

**The Bill Blackwood
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**The Use of Performance Evaluations
in Promotional Considerations for Law Enforcement**

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ABSTRACT

Promotions are the life blood of any law enforcement department. To enhance the promotional process, performance evaluations or assessments should be used. Immeasurable time and effort have been put into testing and interview processes for promotions, yet, less than a majority of law enforcement departments include a review of performance as an integral part of the promotions process. A review of literature and a survey were used to arrive at the conclusions and findings. Through the aforementioned reviews and the survey, it was found that an overwhelming number of authors and law enforcement professionals recognized the need for the use of performance evaluations in the promotions process. It was also recognized that while a majority of departments complete performance evaluations or assessments on their employees, a great number of departments do not use them for promotional purposes. In the survey that was conducted as a part of the research, only 48% of the departments surveyed considered the performance assessment as a fundamental part of the promotional process. As a result of the research, it is the conclusion of the researcher that performance evaluations should be an integral part of the promotion process, provided the assessment instrument is constructed properly, and the assessors are properly trained in the use of the instrument.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	4
Findings	5
Discussions/Conclusions	8
References	12

INTRODUCTION

The researcher has been associated with several law enforcement agencies in the State of Texas. Through these associations he has seen numerous methods of promotion that have been used to select those who are to advance in their careers. All too often, the only criteria used, appears to be a system of written tests and interviews, with very little or no attention given to performance evaluations. The results of this type system all too often is that a person gets promoted who can test and interview well, but who may have an actual work history of poor job performance.

The purpose of this research is to determine the various methods used to determine who is to be promoted, with the primary question being, "Should performance evaluations be used in the promotion process?" In an effort to obtain a broad base of information, several methods of inquiry will be used during the research phase. The basic research will consist of a review of any written material, either in periodicals or books relevant to this topic. This method will reveal whether there have been any prior studies conducted on this topic, and whether they were regional or geographical in nature. It should also reveal whether the topic has been addressed in a periodical format. The other type of inquiry to be used is a survey of law enforcement agencies to determine what methods they use for the promotional process, and if performance evaluations are considered.

It is anticipated that this research will demonstrate that the properly completed performance evaluation can become a positive part of the promotional process in any department. When properly designed testing and interview procedures are combined

with a review of the candidate's prior job performance, a more complete picture of the candidate's suitability for the promotion can be determined.

Should the anticipated findings of this research be born out, the potential is there for some merit to be placed in the evaluation process for those who wish to be promoted. Furthermore, should the findings be born out, and more agencies adopt this type system of promotions, it is the premise of this researcher that the promotional process for those agencies will produce a more qualified candidate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

After studying the promotional processes used in Corporate America, the law enforcement community began to adopt some of their methodology in the area of performance evaluations, and the use of those evaluations in the promotional process (Cochran, 2000). The original thinking behind developing and using performance evaluations was, among other things, that they would be an effective tool to aid in selecting the right person for promotions. Additionally, the rationale was that the performance evaluations may also be a good predictor of future performance by individuals.

After years of developing, revising, and using performance evaluation forms, departments found that the current performance by a person may not be a valid predictor of future performance at a higher level of assignment (Epstein & Laymon, 1973). Additionally, many departments determined that the forms and criteria used for the performance evaluations were not producing the desired results.

They then began assessing the criteria used in the assessment process, and the validity of those criteria. They also reviewed the effect of the evaluator himself/herself

on the evaluation, and how the rater actually derived his ratings. The net results of those assessments revealed that in small to medium sized departments, the rater's decisions during the rating process were influenced unfairly by information given to the rater by persons within the community, and that many times that information was irrelevant to the performance evaluation (Cochran, 2000). The assessment also determined that in many cases, the questions asked on the performance evaluation were open to interpretation, and therefore, could be interpreted in many different ways. If this is the case as a rule rather than the exception, then does the problem lie with the instrument for rating, the rater, the training given in how to use the instrument, or a combination of all factors?

In the mid to late 1970s, Assessment Centers became the tool that many departments used to assist them in the promotional process. At one point the Assessment Center method was touted as the wave of the future (Coleman, 2002). While the assessment centers were not a physical location, they were a prescribed testing process that could be carried out at any physical location.

Studies of this method were conducted, and it was found that one of the downfalls of this system was that it was relatively expensive, approximately \$300.00 per candidate, and so it was primarily used only for mid level management and above (Reinke, 1977). Another problem with the Assessment Centers was that they appeared to be a policy capturing center that reflected the direction of the policy makers, and because of that, their findings on who should be promoted often times reflected policy mannerisms rather than personal abilities (Coleman, 2002).

Another method of performance evaluations that has come on the scene is what is termed as Z-Based evaluation or Zero-based evaluation. The premise of this approach is that everyone evaluated deserves a good evaluation score. Under this method of evaluation, the only people who would not receive a good score would be those who cannot, or absolutely refuse to correct an identified deficiency (VanMeter, 2001).

One of the findings of a 1978 survey of several police departments was that 73.5% of the departments surveyed felt that the performance evaluation was a significant piece of the promotional process (Evans, 2000). All literature reviewed held in some form or fashion, the fact that performance assessments or evaluations were a necessary and needed part of the police process. They also agreed that refinement of the evaluation process is needed, and for an assessment of evaluation to be valid, the "human factor" must be removed as much as possible. One of the methods developed to attempt to remove the human factor was the Assessment Center method. This method was developed because more and more police departments and police unions were recognizing the human factor as a weakness, but the results, over the years, have shown that the Assessment Center method of selecting is just as fraught with the human factor as any other method.

METHODOLOGY

Since the primary question to be answered by this research is, "Should performance evaluations be used in the promotion process?", it is necessary to gain some idea of the extent to which they are currently being used. A survey will be conducted of representatives of 20 police departments in Texas and one department in

Alaska. The questions that will be asked of those representatives will be as follows: What type of agency is yours?; What is the size of your agency?; Is your department Civil Service?; In the promotional process of your department, do you use a testing and interview process for promotion?; During the promotional process, are the performance evaluations of the candidates examined and considered in the rating process?

The information gathered through the survey will be examined to see if there is any significance to department size, type, and whether it is civil service, as it relates to the use of the performance evaluations in the promotions process.

FINDINGS

During the course of completing this research, some very interesting information was gathered. The process used in attempting to determine the validity of the use of performance evaluations in the promotion process has been fairly steady. Nearly all research in the area shows that performance evaluations can be an effective tool in the promotion process. Issues arise in the area of what is the most effective method of completing the performance evaluation so it is an accurate reflection of the candidate's suitability for a higher level of performance.

Research in this area began as early as during World War II. Since that time many methods of determining the candidate's suitability have surfaced, including such programs as the Assessment Center system of testing. Each time the question of suitability of performance evaluations arises, the net result seems to be the value and validity of the instrument is based in two areas. First is the question of whether the instrument was structured in such a way to remove as much of the "human factor" as

possible, and secondly, how well was the supervisor trained to complete the performance assessment instrument?

A survey of 21 law enforcement agencies was conducted to measure how the performance evaluations factored into the promotion process. Of the agencies represented, one was a Sheriff's Department, one was a County Fire Marshal's Office, two were University Police Departments, and seventeen were municipal police departments. The agencies ranged in size from a six person department to a department with more than one thousand officers. Nine of the departments were civil service, sixteen of the departments used the testing and interview process for promotions, with one department only testing. Four of the respondents were unaware if their department reviewed the performance evaluation during the promotion process. Of the remaining seventeen, ten did review performance evaluations during the promotional process.

Half of the departments surveyed that had 20 or fewer officers were civil service and in this group, none of the surveyed departments used the testing and interview method in their promotional process, and only 25% used the Performance Evaluation in the process. On the face of this survey, it appears that of this group had the lowest percentage of use of the Performance Evaluations as a tool in the promotional process.

Of the departments surveyed with 21 to 50 officers, 14% were civil service. Of these departments, 100% used the testing and interview method as part of the promotional process, and 71% also used the performance evaluation along with the testing and interview as part of the promotional process. This group represented the greatest percentage that used performance evaluations in the promotional process.

Additionally, the findings of this group also seem to show some type correlation between being a civil service department, and the use of the Performance Evaluations in the promotional process.

In the 50 to 100 officer group, 50% were civil service. 100% of the departments used the testing and interview method. Fifty percent of these departments also used the performance evaluations along with the testing and interview process for their promotional process. Once again, there also appears to be some sort of correlation between being a civil service department, and the use of the Performance Evaluations in the Promotional process.

In the departments that had over 100 officers, 66% were civil service, 83% used the testing and interview process, and 33% also used the performance evaluations in conjunction with the testing and interview process.

Two patterns seemed to present themselves in this survey. The first being that the groups with 21 to 100 officers used the testing and interview method in conjunction with the performance evaluations significantly more often than the larger or smaller groups. The second being that there seemed to be a direct correlation between the departments who were civil service, and the use of the Performance Evaluations in the promotional process. In those groups, the greater percentages where the Evaluations were used appeared to align with the non-civil service departments. When grouped together and the total numbers are evaluated as a whole, 43% of the departments surveyed are civil service. 76% use the test and interview method, but only 48% use the performance evaluation along with the test and interview.

If these findings are even close to the statewide percentages, then it can be concluded that less than 50% of the departments consider whether a candidate for promotion is performing at anything more than a satisfactory level. The figures would also lean in favor of candidates who can test and interview well, but not necessarily have an exemplary job performance record. Candidates who may not be able to test and interview well, but who have an exemplary work record would have less of a chance to be considered for promotion when the performance evaluation is not considered.

Additionally, when departments spend time and resources to develop tests that will withstand civil scrutiny, they should also evaluate the whole promotional process to include the performance aspect of the candidate's career, and also develop the proper performance assessment tool needed to compliment the testing and interview process.

DISCUSSION

The initial problem addressed by this paper was the lack of the use of performance evaluations in the promotion process in law enforcement. The purpose of the study was to attempt to determine as accurately as possible, how widely the performance evaluations were being used, with the actual question being, "Should performance evaluations be used in the promotion process?"

It was anticipated that the research would demonstrate that the properly completed performance evaluation can become a positive part of the promotional process in any department. When properly designed testing and interview procedures are combined with a review of the candidate's prior job performance, a more complete picture of the candidate's suitability for the promotion can be determined.

The result of not reviewing a candidate's performance record can best be demonstrated by what occurred in Detroit in November of 2002. Then Detroit Police Chief, Jerry Oliver, refused to open the promotional process to fill current vacancies because several of the candidates had severe disciplinary records, and some were, at that time, under department discipline. At that time, the Detroit Police Department had a long standing policy allowing anyone who wished to be promoted to complete the promotional process, and be promoted even though they may be under disciplinary action. A suit was filed, and a judge ordered the chief to open the process to all persons. When approached about this situation, Merrick Bobb, executive director of the Police Assessment Resource Center in Los Angeles stated that consideration of disciplinary records is certainly recommended or considered best practice (Schmitt, 2002).

The Detroit incident goes to the heart of the issue that the use of properly designed performance assessments or evaluations can only enhance the decision making process for those seeking to choose the best qualified candidate for promotion.

Through the whole research process, all references used for the research, regardless of their topic, constantly referred to performance evaluations. The recurring issue though, was the type of assessment used and the training of the assessor to use the instrument effectively.

Findings indicated that for an assessment tool to be effective, it had to be structured correctly. In each area to be assessed, the assessor had to be able to choose from a series of descriptive terms that were very clear, as to whether the person being assessed was doing their job within a ranging from unacceptable up to exceeding

expectations. The terms used for these categories may be different, depending on the department, but the descriptors were fairly well the same. Once the descriptors were defined, and the assessor had access to those descriptors for each person being assessed, the chances of having a more accurate assessment was clear.

Secondly, the person completing the assessment tool must be properly trained in its use. Too often, it is assumed that once a person attains the supervisory level, they automatically know how to complete the assessment form. This training should be a part of the new supervisor training. The Tom Green County Sheriff's Department General Order 1.01 states the importance of the assessment very clearly. "Performance evaluation is one of the most important duties assigned to a Tom Green County Sheriff's Department supervisor; perhaps the most important when one views efficient, accurate performance evaluation as a key to current successes and to future progress" (TGSO G. O. 1.01, pg. 1, 2001).

Research indicated that there are two other areas that directly effect the assessment and are critical to the assessment. The first is that the person completing the assessment must have directly supervised the person being assessed for a majority of the assessment period. A person without first hand supervisory knowledge cannot make an accurate assessment. Secondly, personal feelings must be removed from the assessment. This is often very difficult for a supervisor to do when he has become friends with those whom he supervises. This is probably the weakest link in the assessment process.

The research findings support the statement that a department that uses a well defined performance assessment, completed by a well trained supervisor, can benefit

greatly from using that instrument as a part of the promotional process. While there are no studies that this author is aware of that indicate that a person's previous performance indicates his future performance, it is this author's opinion that human nature indicates that will happen. During the course of the research, the researcher was unable to define what type of assessment instrument was used by each department surveyed, or whether any departments had a history or record of the assessments impacting a candidate.

One of the primary roles of a law enforcement supervisor is to mentor those whom he is charged with supervising. If the department is using a properly constructed assessment instrument, the supervisor can use that instrument as a road map to guide the subordinate to achieve more than just an acceptable level of performance. While the assessment tools are used most often to correct deficiencies, they can be used to encourage excellence. The wise supervisor will use the tool to encourage excellence, and as he helps each of his subordinates to reach those goals, their performance helps the department as a whole to achieve excellence.

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