

**Law Enforcement Recruitment and Retention in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

With the advent of social media platforms, the successes and failures of law enforcement organizations are easily spread far and wide throughout the country. These failures and perceptions can create an unpopular view of modern law enforcement and can be further exasperated by social movements such as Black Lives Matters and the Anti-Fascist Movement (ANTIFA). These social movements and perceptions can create recruiting and retention challenges for law enforcement organizations and create personal and ethical struggles for people considering a career in law enforcement. These challenges, coupled with cultural and generational issues create a real need for relevant and progressive, approaches to recruiting new officers to the profession and retaining the officers already on the job. The purpose of this project is to identify those significant challenges and provide potential solutions to those problems.

### **Law Enforcement Recruitment and Retention in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The lineage of modern law enforcement can be traced back to 17<sup>th</sup> Century America. In the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, American Law Enforcement found its birth as an informal “watch” composed of volunteers and persons performing these duties as a form of punishment (Potter 2013). These informal organizations were eventually formalized in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the first police force established in Boston, Massachusetts, followed by a host of other major cities in the United States. Once established, these police organizations had full time employees, were governed by rules and regulations and overseen by local governments. However, it was approximately another hundred years before police departments started considering an emphasis on professionalization of policing.

To coincide with the historical formalization of police organizations, is the history of American Sheriff Departments. More than 1,300 years ago in England the first Sheriffs were elected by groups of families, to maintain law and order. As time went on the Sheriff’s role expanded and changed, and they were appointed by county noblemen or by the King himself. Some of their expanded roles included the collection of tax on behalf of the King and entertaining foreign delegations.

Today in United States of America, Sheriff’s Departments number 3000 and the role of the Sheriff Department’s responsibilities have continued to expand with additional roles in the administration of the county jails and search and rescue. One thing has remained a constant all these years is the process of electing a Sheriff by the people. This significant selection of the chief law enforcement officer and protector of the citizen’s is an important part of American Culture. Evaluated and selected by their display of their magnanimous virtues of Honor, Nobility, Responsibility and Faithfulness (Hoina 2017) they are still often considered a barrier

between the citizen's and a runaway Federal Government. Although there have been technological advancements, changes to law and societal changes, there is still a constant, the need for law enforcement personnel and the recruitment and retention of these people.

In the winter of 1934 Donald C. Stone, employed by the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory, suggested a five-part procedure for the recruitment of police officers. The procedure outlined the need to assess an individual's intelligence and aptitude, physical examination to determine the health status of the individual, as well as a character investigation and personal interview, followed by a probationary period (Stone 1934). Stone stated, "This subject of recruitment requires far greater study than has been given to it" (Stone, p. 998). In summary, Stone also noted successful police administrations were built on the careful selection of police personnel. (Stone, p. 1000).

### **Recruiting Challenges and Strategies**

Law enforcement agencies today are experiencing increased difficulties in meeting the needs and demands for qualified applicants who possess the character traits required for a professional and contributing career within their organization, community and jurisdictions. Past and sometimes current hiring and selection practices have been unsuccessful in locating, hiring and retaining quality personnel that have positively embraced the mission and vision of the law enforcement organization (Wooten, 2019). For law enforcement organizations to meet today's challenges require the agency to first take an in-depth look, evaluate and define its culture, which is important to market the agency core values that answers the reason "Why" they exist and "Why" they do what they do (Sinek, 2019). The Golden Circle as defined in the book "Start with Why" by Simon Sinek, demonstrates the importance of starting with the reason "Why" the agency exists and define the purpose, the cause, and the belief in such a way as to inspire the

importance for the core values and the reason for being part of that agency that is something special.

The current recruiting methods will require the organizational leaders to accept change in order to meet the challenges for today and the future succession for the organization. One change and goal that will assist in this progression is to keep in mind that an agency must not only hire for the vacancies but to hire for the future. The challenges for recruiting quality personnel for any organization is by the effective ability to attract the type of applicants you want and need, the growing competition with other organizations, and the understanding of the generational differences, preferences and values of today's law enforcement applicants.

Today more than ever an organizations culture matters. Most agencies have within their organizations at least four different and unique generations of employees that include, Baby Boomers, people born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, people born between 1965 and 1976; Millennials or Generation Y, people born between 1977 and 1995; and Generation Z or Centennials, people born from 1996 to present (Snyder, 2019). This is why the culture, defined as the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes an organization, is so important in an effective recruitment strategy. The organization must seek input from personnel within the agency to develop an action plan to market both Millennials and Generation Z. Applicant qualities need to address integrity, ability to make good judgements and decisions, agency values, respect and diversity, community service, integrity and honesty as the twin pillars of credibility (Police One, 2018).

Suggested strategies could include utilizing recruitment on many social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat for example, movie theaters, cable access channels, radio, and school career fairs. Several different types of professionally prepared videos using the latest

technology with the assistance of Generation Z persons depicting different aspects in the law enforcement profession, community policing, school resource officers, and specialty units within the organization. Developing recruiting and testing applications accessible and submission by smartphones to the organization. These mobile applications could also be attached to QR Codes and attached to agency patrol vehicles as another means to advertise during the recruiting process. Applicants could be required to submit a resume video with the application. Those applicants that are selected and advanced to the next step of the hiring process could even be interviewed via a remote internet option such as Skype or Zoom Video Conferencing that would allow for the interview with the applicant to be interviewed anywhere on any device.

Attributes that the twenty first century potential employees are looking for include pride in the agency and job, meaning and purpose, appreciation and recognition, opportunity to grow, respect, leaders who listen, value and worth, contribution, training and education, education and benefits. For some people who may have contemplated a career in the law enforcement profession, their minds have been changed by the anti-police sentiment over the last several years. It is for this reason that law enforcement organizations must provide and display credible leadership at all levels if they hope to recruit quality people for their organization, now and in the future for serving their communities.

### **Solutions to Recruiting Challenges**

Law Enforcement Agencies nationwide are struggling to recruit and retain qualified law enforcement officers. According to Carothers, Ramsey, Smoot and Thompson (2019), “In a 2019 report on workforce trends, the Center for State & Local Government Excellence reported that 32% of local governments listed policing as the hardest profession to fill. This figure is up from 15% in 2015.” (Carothers, 2019). For agencies to combat this issue, they need

to understand what factors are responsible for them. One hurdle that agencies need to overcome in the negative stigma that is portrayed of law enforcement within the media. The communities we serve demand the highest standards from our officers and expect that agencies hold them accountable. In order to properly manage this issue, agencies need to make sure that their hiring standards are set high, so that we start out with the best candidates. The process has to be rigorous, so that only the most qualified applicants are accepted, stressing that we are looking for candidates who have a strong moral compass. This means recruiting officers that display high integrity, and those who have values which align with the agency's Mission, Vision and Values. Agencies should strive to hire officers that demonstrate Magnus.

To strengthen the hiring process, an agency needs to implement consistent procedures that all applicants must to adhere to. This should include a set of basic standards that need to be met relating to education, physical fitness, criminal history as well as a psychological evaluation. This process should consist of a thorough background investigation, one that can weed out candidates that do not align with the agency's values. According to Police Chief Magazine, "Law enforcement agencies have experienced astronomical applicant disqualification rates in their attempts to fill existing vacancies. Failure rates during the law enforcement screening process have been reported as high as an astonishing 98.5 percent." (Smith, 2019) Even with knowing these numbers, law enforcement agencies cannot lower their standards just to fill vacant positions. They need to be steadfast, only hiring the right people. In the book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins states "In fact, leaders of companies that go from good to great start not with "where" but with "who." They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats. And they stick with that discipline—first the people, then the direction—no matter how dire the circumstances" (Maynard, 2015). We must

strive for excellence in the recruiting process so that we can hopefully prevent future problems at our agency by getting the right people on the bus.

Understanding the variances related to different generations of employees is essential to law enforcement agencies. We need to understand how we market our agency to different audiences. If we are looking to hire brand new officers, then chances are that they will be part of Generation Y and Generation Z. If we are looking to hire experienced officer (Lateral hires) than we are probably looking at Generations X, Y and possibly Baby Boomers. Different generations have their own strengths and weaknesses that law enforcement agencies can use to their benefit to recruit the best potential candidates from each. Generation Y (better known as Millennials) are those born between 1982 and 2004 while Generation Z are those born between 1995 and 2015. These generations are different than the Baby Boomers (1946-1964) and Generation X (1964-1980) employees that they will be replacing and/or working with (Wooten, 2019).

Law enforcement agencies must be flexible in their recruiting styles, moving away from the past, traditional ways of doing so. The newer generations (Y, Z) were born into the digital age, so they are very comfortable with technology. Agencies need to utilize social media platforms in their recruiting divisions. This includes using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and other social media sites. Gen Y and Z are more comfortable using these types of sources, they are more likely to communicate with texts and emails rather than by phone or in person. As noted previously, some agencies have utilized various types of videos to “show off” their agencies. These videos can be used by recruiting departments to reach out to a broad audience with little cost to the agency to produce. The Larimer County Sheriff’s Office produced a 5 minute and 24 second video called “*The Greatest*”. According to YouTube,



as of October the, 2019, the video has been viewed 64,857 times (YouTube, 2018). This video was used to show the many aspects of the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, it was also used as a recruiting tool. This is just one of the ways that an agency can use technology to recruit new and lateral officers. Other methods that an agency can use to recruit qualified candidates is to reach out to local colleges and universities, attend job fairs within a reasonable distance to their agency, create social media pages that regularly show recruiting videos. They can also establish Explorer programs for high aged students. This can create a pipeline of future officers. According to Our department hosts the TPD Law Enforcement Explorer Post #7721. This mentorship program brings in youth aged 14 to 21 to educate and train them in law enforcement experiences. Weekly, they get a unique look at what law enforcement does and why they do it. Over 20 past explorers are currently employed with the agency (Cobb, 2017). Recruiting divisions within an agency need to consider what a new employee is seeking when they are looking for a future employer. This includes, an agency that provides a competitive salary, benefits package, advancement opportunities, flexible schedules, lateral assignments as well as a positive working environment. In order to draw the best candidates, the agency needs to structure their recruiting methods so that they are attractive to potential recruits.

### **Challenges of Retention**

Law enforcement leaders today face significant challenges when it comes to retaining officers. The Washington Post reported, in a "PERF survey of nearly 400 police departments, 29 percent of those who left their police job voluntarily had been on the force less than a year, and an additional 40 percent had been on the job less than five years." (Jackman, 2018) Locally the Colorado Springs Independent reported, "From 2012 through 2018, the Colorado Springs Police Department lost 290 sworn officers to retirement, career changes, personal or other reasons."

(Zubeck, 2019) The challenges come from a variety of sources and are both external and internal in nature. External factors affecting retention come from a rising economy that is creating more jobs and increasing salaries in the private sector. A rising economy can also create more opportunities for officers to move from one agency to another for an increase in pay and/or opportunity. External factors are very difficult for an agency or city to influence. As a result, agencies must look to internal influences that lead officers to leave. The main internal issue facing law enforcement regarding retention is a failure of leadership to create a cohesive plan to address the underlying internal issues.

Although money can be a factor influencing officers to leave an organization, more often employees leave because of the people leading them and/or the culture of the organization does not meet their needs. “People do not leave jobs, they leave managers.” (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999) “The number one internal factor affecting an employee’s decision to stay or leave a job is the relationship with their immediate supervisor.” (Orrick) The culture many senior leaders were hired under revolved around a Baby Boomer generation that valued loyalty, salary and job security over many factors that influence younger generations today. The millennial generation is most likely to make up most of a department’s officer corps and also be the most likely to consider a job change. Today’s millennial officers have a different set of higher order needs that are often overlooked by the senior commanders who more than likely identify as Baby Boomer or Generation X.

Four factors can influence an employee to leave an organization. First, is if an employee does not believe they are receiving the proper coaching and mentoring towards career enhancement they may look to make a career change. Employees want to feel valued. “If the people working for an agency feel content with their situation at the agency, they will recruit for

the agency. If they feel valued and supported by the agency they will remain with the agency.” (Staff, 2019) Many employees want to work in a culture where they are receiving regular feedback and coaching. They want to receive education and training that will lead to career enhancement and to positive personal development. This is training beyond the regular skills training they receive every year. Officers want opportunities to learn about leadership, specialty areas of development, and can work on advanced degrees. Officers want to work for leaders who teach and model Servant Leadership or someone who thinks about serving others before serving themselves.

Second, employees will consider leaving an organization if they believe they are not making an impact on the agency or the community. Employees want to understand how the things they every day meet the mission and value statements of the organization. Employees have a desire to know more than just the What, they also want to know the Why. (Sinek 2019) Understanding the Why will help feel as though they belong to organization and not just work for it. Employees want to also be able to see a path towards future participation in specialty units and/or a promotion process. Being selected for a specialty unit or promotion gives them career validation that they are being successful and making an impact on the organization and also their own personal lives. Part of this is a desire to leave a legacy with the agency and the community.

Third, law enforcement officers will leave an organization if they do not believe the organization cares about their wellbeing. Officers today want to work in an organization that creates a culture of wellness. This concern for their wellness involves having concern for them on a daily basis, long term, and in times of crisis. Modern law enforcement officers want to work for an agency and leaders who value them as people, which also includes their families. “Additionally, agencies should highlight their dedication to having a family-friendly workplace.

When compared with previous generations in which work overshadowed personal life, millennials are more interested in striking a balance between the two.” (Langhah 2017).

Fourth, law enforcement officers will consider leaving their organization if they believe the organization does not have a culture of changing and modernizing. Officers want to work with modern technology and have an expectation that employers will provide the necessary technology. According to a PWC Study, “59% said that an employer’s provision of state-of-the-art technology was important to them when considering a job, but they habitually use workplace technology alongside their own.” (www.pwc.com, 2011) Technology is going to be a significant challenge for leaders in the retention of younger officers. The saying, “That’s the way we have always done it” is not going to work for younger employees who desire to use modern technology and devices. Technology is also a reflection on the department’s ability and desire to change. Law enforcement officers also want to have a say in the change and the technology being used by agencies. If officers do not feel as though they have a say in how an organization operates then they will lack the ownership and ties that will retain them.

### **Solutions to Retention Within Agencies**

Now that we have mentioned the challenges faced by many agencies it’s time to look to the future. What are some of the solutions that we have available right now? What can we do to make an impact and change the legacies we are currently leaving? What can we learn from and who can we learn it from? The skills and styles we have in our agencies are abundant, if we know what to look for and how to draw it out of them in a constructive process and put it to use. Even though this list is not exhaustive, and every leader and agency will face nuances in their

part of the country, we believe that the following 4 areas will have an immediate impact and get your agency racing to the future with a strong committed crew.

*Coaching, Mentoring, Education, Training (CMET)*

According to Andrews (2009), the longer you've known someone- the more history there is between you- the longer it will take to establish in their mind that you have truly changed. Remember, forgiveness is an altogether different thing from trust or respect. Forgiveness is about the past. Trust and respect are about the future. Forgiveness will be in the hands of others and can be given to you, but trust and respect are in your own hands and must be earned. CMET is an area that we can impact now. How many of us have skills training set up on a set schedule? These skills are dire when they become needed in each situation. However, what are we doing everyday in the workplace? We are out dealing with the public. We are talking to families, adults, kids, leaders, business professionals, and more. What can we do in these moments? We can coach, we can mentor, we can educate, and we can train. We can do this by instilling this same mindset in house. We need to develop our people and their skills. Coaching each other in peer groups after finding a new skill or process that will enhance the agency. We can also use Mentoring by having leaders evaluate their staff and find those star performers to mentor. This process will build relationship and have a stronger impact within the agency. Using Mentoring as a program will allow us to set goals for both the mentor and mentee. When goals are met or checked off, we can then evaluate and start the process again.

According to Dickens (1865), "No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another." Add to this a process of education development that everyone has access to. We can all learn from others in many facets. Take the time to seek out education topics that help build

stronger ties with community and with your personnel. The progression of education can then pass up or down and along the agency in the coaching and mentoring process.

### *Culture and Impacting your Legacy*

We are all currently leaving a Legacy but is it one that will be followed and improved upon. Will that Legacy grow beyond this generation and be greater in the next?

“Dare to be joyful. Serve in ways that bring you joy. Angry, unhappy people leave sad legacies. Monitor your impact on others. What are you doing when you make the biggest difference? Do more of that. Develop and maximize your talent, strengths, and skills. Know yourself – Bring yourself. Do what matters now. Everyone who’s at the end of life says it goes by fast. Seize small opportunities. Big may follow. Stop waiting to make a difference. Start with those closest to you and the ones you spend the most time with. Bring your best self to work and family. Everyone has at least two selves. Bring out the best one. Think service not success. Relax. Don’t run around building a legacy. Run around making a difference. Elevate the needs of others over your own.” (Rockwell, 2014) This speaks volumes to what we do every day. We need to start now and make sure our mission and values meet the goals that we are setting. Then align this to the cores of who we are. As we take on these roles and embody the principles this will begin to transform not only us as leaders but family and the community we serve.

### *Wellness*

How many times do we get to the end of a day or week or career, and with a sigh of relief, exclaim “Whew, I’m done!”. With the ups and downs of law enforcement, all too many times we don’t take the time to help ourselves. The focus is usually outward and directed to those we serve. This trend has taken a large toll on the profession and has manifested in very ugly

ways. 578 officers have taken their lives over the last 3.5 years (Blue HELP, 2019) This should be alarming, and we need to step back and evaluate the best practices to make sure our people are taken care of as well.

Why do we only react to calls for service rather than flip the switch and be proactive? There are ways to predict with reasonable certainty that we can be in the right place at the right time. This is the same thought process we need when it comes to the wellness of our staff. Knowing the types of calls that we handle and what it takes to process through them physically and mentally, then activating the plans to help our people succeed is paramount. Having access to staff or agency resources to accomplish this will change the environment. We then use incentives to allow our people to regenerate and rejuvenate so they are stronger both physically and mentally. This will help them thrive, so when they get to end and say “Whew, I’m done!” it is with a sense of pride in the accomplishments that are with them and the successes they leave for others.

#### *Continuous Improvement Team and Star Performer Planning*

The last piece to this puzzle is to facilitate involvement from all levels of your agency. Not only are you looking to keep your current staff but also your future staff. We know all too well that what officers did in the 1900’s is different than what we do today. There are many technologies and best practices that have come from our ability to improvise and overcome. Opening the door to a young officer and allowing them the freedom, within guidelines, to bring about new ideas can facilitate growth in areas that may not be seen or understood from a 20-year veteran. Allowing them to take ownership in the agency growth, by developing the ideas brought about in the team meetings, creates a bond with the others in the team. When the ideas are implemented and the agency benefits, those bonds grow even stronger and reach beyond to

others in the agency from where the ideas may have originated. Having the chance to make a difference at any level can develop ownership in the agency and its success. The diversity of these teams will bring diversity to the solutions needed in today's law enforcement career. We can never forget that each person that aligns themselves to our agency brings a set of skills and traits, morals and characteristics, that have value to them and can bring value to us.

As we have learned throughout each of our experiences, training, and education, retention is a key to building a prominent agency. The value that we develop within our people can never be measured. If we lose our people to themselves, or to other agencies and careers, we only know of the void they left behind. However, if we can change this now, we reverse our thinking and improve upon what we know we can, then we will be stronger for it. So, when we take the time to build up our people, coach them, mentor them, train them, help them, and then set them free to run this race set before them, we will cultivate stronger agencies, built by resilient people, making solid decisions, leading us beyond the status quo and into a future that will impact generations.



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