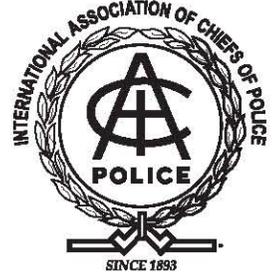


# Best Practices Guide



International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments  
Technical Assistance Program

## Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover in Law Enforcement

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# Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel

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Recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified applicants to meet the staffing needs of an agency is the most fundamental human resource process in a police department. The success of the department's recruitment efforts impacts every other function in the agency.

For years, law enforcement agencies offered good, stable employment. A readily available workforce enabled many police leaders to ignore the importance of recruitment. Today, employers nationwide, including police departments, report having difficulty attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of employees. There are a number of factors both inside and outside the organization contributing to this condition.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of the issues that impact an agency's ability to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified persons who are a 'good fit' within a police agency and the processes to attract successfully these individuals. In addition, factors contributing to increased levels of employee attrition and processes for developing a high retention environment will be identified.

## **Recruitment**

The process of attracting potential employees is more complex than merely convincing a large number of persons to submit an application for employment. Recruiters cannot just use a few simple statements about the agency and expect to be successful in recruiting a qualified individual, either.

To be more effective, agencies must view recruitment in a comprehensive manner. Before a department begins to recruit officers, the number of officers and the needs of the department should be identified through a staffing analysis and a review of the average turnover rates.

Once the number of employees that are needed is identified, the core values of the organization and the unique aspects, or 'employer brand', should be clarified. This information is critical for establishing the caliber of officers needed and what the department has to offer employees. In addition, leaders must designate specific individuals to act as official department recruiters, but every officer can be enlisted to help with the search. Finally, the process of actually recruiting employees should make use of a variety of recruitment strategies. An approach that captures one person's attention may be ineffective with another.

## **Staffing Analysis**

To determine the number of officers required to serve the needs of the community, the department should conduct a staffing analysis. There are several formulas available for projecting the number of employees needed. Assuming the department receives appropriations to fund additional positions, the projected need is added to the number of current vacancies. At the same time, the average turnover should be determined. To estimate the anticipated vacancies, planned and unplanned turnover must be considered. Planned attrition includes persons who are known to be leaving the department in the next 12 –18 months (i.e. retirement). Reviewing the average number of persons who resigned in the past 24 – 36 months can be used to estimate the number of unplanned turnover. Combined, the staffing projection, current vacancies, and estimated

turnover provide recruiters with an approximation of the number of new officers that will actually need to be recruited.

### **Identifying Core Values**

The process of identifying the core values of a police department is often viewed as being the 'softer' side of law enforcement that has no real affiliation with 'real police work.' However, the statement of core values is actually the bedrock of the department's operations. Serving as its constitution, the core values clarify why the department exists, what it represents, and how it conducts itself. While there are many similarities between law enforcement agencies, there are distinct differences between each community's expectations and how its department provides services.

Every agency has a set of values, regardless of whether they have been formally articulated and pronounced. Identifying the core values helps to determine what beliefs an individual should possess to fit well within the organization. This is important because many leaders have been led to believe that a person who passes the various selection procedures is the most qualified person for the department. In reality, an officer who works well in one department may not fit well in another.

The core values establish the standard for evaluating the recruitment and selection of employees. When organizations fail to identify core values and make them an integral part of the recruitment, selection, and operational procedures, they tend to make the same hiring mistakes repeatedly.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, when employees' personal values are similar to those represented by the police department the individual is more likely to identify with the agency's purpose and be anchored to that organization.<sup>2</sup> This results in lower attrition rates.

### **Developing an Employer Brand**

As agencies place greater emphasis on recruiting and retaining employees, they should examine their employer brand. An employer brand communicates the message of what it is like to work in the organization. Every department has a reputation as a place to work, positive or negative. For example, a department may be well known for providing higher salaries, maintaining excellent performance standards, or having the best equipment available. At the same time, a department may also be known for poor relationships between management and line officers or low salaries and benefits.

Agencies that develop a strong employer brand have a special allure as a great place to work and are considered employers of choice.<sup>3</sup> This designation gives agencies a competitive advantage when recruiting officers. As a result, departments are more likely to have a greater number of high-quality candidates apply for positions. Branding also helps lower the cost-per-hire and increases the level of retention by initially attracting candidates who are more likely to be a good fit for the department.<sup>4</sup>

As departments seek to develop a strong employer brand, they should go through a facilitated process to gain employee participation, identify what candidate's desire, assess the department's current brand, and clarify the agency's unique characteristics. Having completed this process, agencies can work to develop the department's desired image. Once established a strategic plan to move from the current brand to the desired image can be developed. This process is not easy and cannot be accomplished overnight. However, agencies that successfully complete this effort find they have better relations in the community, successfully recruit top quality candidates, and are in a stronger position to retain quality candidates.

### **Recruiter Selection**

Many agencies fail to recognize and subsequently stress the importance of the recruitment function. As a result, those persons who would probably be the best individuals for the position do not submit their name for consideration. To overcome this, organizational leaders must develop a perception within the department that recruitment is one of the most important functions in the agency.

To complete the recruitment effort effectively, individuals should be formally assigned the responsibility of ensuring specific recruiting functions are completed. In a larger organization this may require a team of officers. In smaller agencies, this responsibility will likely be completed on a part-time basis. Regardless, a thorough process of identifying, selecting, training, and evaluating recruiters should be completed.

Persons assigned as recruiters must be among the brightest in the department and the position should be viewed as a sought after position. Individuals must possess the social astuteness to read non-verbal signals from others' body language and adjust their responses to meet the needs of the individual. At the same time, the recruiter must be able to assess the potential candidate's ability to meet the department's employment standards. The best recruiters are known, liked, and respected as credible individuals throughout the community. They are always seeking opportunities to sell the agency and establish new networks.

Once officers are selected as recruiters, they should be provided with training to ensure their success. In some cases, this training can be provided internally. If the department is starting a new program, it may be necessary to seek training outside the department.

Finally, performance standards should be established to measure the individual's success and hold them accountable for meeting these standards.

### **Employee Referral Systems**

When law enforcement agencies search for a suspect, they do not have one person to conduct the hunt for the entire department. Every available person is tasked with helping with the search. So why should an agency have one or two persons doing all of the recruitment? Every officer in the department is a potential recruiter.

Employee referral systems (ERS) are the most effective recruitment techniques available. Much of the success of referral systems is attributed to officers doing some form of informal assessment of the individual to determine if he or she can perform well within the organization before approaching him or her or making a recommendation to the agency. Some research has found that officers who are recruited through employee referral systems are more likely to succeed in the selection process and be retained by the agency.

When beginning an ERS, guidelines for the program's operation should be established. First, officers should be informed of the department's personnel needs and goals and have them focus their efforts on addressing these needs. Second, some type of process must be established to track officers' referrals. In many departments, officers who refer a candidate who goes on to be employed by the agency receive some form of bonus. A determination should be made of the type and value of the bonus. The bonus may be a non-cash prize such as two days off or a gift (i.e. television, laptop computer, etc.). Other departments provide cash payments ranging from 100 to 5,000 dollars; a sort of 'finders fee'. When providing cash bonuses, many departments provide one-half upon employment of the recruit and the second half when the individual completes his or her probationary period. This installment program maximizes the motivational benefits of the program. In addition, the referring officer is more likely to serve as a mentor to help the new employee succeed. Finally, when an employee makes a referral, they should receive periodic updates of the progress in the selection process the individual they referred has made, to prevent them from becoming frustrated and discouraged.

Agencies should be cautious using an employee referral system if the department does not have a diverse background of employees. In addition, if the department has a dysfunctional culture, implementation of this system may perpetuate the problems associated with this performance.

## **Recruitment Techniques**

If departments continue to use the same recruitment process they have always used, they will continue recruiting the same types of employees, with the same results. As suggested, law enforcement agencies must use a variety of recruitment techniques that convey the same message to recruit diverse, high-quality candidates. To reach a new group of candidates, agencies should upgrade their recruitment programs and employ a variety of recruitment techniques.

**Internet** – The Internet is rapidly becoming one of the most popular techniques for agencies to advertise vacancies and recruit potential candidates. It is available to potential applicants 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is less expensive and easier to customize than many other recruitment techniques. Finally, the Internet provides agencies with greater opportunity to expand their brand message. Because of this, agencies are commonly using the Internet to advertise positions through employment sites and department web sites.

To capitalize on the increased usage of the Internet many agencies have begun to utilize on-line employment sites such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com. Many state law enforcement agencies, municipal associations, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, United States Military, and state labor departments also provide websites for posting vacancies at no cost.

Developing a department website allows the agency to communicate the services they provide, project a solid image, and describe various career opportunities. Recruiters and leaders should assume that serious job seekers will examine the department website to research the agency and learn about its operations. Because of this, the site should provide an accurate reflection of the department's personality and values.

To provide an informative, high impact website, designers must maintain a dynamic and interactive site. The use of photographs brings the site to life. The site should include a link entitled 'Career Opportunities' that lists available jobs, requirements for each position, and a description of the selection process. When composing an Internet announcement, designers should avoid using traditional job descriptions. Position announcements should capture the reader's attention with the image that the department is a great place to work and enables the individual to do meaningful work. The agency may consider including testimonials from employees of what attracted them to the job and what they enjoy about working with the agency. Some departments are making it possible for individuals to download and even submit application forms through the website.

**Newspapers** – Newspaper listings still continue to be one of the most popular recruitment tools. One recent survey revealed job seekers used newspaper and online ads equally. In rural areas with lower levels of Internet usage, job seekers have an increased dependence on newspaper postings.<sup>5</sup>

Some employers have used conventional commercial advertisements to attract potential recruits. This approach provides more space to attract readers' attention, list benefits, and include images. Most law enforcement agencies have another advantage over other employers in that they have frequent access to local reporters. By using this relationship, agencies can work with reporters to publish human-interest stories about officers and the department's recruitment needs and efforts. These articles are a great way for the agency to provide greater details of what is offered to and expected from candidates. In addition, the use of bold headlines captures attention better than advertisements and classified ads.

**Former Officers** – Many departments are finding they have a group of officers who compose the core of their operations. At the same time, another group of 'transient' employees, who may leave and return to the agency one or more times, begin to identify with the core group and become long-term employees.

'Boomerang' officers provide many advantages for a department. The department and the officer are familiar with each other, so there are fewer risks for each. The officer is familiar with the department's expectations and operational procedures, so the transition is smooth and training is limited. These officers have explored other alternatives and appreciate the opportunities within that particular agency more. They

are likely to spread this to other officers who are considering other opportunities and potentially limit turnover.

**Viral Recruitment** – Top quality candidates are likely to be associated with similarly qualified persons. While recruitment efforts may not be successful with one individual, the candidate may likely associate with another person who would be open to opportunities offered by the agency. Recruiters should provide good candidates with several copies of brochures and other recruitment materials. If the person is not interested, ask him or her to pass the agency's materials around to friends and colleagues. Other departments are asking applicants to list several friends who they think may be interested in becoming a police officer. This information is then forwarded to recruiters to conduct follow-up interviews.

**Career Fairs** – There are a variety of job fairs available for recruiters to meet with potential recruits including public, military, and college events. Many departments have experienced limited success with participating in job fairs. Despite this, participating in career fairs provides departments with many benefits. Persons attending the events are seeking a career change and are looking at all the different opportunities. Because of this, recruiters have the opportunity to meet larger numbers of potential candidates at once. At the same time, the competition for job seekers attention is great, allowing job searchers to be easily distracted.

Working at a booth at a career fair requires recruiters to have a positive attitude and good listening skills. When talking with job seekers, recruiters only have a few minutes to talk with interested persons before they move on to the next booth. To prepare for this, recruiters should practice approaching and interacting with potential candidates. In addition, a system should be established for rating potential leads at the event and, following the event, the effectiveness of its recruitment potential.

**Religious Organizations** – Networking with various religious organizations has proved very effective for police departments in attracting successful candidates, particularly minorities. Recruiters have reported that persons who possess strong religious beliefs make exceptional officers because of the 'balance' they possess. In larger communities, church organizations operate job centers as a ministry and by taking a few precautions, agencies can avoid any potential litigation.<sup>6</sup>

**Developmental Programs** – Agencies report helping persons during the early stages of their career to identify with and anchor to the agency. Various programs including internships, explorer posts, and community service positions serve as a realistic job preview for the individual. At the same time, participation in the program gives the agency an opportunity to interact with individuals and observe their personalities and work ethic. Many of these programs result in the successful recruitment of participants.

## **Turnover**

In recent years, police agencies nationwide have experienced increasing levels of staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting new officers. The problem is compounded by experienced officers, who have been the core of their agencies' operations for years, who are beginning to retire. Some agencies are finding they do not have enough seasoned officers to take their place. If agencies are not able to address this issue, a serious imbalance will form in many departments between the number of experienced officers and newer recruits. As a result, the average years of experience for patrol officers will drop significantly. Over time, agencies with higher turnover and less experienced officers will suffer a reduction in productivity and lower quality of service delivery.

A number of studies have documented the level of turnover and contributing causes. Still, little research has been done to establish a benchmark of 'acceptable' or 'normal' turnover rate for law enforcement agencies.

In 1999, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement reported 14 percent of state and county officers and 20 percent of municipal officers left within the first 18 months of employment.<sup>7</sup> Between 1983 and 1997, the state of Alaska averaged a 35 percent turnover in its Village Public Safety Officer positions.<sup>8</sup>

In 2003 the North Carolina Department of Criminal Justice assessed the level of turnover in municipal and sheriff's officer positions and found attrition in municipal agencies ranged from zero to 87 percent with an average of 14.2 percent.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, sheriff's personnel had a turnover rate of zero to 60 percent with an average of 12.7 percent.<sup>10</sup>

A study of attrition of Vermont law enforcement agencies between 2001 and 2006 found counties averaged 8.9 percent, while municipalities experienced 8.25 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Law enforcement attrition is a complex and difficult issue to manage. In many instances, the turnover occurs in trends. To identify these trends, agencies must track when officers resign from the department. Using this information, charts can be developed to help illustrate the severity of the problem and how to coordinate retention efforts at critical times. Before an agency can determine the retention strategies to be initiated, it is critical to know the specific reasons why officers are leaving an agency. As departments seek to find the causes for attrition, officers must have an integral role in the process. One of the most important areas to clarify in this phase is to ask employees what is important to them and their opinion of why employees are leaving. Several techniques can be used to capture this information, including confidential surveys, personal interviews, exit interviews, and focus groups.

## **External Factors**

The greatest external factor influencing employee attrition is the economy. For more than ten years, the United States has enjoyed a prosperous economy. Because of the growth in the economy, there are more jobs than qualified persons. Most of the key economic indicators suggest this condition will continue through the foreseeable future. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections indicate that by 2010 there will be over ten million more jobs than qualified personnel. It is estimated there will be a net increase of approximately 264,000 in governmental protective service positions. The overall increase in job openings of police officers /sheriffs, due to growth and net replacements, is estimated to be about 15.5 percent.<sup>12</sup>

In this environment, the employees control the employee-employer relationship. The bottom line is people leave for other opportunities which they perceive as better because they can. Therefore, it is critical for executives to recognize that all of their employees are constantly comparing the push-pull balance of alternatives. The balance is the conditions within the agency that push the officer to look for better opportunities. At the same time, other public and private employers are trying to pull or poach high quality candidates with more attractive or appealing working environments. To counter this, departments must maintain conditions to minimize the push and enhance the pull, or retention, of staff. To accomplish this, police leaders will be required to make more concessions to attract and retain employees.

## **Internal Factors**

**Salary** – The most frequently cited reason by police executives of why officers leave is salary. There are a number of reasons for this claim. First, employees who do not want to burn bridges with an employer frequently tell their bosses they are receiving a better salary in their new position. Second, if the individual is making more money in his or her new position, it is easy to say he or she left for a higher salary. Finally, relying on salary increases allows executives to give a simple answer to a potentially complex problem without making any hard analysis of the problems or conditions within their agencies.

When comparing compensation packages, it is difficult to suggest arbitrarily that one package is better than another. The issue of compensation is more inclusive than just salary and includes a number of benefits such as health insurance, vacation, retirement, schedules, and equipment. Generally, money is a deficient need. That is, when an individual does not have enough money to pay his or her expenses, salary becomes more

important. As a general rule of thumb, persons who are struggling to pay their bills will leave for less than a 5 percent increase in salary. Unhappy employees will leave for 5 percent, and satisfied employees generally require a 20 percent increase before they consider resigning.<sup>13</sup>

**Poor Supervisors or Leadership** – People do not leave jobs, they leave managers.<sup>14</sup> The number one internal factor affecting an employee's decision to stay or leave a job is the relationship he or she has with his or her immediate supervisor. One of the greatest crises facing law enforcement agencies in the near future is the failure to develop leadership potential of officers throughout the entire organization.

**Poor Job Fit** – Another contributor for officer attrition is a poor person-job fit. Even though the individual has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the job, many do not like the work or fit within the agency. Several states have found that at least 25 percent of officers leave their department within the first 18-36 months on the job. Field training officers or supervisors often hear the officer say, "This job is not what I thought it was." This same person may work very well in another department; they just do not work well within that particular agency.

**Higher Ordered Needs** – In recent years, the police profession has placed emphasis on the professionalism of working within law enforcement agencies. Departments spend enormous efforts attracting better-educated, well-rounded individuals. Past recruits have satisfied lower-ordered, motivational needs of food, water, shelter and safety/security. Today's applicants are looking to satisfy higher-ordered, 'hygiene needs' of belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Despite this, many departments' organizational cultures have not evolved beyond the survival mentality aspects of police work. Basic and advanced training classes emphasize the need to go home at the end of the day as a measure of success. This is not to minimize the dangerous aspects of a career in law enforcement or the need to exercise appropriate care in performing their duties in a safe manner. The officers being recruited today are seeking challenging work environments and problem solving opportunities. When these needs go unmet for an extended period of time, it causes internal conflict for the individual. Because of this, when officers who possess higher-ordered needs are placed in an environment that constantly focuses on the lower-ordered needs, the individuals will soon look for work environments that offer those opportunities and conditions.

**Dysfunctional Organizational Cultures** – Many agencies are still characterized by silo management styles, hierarchical organizational structures with a dependence on strict operational procedures. This compliance, rule-based environment is based upon a transactional leadership style. Employees today are seeking an intrinsically motivating work environment. To accomplish this, leaders must engage the minds and hearts of their officers. Officers must take ownership of the various projects in which they are assigned to participate. When leaders fail to do this, they are limiting the organization's success and contributing to the attrition problems within their agency.

**Generational Differences** – Generation theory proposes there are four stages in a cycle or 'saeculum.' Each stage is identified as being a different cohort or generation. The 'personality' of each generation is developed by the events occurring in society during the formative years. The manner in which each generation treats and raises children differs because of changes in values and perspectives. These changes ensure the cycle continues its evolution. No generation is really any better or worse than another; each is different with its own strengths and weaknesses. The secret for leaders is to be aware of these differences and develop the leadership strategies that are needed to reach out to the individuals at their current level of development.

**Lack of Career Growth or Better Opportunities** – Officers often cite limited opportunities to grow or 'move up' as a reason for leaving their current position. For years, larger agencies have successfully used more opportunities in a larger agency as a way to poach exceptional officers from smaller departments.

**Inadequate Feedback** – Providing frequent feedback is a critical link to having a contented workforce. Employees want to know how they are performing and are anxious to improve. Supervisors who do not

provide frequent feedback allow poor work habits to form that result in unnecessary mistakes, citizen complaints, and managerial problems.

**Inadequate Recognition** – Positive reinforcement is the easiest, least expensive, and best way to improve good performance. When individuals do not receive this recognition, the exceptional performance will likely diminish.

**Inadequate Training** – Police officers' work environment is constantly changing and providing new challenges. Training is critical for providing officers with the skills they need to achieve their personal career objectives. When officers do not receive sufficient training, they make more mistakes, lose cases, and feel less confident. This also causes more lawsuits, negative publicity, and poorer organizational performance. Today's officers view training as an opportunity to improve their skills and make them more effective. Agencies that ignore this need are failing to meet the individual's desire to improve. If the department does not provide these opportunities, officers will look for agencies that will.

**Equipment** – Officers consider the type of equipment they receive as being indicative of their value to the community. For example, if all of the patrol units have 150,000 miles, officers have to share portable radios, or computers are slow and in need of replacement, the department may be viewed as having little concern for its employees. At the same time, keeping officers equipped with well-functioning cruisers and upgrading or replacing equipment on a regular basis will result in the department more likely being viewed as being an attractive employer.

## **Retention Strategies**

The overarching goal of any department's retention efforts should be to maximize factors pulling employees into an organization while limiting the factors pushing employees out of the department.

As agencies attempt to identify the reasons for employee attrition, they should also try to determine the reasons why others stay. By surveying and conducting 'stay' interviews with high performing veteran employees, the agency can likely determine factors that influence their decisions to remain in the agency. As part of this process, the goal is to determine factors that are pulling individuals into the agency as well as individual traits in persons who are more likely to stay and fit within the agency. The agency should identify what employees want and provide it.

Successful retention begins before the officer is selected. The selection process should be considered a two-part process. In the first stage, processes are designed to identify individuals who pass minimum qualifications. Standard selection devices to eliminate individuals who do not meet minimum established standards typically include: basic skills exams, physical ability tests, background investigations, and psychological assessments. In the second phase, qualified personnel are evaluated to identify those candidates who fit with the agency.<sup>15</sup> While most agencies perform very similar activities, every department has its own personality or organizational culture. Too often it is assumed the person who scores the highest on selection exams are the best persons for employment. This pursuit of a fair system limits the agency's ability to attract those persons who are more likely to stay with the agency.

**Behaviorally Based Interviews** – One of the best techniques to determine if an individual identifies with the agency is the use of behaviorally based interviews. These interviews work upon the assumption that past performance is the best indicator of how an individual will perform. Interview questions are based upon critical tasks or values within the agency. Individuals are asked to describe incidents they have been involved in and how they responded. For example, if the agency has a core value that all persons are treated with dignity and respect; an individual may be asked to "Describe a situation in which you had to interact with a

person in a work-related situation who you felt was acting in an unreasonable manner. How did you respond to this person? What did you learn from that situation?”

Avoid the use of questions such as “where do you want to be five years from now?” or that allow the individual to provide a rote or prepared response. The behaviorally based question requires the individual to explain how he or she has responded in the past and what he or she may have learned from the experience.

**Realistic Job Previews** – Too often departments trying to attract recruits focus all of their attention on the positive, sensational, or exciting aspects of law enforcement. To ensure a strong ‘employee-job fit,’ departments should provide realistic job previews. These previews may be provided in several formats, but explain without reservation what it is like to work within the agency. This preview may include a supervisor describing what will be required of new officers. Some departments require potential applicants to complete an established number of ride-alongs before a conditional offer of employment is provided. Regardless of the approach used, both the agency and the recruit should have an accurate perception of what will be required of the individual and what each will provide in return.

**Compensation** – To attract and retain good employees, departments must provide competitive salaries that match or exceed the market average. Compensation, however, means more than just salaries. Compensation packages include benefits other than salary including health insurance, retirement, leave, schedules, and equipment. As people mature, the priority of different benefits change. Because of this, compensation must be considered on a sliding scale. For example, officers who are under 35 years of age generally place greater emphasis on salary, while officers over 35 place increasing levels of emphasis on other benefits such as retirement. In the future, governing authorities will be required to implement more cafeteria-style compensation packages that allow individuals to tailor their salary and benefits to meet their particular needs.

**Training** – Today’s employees view training as a highly regarded benefit and an issue of career development. Departments should bombard their officers with training opportunities. Quality training should be designed to ensure officers perform to established competency levels and build their confidence. Officers who receive increased levels of training feel valued and are more likely to stay.

**Feedback** – “Feedback is the breakfast of champions.”<sup>15</sup> For feedback to be meaningful, it must be timely, specific, behavioral, and job-related. A basketball or football coach does not wait until the end of the year to correct a player’s performance. He or she pulls the player to the sideline, explains what he or she needs to improve, and keeps the guidance focused on the game. The same is true for the best police leaders. By immediately reinforcing good behavior and addressing poor performance before it becomes a problem, supervisors make sure their officers are working at peak performance, building their self-confidence, and anchoring them to the department.

**Recognition** – Feeling valued is a basic human need and good behavior which is recognized is more likely to be repeated. Leaders must seek out opportunities to recognize good behavior through regular meetings, passing information on to senior leadership, and informal gatherings. Supervisors frequently use letters of commendation, achievement, recognition, and thank you notes.

Morale or pride meetings provide opportunities for social interaction to improve communication and trust among officers. During these meetings, supervisors can announce officers who achieved advanced certifications, are being promoted in the career ladder, or performed well in various instances. These meeting also provide a good opportunity to highlight creative or innovative procedures to address a problem. The entire focus of these meetings is on the positive activities being completed by officers and the department.

**Career Assessment and Counseling** – In an effort to determine the specific training and work experiences officers need to improve their individual performance and anchor them to an agency, they should submit to a combination of assessment tools. There are a number of processes available for organizations to complete

these assessments, including paper and pencil assessments, 360° evaluations, assessment centers, and mentoring programs. Using information gathered from these development programs and diagnostic exams, leaders should work with the individual to compose a personalized development plan. This plan may include work experiences, training, formal education, and the need to prepare them for short and long term career objectives. This plan should include benchmarks for evaluating progress along with responsibility assignments for the officer and the department.

**Dual Career Ladders** – Traditionally in law enforcement agencies, the only way to move up was to assume a supervisory position. Unfortunately in many smaller agencies these vacancies only become available when someone leaves. Law enforcement today is much more challenging and broader than ever before. Many persons who are great officers do not have the personal attributes or interest to be a supervisor. This does not minimize their importance to the organization. At the same time, experienced officers note that there is no way for the public to differentiate a ten-year veteran from a one-year rookie. To address these concerns many departments are developing alternative career opportunities for officers as a reward for increased levels of training and experience. As persons reach established levels, they are provided with increased salaries along with increases in rank designation (i.e. private, private first class, or Officer I, Officer II, Intermediate Officer).

**Enhanced Work Experiences** – While training is important for developing staff, the more senses that an individual uses when learning a new skill, the more likely that skill is to be retained. One of the best ways to learn a new task or skill is by actually performing in the job. There is a variety of ways to provide expanded work, including job shadowing, job rotation, and cross training.

**Committee/Task Forces** – Appointing individuals to work on committee and task forces demonstrates the department respects their opinions and abilities. Equally as valuable is that this will provide officers with the opportunity to work with others, learn new networking skills, and develop new techniques to perform their jobs.

**Teaching** – Officers who develop an interest or expertise in an area can share their knowledge by teaching classes to other officers. This instruction helps to solidify their knowledge base and establish them as recognized experts.

**Environmental Strategies** – Agencies with a strong employee retention program have an organizational environment with high standards of performance. Unsuitable personnel are removed and the work is intrinsically motivating.

One of the most effective measures for developing a strong retention environment is to hold employees accountable when they are not performing to reasonable standards. Officers know who the mediocre officers are who are not performing to standard. These persons should be given a reasonable opportunity to improve their performance. Those who can not or will not perform to established standards should be removed. Leaders are often amazed at how a few cynical officers can adversely impact an entire unit.

Finally, leaders must develop an environment that constantly reinforces how officers are serving a purpose greater than themselves. This sense of meaningfulness forges an inseparable bond among officers.

**Provide a Caring Environment** – Members of law enforcement often spend more time with their co-workers than they do with their families. Officers need to know that the people they work with care about them on a personal level. It is easy for leaders to get caught up in the day-to-day operations and not contact persons who may be experiencing personal hardships such as health problems or family emergencies. Scheduling time to visit or call individual officers guarantees it gets done and provides the officer with a sense of belonging and reassurance.

Departments may also build a caring environment by providing access to various services and classes such as health/wellness screenings, offering gym memberships, smoking cessation classes, stress management classes, and financial planning, to name a few.

## **Responding to Departing Officers**

Traditionally, when an officer submitted his or her resignation, his or her supervisors congratulated the individual on his or her new position and wished him or her well in all future endeavors. In some instances, the employees were told they could leave work and draw their accumulated leave during the final two weeks. This approach sends the message, both to the departing officer and others within the department, that officers are not valued and can be easily replaced.

To curb the churn of attrition, organizational leaders should develop a process of responding to officers who may be considering other employment opportunities. To accomplish this, supervisors must identify employees who may be considering leaving. In some cases, the first indication an individual is leaving is when he or she submits a resignation letter to his or her supervisor. In most instances, however, persons will send subtle clues they are considering other opportunities. As adults mature, they enter transitional phases in which they re-evaluate their lives. During these times, individuals are more likely to make significant changes. These phases may be linked with the birth of a child, graduation of children from high school or college, divorce, or purchase of a new home.

Other possible signs an employee may be considering other employment opportunities include:

- Prolonged disappointment of being passed over for transfer or promotion;
- A close friend went to another job and is perceived as having better opportunities;
- Individuals reviewing personnel/training records to update their resume; or
- Making inquiries of human resources about early retirement or transfers of benefits.

When a supervisor learns an officer is considering other employment opportunities, he or she should take time to meet privately with the officer. Depending on the relationship, the supervisor may feel comfortable asking the individual directly if he or she is considering alternative opportunities. The officer may mention he or she is considering another offer.

When responding to a departing employee, the supervisor should remember that changing jobs is an emotional time for the officer. Ask the individual to describe his or her new job. If the officer asks any questions, the supervisor should respond candidly and honestly.

When the opportunity is presented, the supervisor should inquire about potential challenges the officer perceives he or she may have with the new position. Also the supervisor should ask about the factors that caused the officer to look for alternatives or that may have lured him or her away.

If the supervisor is aware of problems within the other agency, it would be appropriate to suggest that every department has many of the same problems, just in varying degrees. The supervisor may comment on opportunities that they currently have that are not available in other departments, such as career development, training, salary, equipment, and good relationships with fellow officers.

If the individual chooses to leave the agency, remind him or her that he or she will always be a part of the agency and offer to help in anyway possible in the future. Remind him or her that he or she always has a home in the department and will be missed by his or her fellow officers. After the individual has been gone for about three to six weeks, the supervisor or another officer who had a close relationship with the officer should call him or her. It is an important gesture to check on him or her and see how things are going:

indicate that he or she was and still is a valued employee. Let him or her know the department wants him or her back and he or she should not hesitate to reconsider his or her decision to leave.<sup>16</sup>

## Summary

Never before has the recruitment and retention of police personnel been as critical or as challenging for police organizations as it is today. To address these challenges successfully, law enforcement leaders must examine the process in an entirely different manner. This process will require a constant review of the labor market, compensation systems, leadership, recruiting techniques, supervision of recruiters, employer brands, leadership and operational management systems, and retention systems. Quite simply – when recruiting and retaining personnel, every detail is important and deserves attention.

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<sup>3</sup> Davis Advertising, “8 Things You Should Know about Branding”, [www.Recruttersnetwork.org/articles.cfm?ID=1418](http://www.Recruttersnetwork.org/articles.cfm?ID=1418). Accessed: July 18, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Woodall, “Survival: Can Branding Save Your Organization”, Communication World, (December 1, 2002), Internet: [http://findarticles.com/p/article/mi\\_m4422/is\\_1\\_20/ai\\_96513664](http://findarticles.com/p/article/mi_m4422/is_1_20/ai_96513664) Accessed: 11/9/1005.

<sup>5</sup> Gina Ruiz, Survey: Newspaper Ads Still Important to Job Seekers, (Workforce Management Online, January 2, 2007), Internet: <http://www.workforce.com/section/00/article/24/62/06.htmlarticle/24/62/06.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Taylor, Bruce Kirby, Lorie Fridell, Carter Rees, Tom Jordan, and Jason Chaney, The Cop Crunch: The Recruiting and Hiring Crunch in Law Enforcement (Part III), Police Executive Research Forum, May 2006, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> “Criminal Justice Attrition Study”, Report by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, (December, 2003), pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Darryl Wood, “Employment Turnover Among Alaska Native and Non-Native Village Public Safety Officers”, (November, 2000), pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas L. Yearwood, Recruitment and Retention Study Series: Sworn Police Personnel, Report by the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center, (April, 2003) pp. 1-13.

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher D. Litcher, Devan Reister, and Christopher Mason, Statewide Law Enforcement Officer Retention Study - 2001 – 2005 State of Vermont, Report by I/O Solutions, (January 2006), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel E. Hecker, “Occupational Employment Projections to 2014”, Monthly Labor Review, November 2005, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Leigh Branham, The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave, (New York: AMACOM, 2005) p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordon-Evans, Love'em or Lose'em Getting Good People to Stay, (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Jonathon A. Segal, “Brains in a Jar – Employee Recruitment”, HR Magazine, April 1999.

<sup>16</sup> John Sullivan, “A Blocking Strategy for Increasing Retention, Part 2”, Internet: <http://www.ere.net/articles/db/7684136CC0724F06A157CD185653FBBB.asp> Accessed: January 11, 2007.

Editorial Note: The author has a forthcoming book entitled Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Police Personnel; Reliable, Practical and Effective Solutions, in March 2008, Persons wishing to purchase a copy should call Charles C. Thomas Publishers, Ltd. at (800) 258-8980 to place advance orders.

**About the Author**

**Chief Dwayne Orrick** has been the police chief for the City of Cordele, Georgia since 1994. Under his leadership as chief, the department has been awarded State Certification from the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Certification Program. He was recently promoted as Director of Public Safety for the City of Cordele. Prior to becoming a police chief, Chief Orrick was employed with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs as a Criminal Justice Management Consultant. He has also worked as a police officer, field training officer, and deputy sheriff. He is a graduate of the 186th Session of the FBI National Academy and the Georgia-Israeli Law Enforcement Exchange. Chief Orrick is an adjunct criminal justice instructor with the South Georgia Technical College. Chief Orrick is an advisory group member and trainer for the IACP Smaller Police Department Technical Assistance Program. He holds a bachelor of arts in criminal justice and masters of public administration from the University of Georgia.