

Recruitment in Law Enforcement

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Abstract

The purpose of this capstone project is to identify marketing/messaging to inform/attract the Millennial Generation to a career in law enforcement. With the recruitment levels dropping to historic lows, it is becoming increasingly difficult for law enforcement agencies to identify and recruit quality candidates. The goal is to develop a comprehensive and repeatable marketing concept to attract potential millennial tier two candidates to the law enforcement profession. Leadership will be a foundational component of the comprehensive plan. A conclusion will be articulated.

Recruitment and The Future of Law Enforcement

A recent Forbes survey of the current workforce found interesting results of the willingness for workers to job-hop. One study noted that millennials would work for five different employers before the age of 35 (Landrum, 2017). Furthermore, this study also noted that job-hopping is becoming more of the norm now that there is no longer a stigma attached to leaving a job as in years past. Also, with a strong economy today, law enforcement agencies across the nation are receiving fewer applicants for this dangerous profession. For these reasons and more, effective recruitment into the law enforcement profession is vital to a healthy future. Moreover, with an ever-shrinking group interested in entering law enforcement, agencies are competing for the same candidates. Agencies such as Dallas Texas have had to cancel recent academies due to lack of applicants. They have noted seeing up to a 35% reduction in applications as of late.

Focusing on recruitment and getting the right persons into the profession is vital to sustaining a healthy agency. The leader of the agency is tasked with identifying future leaders, grooming them, and ensuring that a succession plan is in place. One common mistake identified in law enforcement, in terms of promotional growth and succession planning, is the "promote to failure" method that has been used for years (Reynolds, 2016, para.3). Failure occurs when leaders promote those they are limited to selecting based upon by how well they took a test. Succession planning starts with getting the right people into the agency so that there is a good candidate pool to later select from for leadership positions. By actively recruiting well-qualified candidates with leadership skills in the front end, leaders will have better selections to choose from later. Enhanced sound leadership will benefit an agency for years to come.

How Recruitment Issues Affect Any Function in Policing, Agency, and Size

Functions of a police department are maintaining public order and safety, enforcing laws and ordinances, crime prevention, detection and investigating crimes. Traditional law enforcement agencies start recruits at the lowest level of the organization where they are expected to learn their roles and the policies and procedures of their organization. Law enforcement organizations represent different demographic and geographic areas.

Applicants can choose to work in a smaller rural agency or a larger municipal agency. Some of these decisions are based on their personal preferences on where they want to live, whether they have family in the area or if the area offers things that match what is essential in their lives. Larger departments need to focus more time and energy to fill their ranks. Smaller departments need to focus on retention and keeping their officers because many young officers look to gain experience and are lured away by more opportunities offered in larger departments.

For instance, a complaint often heard from young officers is a lack of upward mobility. Small departments have a limited amount of supervisory positions and a limited amount of specialty positions that are attractive to young officers. A larger department has many more opportunities for advancement and multiple opportunities to branch out beyond patrol positions.

Recruiting affects budgets and more. Turnover is expensive. It increases costs related to purchasing equipment for officers who leave, covering shifts to ensure minimums are met, psychological testing, background investigations, and lost time while the new applicants are trained and ready to operate on their own. Turnover causes psychological effects to other officers who are forced to cancel vacations, work overtime, and have reduced time off due to being short

staffed. It reduces collective experience levels as it often can take a year or more for a new officer to become efficient and good at their jobs.

Perhaps our best resources are the resources we already have which are our new hires. We need to cooperate with our new hires and enlist their thoughts and ideas on how to recruit their friends. By making our new hires a critical part of our team, we can learn from what made them make the decisions they made in choosing our agency. Captain Abrashoff's advice to leaders on teams:

I decided that my job was to listen aggressively and to pick up every good idea the crew had for improving the ship's operation... After all, the people who do the nuts and bolts work on a ship constantly see things that officers don't. It seemed to me only prudent for the captain to work hard at seeing through the crew's eyes (2012, p.55).

Underlying the Causes of The Problem

There exists a host of underlying causes that are contributing to the problem of police agencies across the nation not being able to identify and hire qualified candidates from the tier two millennial age group and recruit for the long-term the Generation Z age group. In distinguishing the generations, Dimock stated the following:

In order to keep the Millennial generation analytically meaningful, and to begin looking at what might be unique about the next cohort, Pew Research Center decided a year ago to use 1996 as the last birth year for Millennials for our future work. Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial and anyone in the younger half would be considered tier 2. and

anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation (Dimock, 2019, para. 5).

The list of causes stems from both internal and external sources which create a synergistically negative impact on auspicious recruitment numbers. They include:

- 1) Traditional intent of the hiring process being focused on weeding out based on existing negative characteristics versus using the “process to proactively identify and hire the positive-the candidates who possess the values, character traits, and capabilities” (Morison, 2017, p. 5).
- 2) The “Ferguson Effect” is contributing to a diminished perception of police officers.
- 3) An increase in both public and media scrutiny of police made possible by technology and social media.
- 4) Increased criminal liability for mistakes made in a uniform.
- 5) A healthy economy providing better private sector salaries with less stress.
- 6) Not receiving validation and respect for putting one’s life on the line.
- 7) Historical perspectives of family members/influencers are deterring and discouraging law enforcement career due to race, diversity, or danger (Jackman, 2018, para. 3-13).
- 8) Maturity of individuals as human brain development is potentially not complete until age 25, which is supported by the “landmark Supreme Court case, *Roper v. Simmons*,... that determined capital punishment was unconstitutional for offenders under the age of 18 due to evidence suggesting that executive control does not fully develop until the mid-20’s” (Sukel, 2017, para. 13).
- 9) Departments are lacking a comprehensive recruiting plan.

Social Movements and Political Actions That May Affect the Issue

Generationally, candidates eligible for recruitment will be Millennials and Generation Z. Millennials are the most racially diverse group and makeup approximately 22% of the population. They are expected to surpass the baby boomers as the largest living generation (Schwarz, 2018). Millennials are the most independent group and are most likely to remain unmoored from social institutions. Millennials and Gen Z have a lot in common. However, Gen Z will be the most educated generation.

Social movements that have affected these generations include student debt, the great recession, the influence and rise of social media. Politically, the election of Donald Trump and social and political unrest due to several high-profile police-involved issues such as Ferguson, Missouri, Laquon McDonald (Chicago), and Muhamad Noor (Minneapolis) have had a direct that effects on the public's perception and views of law enforcement in general. Perception has correlated into disdain for law enforcement and discouragement for those who have an interest or have thought about a career in public safety. The use of social media and the news media have fanned flames in the public arena and created a negative outlook for the law enforcement profession (survey data, 2019). These aspects have created a vacuum, creating retirements and a lack of qualified candidates to fill those voids.

Emerging Technologies That May Affect the Issues of Recruitment

Recruiting is a verb and needs to be done with intentional action. According to Church (2006), the Rules for Effective Law Enforcement Recruiting, a recruiter needs to recruit by using email or phone, so the potential recruit can talk to a recruiter instead of an automated system about what the agency offers. Currently, email and web browsers are ways law enforcement agencies connect with potential applicants. According to Pearson (2010), A Look at The Real Opportunity, “tomorrow, text messaging will increase in importance. The next generation of

employees has grown up texting. They do not do email and do not want to” (Parker 2019, para.3), National Command and Staff College stated that SMS text messaging is the wave of the future to communicate with your audience at a 90% open rate and a 70% response rate. With that data illustrating the importance of texting becoming the way of the future, law enforcement agencies will need to adapt their recruitment strategies to encompass the texting tool. One such way to utilize Short Message Service (SMS), also known as text messaging to communicate with potential new hires. Nixle applications uses shortcodes to distribute important information such as hiring and recruitment information as well as critical incident information. Nixle can disseminate road closures, severe traffic, crime information, and local events. To get Nixle information distributed individual will need to use their cell phones to receive the agency information. For example, from instructor Parker's PowerPoint, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department uses Nixle to push out their information by informing public and potential hires to use SMS and Text JoinLASD to 888777.

The pros of law enforcement using Twitter to connect with their targeted audience are ease of use to craft posts that takes less than a minute, quickly absorbable information that contains essential facts, and it's the fastest way to get or send news. The huge benefit in terms of recruiting the target age group of 23-38 years of age or millennial generation has everything to do with how they get their information. With technological improvements, people are no longer are people relying on newspapers or magazine but on their cellphones, which can give them the information they need with just one click. Twitter can assist in recruiting for an agency looking to hire a wide range of viewers. According to Parker (2019), National Command and Staff College, "Our people are our best recruiters." With that in mind individuals from your agency can retweet the agency post which can reach even more viewers. Twitter also promotes secure

connection which means an agency has a great deal of control over the information coming from the agency twitter account.

According to O'Donnell (2015), A Powerful Way to Use Instagram to Recruit Employees, A survey for LinkedIn shows 70 percent of people following a company on its platform were interested in working for that company. The data from the article shows that Instagram is a useful recruitment tool to target the millennial generation. With fifty percent of today's workforce consisting of Millennial, research shows they are willing to take less pay to work at an agency with a good culture. Instagram can help with showing potential hires how positive the agency culture is with pictures posted to the agency Instagram account. The agency Instagram account feed showing how to get hired will attract followers to open positions. "Purple Squirrels" are in today's terms are defined as talented workers that are currently in the workforce. The ability to lure them to an agency takes using the Instagram platform that studies show has 50 times the engagement rate of Facebook or Twitter. Now any agency using Instagram and followers are commenting or liking their pictures, should verbally engage those interested individuals in a timely matter. According to O'Donnell (2015) out of the top 20 companies in 2015, he commented or liked on 5 of those companies Instagram accounts. Only 1 of them responded to his like or commented offering information about their agency. It increases the likelihood other's followers would see the interactive nature of that agency and want to apply or at least show interest.

The use of technology to positively affect recruitment of the millennial generation is paramount in continually growing the agency ranks with individuals that fit agency culture. The platform mention in this section is used widely by current and future in employees. Let the

battlefield of technology related to recruitment begin and whatever agency uses these tools more productively will have the upper hand.

Leadership Role in Recruitment

Leadership plays a significant and pivotal role in the recruitment of applicants to an agency. In today's political and social climate, prospective applicants have soured at the thought of making law enforcement a career. As leaders of an agency, it is our job to adapt to this ever-changing landscape and think more like a marketing executive. According to Simon Sinek: *Start with Why: How great leaders inspire others to act*, why are we here? How do we sell ourselves? What do we have to offer? (Sinek's "Golden Circle") As Sinek states, just because someone claims something, or in this instance agency, is better does not hold to form. Generational constraints have created an even more competitive recruitment arena due to shrinking recruitment numbers and qualified candidates. To attract the best, we as leaders need to inspire those potential officers, and demonstrate that we have developed an open culture with shared values and goals. We need to demonstrate and practice Authentic Leadership (Normore, 2018), promoting enthusiasm, positivity, and openness within our organizations. Our greatest asset is the people we currently have in our given agencies. Their opinions, words, and overall satisfaction speaks volume to all they meet. Seeking out applicants that make emotional intelligence a constant practice is a priority. An emotionally intelligent applicant is in a constant state of self-awareness and in-tune with their surroundings. By hiring applicants with these qualities, they can foster a culture within an agency of high performers. Emotionally intelligent applicants can demonstrate a passion for their work and practice empathy for those they come in contact. In addition to high performers and emphatic candidates, they display sound decision-

making skills. These candidates' moral compass should always be pointed toward exhibiting virtues of peace, equity, justice, service which are the cornerstone of public safety officer.

Word of mouth from those within an organization can create a massive advantage in recruitment if we are committed to being and practicing authenticity.

These aspects lend themselves to creating a positive reputation for the agency and generating a buzz for those interested in starting a law enforcement career for a particular agency. The recruitment work starts within agencies four walls with providing a generational friendly culture for an organization and not taking anything or anyone for granted. Ensure that all your employees are valued and essential parts of the team that have been empowered with responsibilities to pique and keep their interests while creating a sense of belonging and buy-in.

Personal and Professional Experiences

Historically, applying for law enforcement positions consisted of contacting the agency, getting on a list with human resources and staying current on upcoming physical tests and subsequent interviews. Experiences are based off working for multiple law enforcement agencies. Each agency had difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified applicants, and it did not matter if it was a large metropolitan agency or small rural department.

The landscape of recruiting has changed law enforcement needs to focus its recruiting efforts toward millennials who've been raised with technology and demand easy-to-access information. Law enforcement needs to ensure agencies have easy-to-access, short, informative and entertaining content available for someone doing an employment search.

Agencies need to have simple employment applications that can be filled out online with precise directions that are user-friendly. Law enforcement has begun using Skype interviews for applicants that are out of state in the initial phases of hiring. Law enforcement should provide

information on benefits and give an overview of the process. Law enforcement has changed some shifts and begun asking for input that impacts which shifts part-time-applicants (e.g., future full-time employees) would be able willing to work into their schedules, hoping to recruit younger correctional officers.

Recruitment Plan Checklist

Throughout this document, specific suggestions have been provided to address various issues. Given that the underlying causes and contributing factors working against recruitment efforts are many and varied, it makes the most sense to combat the issue by utilizing a comprehensive recruitment plan. Listed below is a checklist that any agency desiring to modernize their recruitment efforts should consider implementing. It is intentionally generalized so that any agency that finds it useful can customize their plan.

- 1) Agency heads need to sanction and support the program.
 - a. Funding
 - b. Workforce
 - c. Planning
 - d. Administrative control of social media platforms
 - e. Culture that people want to be a part of
 - i. Every officer is a leader
 - ii. Emotional intelligence
 - iii. Growth mindset
- 2) Put someone with authority in charge but utilizing rank and file personnel who represent the age group, diversity, and other characteristics the agency should be targeting.
- 3) Utilize modern marketing and branding strategies.

a. Utilize images and more importantly social media videos frequently to educate and connect with your target audience where they are.

i. Take the guesswork out of what is required and what will happen. Create an experience for the audience that brings them inside the process.

b. Have a modern website with infrastructure that is organized and easily accessible.

c. Connect the message to the mission and vision statements.

d. Give employees an elevator pitch and make sure they know how to connect to potential candidates with information.

e. Utilize educational programs.

i. Explorers.

ii. Citizen Police Academy.

iii. Technology safety education programs.

iv. Utilize foot patrols to encourage low pressure/nonenforcement personal contacts.

f. Utilize other technology platforms that disseminate info and connect people to information

i. Nixle short-codes

ii. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook

iii. Use major incidents and planned events as touch points to drive messaging, site traffic, and candidate applications

4) Advertise agency strengths

1. Standard of living

2. Training

3. Service

4. Opportunities for development
5. Diversity
6. Benefits package
7. Mentorship
8. Streamlined application processes
9. Location – Desired place of residence

Conclusion

The problem of recruiting Millennials in the short term and Generation Z in the long term is relevant to the successful future of law enforcement. Agencies must leverage emerging technologies and address underlying causes, including social movements and political action. The role of leadership is a critical component in developing a comprehensive recruitment plan to ensure the success and longevity of the agency.

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