and fitness and not on whom they know. The policy provided and the one most followed by departments researched is to prohibit one family member from interviewing, evaluating or directly supervising another family member.

Following these guidelines should help reassure employees that decisions are being based on merit, an ideal that all employers should strive to achieve.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not strict anti-nepotism policies are beneficial to a police department or whether they restrict the department's ability to fill staffing requirements with dedicated, qualified employees. Hiring family members may hurt the department, but it can also be beneficial to the department as a whole. The size of the department may determine whether a strict anti-nepotism policy is needed. The researcher believes that allowing family members to work in the same department can be beneficial if formal guidelines are established regarding hiring, responsibilities, reporting structure, training, and supervision. The researcher feels that recruiting family members can boost performance as well as retention and have a positive effect on individual performance and department results. The negative impact of hiring family members can be limited with proper supervision and a sound policy stating such.

The method of inquiry will include: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 50 survey participants. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of nepotism in law enforcement will include a survey questionnaire and literature research. The size of the survey will consist of seven questions, distributed to 50 survey participants from various police agencies throughout the state of Texas. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in all surveys being completed and returned. The researcher also made 10–15 follow-up phone calls and interviews to obtain additional information

regarding questions answered on the surveys. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed, and the information gathered will be used to make findings in regards to this researcher's questions involving nepotism in law enforcement.

FINDINGS

The research showed that the majority of agencies that responded or were interviewed have not had any significant issues with nepotism. All agencies that responded stated they had some sort of nepotism policy. The responses were varied as to which agencies had strict anti-nepotism policies and those that did not. Twenty percent of agencies responded stating they had strict anti-nepotism policies in place restricting the hiring of family members. One hundred percent of the departments with 50 officers or less responded stating they did not allow the hiring of family members. Only three departments with 100 plus officers responded stating they restrict the hiring of family members.

The research was not able to determine specific factors that guided individual department's policies in regards to nepotism. Departments of various sizes all had different policies and did not follow any type of set guidelines. The research did show that the eight larger departments (100 plus officers) surveyed allowed family members to work in the same department, just not supervise each other. Throughout all agencies researched, the standard policy was that if family members were allowed to work in the same department, they could not supervise each other. No agency reported having any disciplinary issues in regards to family members working together. It appears that police departments and private sector companies are handling nepotism issues similarly with the main emphasis being that one relative does not supervise another relative.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not strict anti-nepotism policies were beneficial to the department or hindered its ability to recruit and hire qualified applicants. Also, the size of the department can be an issue in determining policies in regards to hiring family members. The purpose of this research was to show that hiring family members can be beneficial to the department if formal guidelines are established regarding hiring, responsibilities, reporting structure, training, and supervision. The research question that was examined focused on the effects of hiring family members into the same department. The researcher hypothesized that restricting the hiring of family members limits the applicant pool and the hiring of family members can actually have a positive effect on individual performance and company results.

The researcher concluded from the findings that there is no set standard that departments follow in regards to nepotism. It does appear that larger agencies (more than 100 officers) tend to be more open to less strict nepotism policies. The general policy for agencies that do allow the hiring of family members is to prohibit one family member from supervising another. The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to the majority of departments reporting having no issues in regards to nepotism. The departments stated a need for a good policy to be in place and for that policy to be followed at all times. Most departments that allow the hiring of family members have benefitted from the ability to hire and retain officers that are related while reporting no significant instances of problems.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because there is no set standard among law enforcement agencies. Policies regarding nepotism are agency specific, and there is no specific guidelines followed by the various agencies researched. It is possible that more information or a better standard could have been established if more agencies were surveyed.

The study of nepotism is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the industry as a whole is having problems filling vacancies with good, quality applicants. It is believed departments adhering to a strict anti-nepotism policy are restricting their applicant pool rather than protecting themselves from future problems by hiring family members. All police agencies that are facing difficult challenges in hiring quality officers stands to benefit from the results of this research. Police departments put a lot of emphasis on making themselves attractive to potential job applicants. This not only involves money but also time. Officers within a department from the chief down also put a lot of time and resources in to making their department a quality place to work. A strict anti-nepotism policy would keep a family member from reaping the benefits of a well run, enjoyable work place created by officers and family members employed with the department.

REFERENCES

- Adams, S.D. (2005). Nepotism. *New Jersey Law Journal*, 13(48), 13.
- Bellow, A. (2003). *In praise of nepotism: A Natural History*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bush-Bacelis, J.L. (2010). *Nepotism*. Retrieved from
<http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/management/Mar-No/Nepotism.html>
- City of Fort Worth, Texas, Personnel Policies. (2002). *Nepotism*.
- City of Missouri City, Texas, Personnel Policies. (2000). *Nepotism*.
- City of Sugar Land, Texas, Personnel Policies. (2005). *Nepotism*.

APPENDIX

Nepotism Survey

What is the personnel size of your department? _____

Is your department: Municipal____ County____ School____

Does your department have a nepotism policy? Yes____ No____

Does your department restrict the hiring of any family member? Yes__ No____

Are family members permitted to work together on the same shift, same hours or within same division? Yes____ No____

Comments:_____

Can one family member supervise another family member? Yes____ No____

Comments:_____

Are you aware of any disciplinary action occurring at your police department that involves nepotism? Yes____ No____ Unknown____

Comments:_____

Additional

Comments:_____

Name_____ **Rank**_____

Department_____

Contact Number_____

Please return to Kevin Burleson