

Motivating Today's Generation to a Higher Calling: Law Enforcement Leadership Role in Hiring and Retaining Highly Ethical Police Officers

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Abstract

Currently in today's law enforcement environment our profession is lacking in the ability to recruit, hire and retain highly ethical police officers. This paper will look at the causes related to low recruitment pools, hiring processes, and what our leadership is doing or not doing to motivate and retain our best. These difficulties are not just relegated to specific agencies, or areas of the United States. The make up of affected agencies in the nation range from large metropolitan police departments to small rural agencies. Specifically, we will investigate what law enforcement as a profession is doing to rebrand itself and rebuild its image with the community it protects. We will look at the hiring pool and what the private sector is doing to improve recruitment. We will discuss how to enhance the hiring process to be more efficient and develop leadership within our departments that institute policies which help to retain highly ethical police officers.

Motivating Today's Generation to a Higher Calling: Law Enforcement Leadership's Role in Hiring and Retaining Highly Ethical Police Officers

This research paper is the result of a collaborative exertion of law enforcement officers from different settings and perceptions, coupled with information from resources, to highlight the ongoing environmental struggle with recruitment, hiring, and retention of law enforcement officers. Law enforcement personnel from various fields, including Police Departments, Corrections, and Sheriff's Offices, have realized that a common trend in officer recruitment and retention has emerged in public safety today.

The purpose of this research topic is to surface the realization of the ongoing day-to-day difficulties we face to fill the void in hiring law enforcement officers, and how to retain those still serving in the field. This significant topic needs to be addressed, as it has a direct effect of keeping our communities safe. Law enforcement leaders need to utilize individual and organizational goals to change the perception of this calling, and to improve the longevity of those in public service.

Literature Review

Recruitment

For many law enforcement organizations the focus on hiring police officers becomes about the logistics of the day to day business, the need for staffing and not the virtue and the "why" of the profession (Sinek, 2010). Why do we as law enforcement professionals do what we do? We, as leaders, need to ask ourselves what are we selling? What is our brand? What are we selling the youth of today to get buy-in to the future of the law enforcement profession? Far too many times, leadership at law enforcement agencies do not create a brand. They do not sell their brand. A brand is defined by a business as the marketing concept that helps people identify a particular company, product, or individual. It also provides the competitive edge over our

competition (Kenton, 2020). As leaders in today's world, are law enforcement leaders doing the necessary things to get the competitive edge when recruiting qualified applicants?

Law enforcement leadership must understand the current cause and effect, and the need for progressive recruitment techniques. These causes are related to high attrition rates based on large retirement pools, large numbers of opportunities for police candidates (both in the private sector and law enforcement), long thorough hiring processes, and changing political attitudes related to drugs (Roufa, 2016). Law enforcement, as a profession, currently wears many hats. In today's political environment, expectations and pressure from the community have grown. There is a "call to action" for political change and police reform. There are a lot of great people out there and it is our job as leaders to pull these recruits into the fold.

Let us look at our current youth and a study completed by the National Research Council related to military advertising and recruiting. In a study titled, Attitudes, Aptitudes and Aspirations of American Youth, the National Research Council found that for every one eligible military recruit the U.S Army must contact one hundred and twenty individuals (National Research Council, 2003). This information shows us that we are going to have to cast a wide net when advertising our profession. Simply recruiting from our local jurisdictions and law enforcement academies is not feasible. As police leaders we must endorse the use of technology and social media to accomplish a task of this latitude. The study also found that we must recruit to a higher calling. The study stated that patriotism and service to a higher calling differed from civilian jobs and that there is a higher purpose to the military. The military is not just about higher pay and benefits. The higher calling helps with the acceptance of hardships (National Research Council, 2003). Patriotism and selfless service to one's country provide a high motivation (National Research Council, 2003).

During our research and personal experience, we have found various techniques that can make our organizations more progressive on the recruitment front. One of the first questions we should be asking ourselves is: what is the private sector doing to recruit employees? The private sector always seems to be ten steps ahead of the government sector. Fortune 500 companies are working smarter not harder. One technique found during research is the ability of your department to optimize job postings within Google Jobs. Most organizations in our cities and counties have great job websites, but like the article on optimizing job listings states, if the job website cannot be found what good is it (Maurer, 2018)? Google is the most popular search engine in the world. Google jobs has a step-by-step process that allows Google Web Crawler to find job postings easier by following Search Engine Optimization. By following the minimum data required by Google and using compatible career pages like Linked-in, applicants will find your job postings easier (Maurer, 2018).

The above Google search is just one example of agency adaptation to become more progressive. In our experiences as part of the hiring process, we have had to look at new techniques in recruiting to draw people in. As an example, The Green Bay Police Department is approximately the fourth largest agency in the state with approximately 180 officers. The department is seeing large numbers of retirements due to age eligibility. The Green Bay Police Department will have 10-15 positions open that will need to be filled by the end of the 2021. In the past the department has done well with public testing options that include hundreds of applicants and the ability to pull candidates from local police academies. Currently, the department is witnessing a drastically reduced candidate pool. For example, in the last testing process twenty-eight people applied and tested. The department is not drawing people through the current recruitment process. The department has moved to new techniques to interest

candidates. Currently the Green Bay Police Department has invested money in a new advertising campaign video. This video that shows current officers and department opportunities. The video is targeting areas of the country where law enforcement officer support is lacking, specifically, Chicago, Minneapolis, Detroit, and Portland. The program is set up to demonstrate that when someone watches the video a lead is created and the person's email, name, and phone number are sent to the department in a spreadsheet format. A representative from the organization then contacts that person to gauge their interest in the department. The department is attempting to target current law enforcement into a lateral transfer program. Department personnel recruits candidates by offering equivalent pay, and removing the written test for any officer who has a year or more of experience in another agency. The department will try to recruit from the military police ranks as they complete their service commitment. The police department also offers to sponsor candidates and hire them while in the police academy to draw more candidates.

Leadership in the Recruitment Process

As leaders, how do we use current leadership philosophy and training to enhance recruitment, and draw the youth of today to work in a profession with a higher calling? Organizations must not only ask this question in our current state, but must have an understanding of what the future holds for our departments. Leaders must understand there will be constant change in their department. Leaders need to be willing to make deep change using progressive leadership. As organizational leaders there must be a balance between our internal influences and our external environment in the process of change (Long, 2017). We no longer live in an age of only being concerned with the internal dynamics. Leaders must be constant change agents to enhance recruitment techniques, always looking for the newest technology and philosophy to improve the agency. To create deep change, we must be in a constant state of

formalization to become more effective and more efficient (Long, 2017). This process should be incremental helping to create irreversible change (Long, 2017).

Leaders of organizations must follow certain leadership processes to allow employee success and draw new employees through recruitment. It must start at the top. As leaders, we cannot do the recruiting ourselves. Leaders must encourage their officers to go out and find potential applicants. Leadership needs to train our officers early and teach them to be authentic, credible and adaptive leaders themselves. Leaders must develop interpersonal skills that create a good leader follower relationship. Leaders cannot be superficial and must show insight and initiative. They must have influence with their people, impact and most important, integrity to be an authentic leader (Normore, 2017). This can be taught through a good mentoring program.

Credibility goes a long way in organizations. Without it, we cease to exist. We must promote credible leaders into positions that allow us to recruit the best, not only by process but by reputation. Credibility is the foundation of leadership (Long, 2017). To create credibility within an agency and within the community our leaders must have the ability to discover themselves, appreciate their constituents, affirm their shared values, serve a purpose and always sustain hope (Long, 2017). Credibility drives our profession and drives recruitment through a values-based system.

Law Enforcement Hiring

Young people today expect police agencies to have a faster, easier and more transparent hiring process than many of us experienced previously. The hiring process takes several months to navigate causing many of today's candidates to lose interest. Just as law enforcement leaders are changing the way we recruit new applicants, we must also evaluate the process in which they are hired.

According to a study conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum, three major themes were identified. 1. Hiring candidates who share the values and vision of the community and the department. 2. Making the hiring process more efficient and 3. Advancing diversity and inclusiveness in the hiring process (Morison, 2017).

Key findings from the study revealed that there must be a nexus between recruitment and the hiring process. Just as we need to explore new and innovative ways to attract diverse, qualified, and community-oriented people to the police profession, we need the same innovation to get them in the door. The hiring process must be centered on how to efficiently screen and evaluate candidates and how to get the best candidates through the hiring process.

Historically, police departments have used the hiring process as a way to exclude candidates who do not meet minimum agency standards. Successful candidates who are put through a background investigation process that focuses almost exclusively on issues that would disqualify them from service. A newer, more positive approach may be needed that allows a department to proactively identify and hire the candidate who possesses the values, character traits, and capabilities that the agency is looking for. One of the ways departments can evaluate candidates is by conducting emotional intelligence assessments. Self-awareness, self-regulations, social skills, empathy, and motivation are all skills that can be identified and measured by understanding emotional intelligence (Robinson, 2017).

Of all the hiring issues confronting police agencies today, one of the most complicated is the issue of prior drug use among applicants, especially marijuana. Today's police officer candidates are entering the workforce at a time when marijuana use is becoming increasingly normalized, even legalized, in many states (Morison 2017).

It is a common complaint that the hiring process for police officers lacks efficiencies. The process is often slow, or many candidates lose interest or find employment elsewhere. Compared to other industries, the process is cumbersome and overly bureaucratic. At some agencies it can take up to a year from the time a person applies to the time they are hired. For many decades this was not a major issue as there were far more applicants than available positions. Today this is not the case as the dynamics have shifted dramatically. Law enforcement vacancies have risen significantly and some large departments are suddenly looking to fill several hundred positions. Additionally, many more applicants have college degrees that provide them with greater flexibility in considering other career fields.

A significant change involves the newer generation of applicants. Candidates entering the workforce today are a part of the Millennial and Generation Z generations. These generations grew up with technology that allows them to obtain information instantly. These generations are also less likely to tolerate a police hiring process that can last months, and are largely paper-driven. Police agencies are no longer competing just with other professions. As police vacancies have increased and the applicant pool has shifted, agencies are now competing more fiercely with one another for candidates. These factors provide agencies a strong incentive to improve. Agencies are looking at solutions to these inefficiencies which include more frequent testing, flexibility in the process, more background investigators, continuous hiring processes, and technology-based solutions.

Many agencies look to recruit and hire applicants from within their own community. Belonging to a certain community does not guarantee that an individual can become an effective police officer in that community. There is nothing to prevent a candidate from outside a community from becoming an effective, community-oriented, culturally competent police

officer. That said, candidates who are from the community often have more insights and perspectives about the local issues. The benefits of hiring candidates from the community can strengthen critical bonds of trust between police and residents.

A good police cadets' programs (Explorer programs) is a greater way for a department to "grow their own" applicants from within a community. These programs are designed to prepare young people to become police officers. Some police departments even partner with their local public schools to support specialized public safety academies. These academies are often run in conjunction with the police cadet programs.

In addition to the three areas listed by the study, many agencies are reconsidering long standing practices that have changed over time. For example, not so long ago many departments had rather strict tattoo policies which prevented many applicants from applying. As tattoos are far more common today with young people, many agencies are reviewing their policies to allow for a wider pool of applicants.

Considerations for Corrections

Law enforcement agencies are also encountering difficulties hiring and retaining individuals to work in their jail and correction centers. Jail officers are tasked with the supervision and safety of individuals who have been arrested and are being held in custody charged with a crime(s) or those serving sentences after having been convicted of a crime. Leaders should work to ensure adequate staffing levels, acknowledge jail staff for their important work, and strive to remove barriers to recruiting and retaining staff working in our jails.

An example of a barrier to recruiting and retaining jail officers can be seen in recent political actions in Wisconsin. In 2010, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed Act 10, which brought significant changes affecting jail and corrections officers in the state. Act 10 redefined

job classifications that qualify as “protected status” and removed jail staff from the “protective status” category. Protective status gives those in certain job descriptions: a) The ability to be in a public union without the annual vote, b) Being able to bargain for wages and benefits without the limitations Act 10 places, c) Being able to be fully vested in the state retirement system by age 54, d) Qualifying for state Duty Disability program, which has higher payouts than workman's compensation (Timmerman, 2019). Many agencies have seen a decline in applicants for jail officer positions as many of these individuals are applying for patrol positions that are classified as “protected status”.

The above-mentioned barrier is a prime example of the importance of law enforcement leaders actively engaging with their community. Changes in legislation, such as the Act 10 example, can make it more difficult to attract quality candidates and has caused some officers to leave the profession. A large part of being a law enforcement leader involves sharing the values and mission of the agency with those in the community. Many citizens see the budgetary costs of running a jail and view it as a drain on local tax dollars.

Leaders must be an advocate for their jail officers and work to influence community voters to value the work done by officers working in their local jails. Leaders must be involved in their communities to educate the public on the role of the jail as an integral part of the criminal justice system. By increasing public awareness of the issues and problems facing jail staff in their difficult work, leaders may be able to better present a case to remove barriers and provide incentives to those working in jails.

Retention

One of the issues that law enforcement has with their employees is retention. Retention within agencies is frequently overlooked as efforts are focused on recruiting and hiring. The

thought is that once an officer is hired, a spot is filled and the agency needs to focus on filling all the other vacant spots. This thought process can have negative results on your agency and officers. Retention of officers in the department is key to make sure that your department will grow and develop future leaders. Failure to retain your employees should be just as big of a priority as recruiting and hiring (Personnel Communication, 2021).

No matter where we look, we see law enforcement agencies losing officers. Many departments declared a “staffing crisis” since the racial justice protests began in the summer of 2020. The Seattle Police Department, for instance, had experienced the departure of over 200 officers. Louisville Metro Police Department has also seen more than a 20% decrease in its size, losing over 190 officers since last summer. Additionally, New York Police Department observed about 15% of its department leave in 2020 – that is more than 5,300 officers (McEvoy, 2021). Larger departments are not the only agencies succumbing to this trend. Small-town departments are also feeling the ripple effect and finding it difficult to retain their public servants.

The “mass exodus” of law enforcement cannot blind us from the fact that our profession is still dangerous – physically and mentally. In 2019, the FBI reported 89 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty – 48 felonious and 41 involved in accidents. Though, in 2019 we lost 228 law enforcement officers to suicide (Cain, 2021). This astonishing and concerning statistic needs to be addressed. Human factors and the relationship between law enforcement's job duties, stress, sleep deprivation, and the inability to cope with these factors can highlight the need for wellness. Law enforcement leaders need to regularly discuss wellness. If wellness programs can be established, our officer's physical and mental health will improve, ultimately refining our abilities to retain officers. A retention plan could include offering

assistance with a peer support program, or a financial incentive to get an annual physical exam and to enroll in a physical fitness program. Leaders need to make it part of their department's social norm to focus on their employee's personal wellbeing, which will in turn benefit retention.

Leaders who practice a servant leadership approach can exhibit strength to their subordinates. This strength creates enthusiasm and foresight for the employees, inspiring them to lead and grow. Servant leaders discipline themselves to listen first. (Spain, 2017). We need to change the trend of "exit interviews" of those officers leaving and replace them with periodical meetings to communicate better with our employees. If a department can implement strategies to speak with subordinates on a routine basis about individual and organizational goals, and allow them to contribute to decision making, communication will improve and their sense of belonging to the department will be enhanced.

Similarly, leaders need to communicate with their employees about appreciation. A simple, yet effective, method could be implementing ways to show appreciation. Whether it is a formal letter of commendation, or even a ceremony decorating success in the field, cultivating ideas to motivate and empower others to succeed will improve morale, which will lead to an increase in retention. Reaching out and taking time to learn about the employee's social life will also strengthen the bond between those in supervisory positions and their subordinates. Showing the interest in their personal lives will humanize the link between us and develop communication and loyalty.

Other strategies that impact an agency's capacity to retain officers involves a series of versatility skills and professional growth opportunities. For example, leaders need to exhibit versatility skills, including being able to style shift. The ability for a leader to style shift can influence effectiveness of the team. The skill to understand others in a "detailed and specific

manner” would allow the leader to be in a better position to respond to the needs of their employees (Anderson, 2017). If a leader can be fluid, shifting their style to respond to others' needs, they will achieve the team's goals and enhance communication. This will improve workplace development and promote a positive atmosphere.

Creating professional growth opportunities for employees and collaborating strategies is critical. A Harvard Business Review acknowledges the element that employees may leave their job because of the nature of the job – they get bored. By adding value, creating career paths, training opportunities, and advancements, it drives the employee's commitment to the organization (Kirkland, 2019).

An agency that cultivates officers early on, or “grows” them internally can develop and establish goals and interests for their future careers. Beginning a law enforcement career in a jail or corrections setting with an insight of advancement to a patrol position is an example of forward thinking by an agency to promote them to stay. Moreover, specialty units, such as tactical units, K9 units, instructor opportunities, and so on, will allow further progression that agencies can use as influence for retaining officers. Ultimately, law enforcement leaders need to incorporate a mindset to train their employees well enough so they *can* leave, but treat them well enough so they *won't* leave.

Another key to employee retention is having good leadership. This starts at the very top of your organization. Your department can have five or five thousand officers working for it, but if you do not have good leadership then your department will become a training ground for other departments. One of the worst type of leaders you can have for this is the toxic leader. The toxic leader is arrogant, self-serving, petty, and focus on short term accomplishments that make themselves look better. According to Watt (2017), this type of leader could cause a high

turnover of employees at the department. The employees that leave are normally your better employees as they are looking to be able to contribute as part of a team to improve the department and community they serve. When a high performing employee leaves, the department is left with more mediocre employees. Once this cycle starts and continues you will be left with a department that is not forward thinking, adaptable, or empowers their employees. Most people in their careers have worked for a toxic leader and have thought about moving to another agency to be more fulfilled.

Leadership training needs to be an emphasis at police agencies. In 2021, society is looking to defund police agencies, due to events that happened in Minneapolis regarding the homicide of George Floyd. Police leaders need to explain that that money could be used to train employees to be better leaders at the department. The trickle-down effect will be that better leaders will retain better employees, which in turn will serve the community better. This will not be an instant result and in today's society, people want immediate results (Personnel Communication, 2021).

Another key aspect of retaining employees related to the future of a department is succession planning. Succession planning should provide a clear path that allows employees to become the future leaders in their department. Today officers want to feel a part of the decision process. They have to truly believe that they are a part of the long-term plans in the department. Officers that do not feel this way will look to move to other departments. The succession planning should start at the lowest level and work all the way up to the head of the law enforcement agency. One important portion of a succession plan is having a good mentoring program in place. Officers will feel appreciated. If they have issues or concerns, they will know who to address them with. Departments benefit from having the succession plan and retaining

employees (Personnel Communication, 2021). Leaders will be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their employees. The department should be able to capitalize on the employee's strengths to improve the department. Employees are the most valuable resource that a department has. It takes a lot of time and money to hire and train officers. The department should optimize the return on their investment by using each officer's strengths to help the department. The department should also coach and train the officer's weaknesses. Having a weakness is not a negative thing. Identifying it and working as a team to correct the weakness will help both the officer and the agency. By identifying the strengths and working on the weaknesses, the employee will feel valued and part of the team. This in turn will help as the employee will not be looking to move to another agency or out of law enforcement all together. The department benefits as it will be able to identify the future leaders of the department at a very early stage in the officer's career. Command staff can work with and mentor these officers to promote through the ranks to eventually take over their positions in the department.

Conclusion

In conclusion, leaders in law enforcement departments must reevaluate, improve, and transition the way they recruit, hire, and retain applicants to accommodate for many factors (changing world views, expectations of younger generations and new technologies). As the number of vacancies is greater than the number of applicants, we must change our process to meet the demand. This is an ongoing process and leaders must be able to adapt to a changing environment.

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