

**OPTIMIZING POLICE APPLICANTS RECRUITING FROM A DIVERSE
COMMUNITY IN THE FUTURE**

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

This study was initiated when the impact of baby boomer retirements in San Mateo County and specifically in the City of Daly City was recognized as having a dramatic impact on the staffing of law enforcement agencies in the near future. Nationwide, police executives are searching for good men and women to fill the ranks. Recruiting will become more critical considering the changes in demographics, the quality of secondary school education, the competitive hiring among law enforcement agencies, the diversity within the community and the department and the need to hire police officers with the interpersonal skills to work in a community oriented police department.

In May of 1998, a survey was sent out to 19 police agencies in San Mateo County. The survey asked questions relating to the number of retirements in the next five and ten years and the number of officers each agency expects to hire in the same increments. The survey also asked the number of supervisors expected to retire in the same period of time. In the first five years, the number of police officers that will be hired as estimated by each agency is 27% of their current authorized strength. In the following five years the total jumps to 33% of the estimated authorized strength. In the first five years 15% (148 sworn personnel) of the authorized strength is expected to retire. The percentage of supervisors included in that number is 43%. The following five years, between 2003 and 2008 indicates an increase in retirements and hiring of personnel. Of the personnel working in the year 2003, 18% are expected to retire and 30% will be supervisors.

This high rate of retirements will challenge police management. Executives will need to know and understand the emerging workers of tomorrow, workplace diversity, societal attitudes and how to provide a quality service to an ever-changing community.

The world around us will change and police executives must prepare their departments for the future by creating a vision and a process to support that vision. Opportunity is a byproduct of this survey. There is a shift from what we know now, to an evolving future we can anticipate. We must redefine the role of an officer to fit the vision of the future department, re-evaluate the skills and abilities that compliment the community policing philosophy. Agencies should engage in a progressive recruitment process with an ongoing mentoring program to seek the best from the community and ensure training supports the mission of the department to provide the community with the best service possible.

To analyze the issue a Nominal Group Technique (NGT) panel was utilized to identify trends and events in an effort to optimize recruiting police applicants from a diverse community and develop ideas for determining the impact on an organization and a strategic plan. The panel identified trends that they believed were necessary for the future of the department to nurture partnerships with the community. Trends are identified as a series of influences that create a direction or inclination or course of action on a single or series of subjects. Educating the public about law enforcement and presenting a career in law enforcement were two key points in removing barriers of understanding from a diverse community. Frequent testing for police applicants was critical and the panel stressed the importance and value of frequent testing with a maximum, one-year eligibility list. The panel also believed, the emphasis for the police agency should be placed on being more competitive in the job market, for recruiting police officers that have the skills to perform in a community oriented policing philosophy. Officers hired, if the recruiting were aggressive, would be reflective of the

ethnic and gender balance within the community. The future of the department will be determined on its ability to deliver a quality service and to meet the community's expectations.

Of the events identified, two were held to be the most negative and would have a devastating impact on the trends. Events are inclinations that have a potential to occur and may have a significant impact on your agency. It may or may not happen, but there is a probability of that event occurring. Those events were lawsuits regarding discrimination and a negative police action. The lawsuits could be in many forms. It was generally held that a member of a protected class would file legal action against the department for an action that should have been corrected, before it became an issue for the courts to decide. The other negative action would be an incident similar to the Rodney King case. If the police were to be involved in a highly publicized incident, similar to Rodney King, it would take years for the department to regain its credibility within the community. Recruiting efforts would be greatly hampered with the information of the incident being common knowledge.

There were some positive incidents that favored the identified trends. They were an increase in immigration, yearly police testing, and a mentoring program. The increase in immigration was viewed as positive because more interest would be generated into law enforcement as a career if the immigrants' exposure were positive and at an early age. Positive contacts and an understanding of the police task in the community could promote an interest in young immigrants that may foster the idea of law enforcement as a career.

Yearly police testing with an eligibility list of no more than 12 months was

identified as the most critical event that would have the biggest positive affect on the department and named trends. There was a discussion in the group about the importance of yearly testing and a one-year eligibility list. The most common belief in the group was the best would be hired before the year was out and anyone remaining on the list would not be competitive enough to win a position with another departments. Time and money should not be risked hiring a mediocre police applicant.

Mentoring was a key issue. The panel was aware of the efforts by police departments to form partnerships with the adult community, but had very little information about what was being done for the younger generations. Consensus was reached on the ability to grow your own by participating in elementary and high school programs, developing high visibility in the schools in roles other than enforcement, and eliminating misconceptions about police officers within the minds of students. Along, with changing perceptions and roles, the police must offer and foster programs to provide young people with the opportunity to learn about police work in the police department. Some departments aggressively support sport programs, student academy, explorer units, internships, police cadet programs, citizen academy and a reserve program.

There is an undeniable urgency to look into the future with the hopes of planning today for the changes that will impact organizations. Organizations desire to reflect their customer base for understanding, communication and identifying their needs.¹ The most significant change is the composition of the workforce. The emerging workforce, which will be a mosaic of colors, languages and cultural traditions and values, represents an immense challenge for both organizations and employees.² The average age of the workers will rise, while the pool of younger workers will shrink. More women will enter

the workforce, minorities will represent a larger portion of the entry-level workers, the population and workforce will include a higher percentage of immigrants than any time in since World War I and the population and workforce will grow more slowly than in the 1990s³ Changing demographics are requiring executives to rethink the way they manage a workforce that is increasingly diverse in terms of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, education, lifestyle and disability. Instead of perpetuating a homogeneous workforce with a single approach to practice, organizations are beginning to value diverse backgrounds of their employees in order to strengthen their organization. The leadership of organizations needs to prepare for the diversity that is developing.

The definition of diversity is expanding beyond race, ethnic background and gender. Diversity includes discussion of all human differences, including religion, sexual orientation, education, background, age, and even dimensions such as union / non-union and management / non-management. Diversity is changing the scope of management from a personal to an organizational issue. Employees must recognize that building understanding through effective management makes diversity work for an organization rather than against it.⁴ Modern diversity management seeks to help employees appreciate all human differences whether they arise from race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. A commitment to diversity management is a commitment to all employees, not an attempt at preferential treatment.⁵ The implications of diversity are positive. It is a benefit to the organization because promoting diversity attracts talented people, fosters good public relations, a promise of equal career opportunities, lowers absenteeism, turnover rates and job dissatisfaction. It becomes easier to recruit talented workers from all backgrounds,

by cultivating a diverse workforce, because it promotes strong community support. Employees benefit from diversity. Workers, who feel valued, tend to be happier. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences can bring to an organization diverse problem-solving skills. The organization benefits by receiving input on how to improve the job or procedure from employees that feel free to offer insight and suggestions.⁷

Law enforcement has moved from the professional model to the community-policing problem solving model. The transition was not easy and continues to be a challenge. Establishing partnerships, identifying problems, implementing solutions basically, changed the process of service rendered by police agencies. The transition to community policing produced a need for agencies to re-evaluate their personnel selection, training and employment standards. Recruiting police applicants with the interpersonal skills to work in a community policing philosophy becomes a priority.

Police organizations need to be aggressive in marketing the image of their department and recruiting from the community they serve and area around them. Law enforcement agencies that are serious about finding more applicants from minority groups need to utilize publications serving ethnic groups, native language publications, locals colleges, job training centers, job fairs, employment offices, career days and create an attractive employment poster for display in areas of heavy foot traffic. Police officers should be available to speak at community meetings, attend events, and cultivate contacts for a recruiting network in mentoring programs.

High school students throughout the United States are ill prepared to go into the work place. They lack mathematical, communication and team skills critical in most jobs today. The main deficiencies noted in the applicants were their weakness in literary skills

(reading and writing), interpersonal skills and a history of narcotic and criminal activity.⁸ In order to address these deficiencies, some departments have created “student academy” in partnership with the local high schools and junior colleges. The programs are designed to expose students to various aspects of public safety, but also to develop the student’s self esteem. The “student academy” stresses the importance of “doing the right thing.” To maintain a good standing in the academy, students are required to have a “C” average in their studies.⁹ Other departments’ sponsor mentoring in forms of explorer programs, internships, cadet positions and reserve programs. In many departments, mentoring programs are seldom viewed as a long-term investment to produce future applicants, maybe they should.

School liaison officers are ambassadors of law enforcement on campuses. They bring with them conflict resolution skills, counseling techniques, mentor students, overcome the “us and them” thinking and create positive contacts on a day to day basis with students. School liaison officers have the opportunity to be not only mentors, but also recruit for the future applicants for law enforcement.

Community policing has allowed agencies to re-evaluate the role of a police officer from one of enforcer to that of a provider of quality service, customized to the community’s needs.¹⁰ Many departments are now requiring applicants to take writing proficiency and reading comprehension tests. Those departments already using these tests have raised the level of acceptance. Years ago, college was a common prerequisite for an application to become a police officer. The trend reversed and high school replaced many of the two-year college requirements. With the skills necessary to apply community policing the requirement of several years of college is popular again.¹¹

Departments are varying their testing methods to better sense the ability of their applicants. Many are testing candidates' communication, leadership, planning and organizing skills. A common screening of applicants is a role-playing scenario usually involving a community member from the role-playing; evaluators have a sense of the candidate's character traits and interpersonal skills.¹²

Police work as portrayed throughout the media is a collection of exciting and challenging assignment with twisted and intriguing criminal plots. The image does not fit the reality mold and often applicants need to be aware of the difference and tested for their perception of police work.

The role of a police officer in a community-policing, problem solving department is one of quality of life rather than full time enforcement. It is important to explain the difference of the image of law enforcement and the reality.¹³ In the police academy of years ago, the criminal law, survival, traffic investigation and enforcement were the core subjects. They are still important and should never be de-emphasized. Now, in addition to the core subjects, police officers are learning about values, quality of life issues, character traits, organizational principles and the value of ongoing training.¹⁴

In the world around us there are constant changes. The information age is upon us and great strides are made every six months in the ability to share and transmit information. In society, changes are also constantly evolving. It is the duty of law enforcement to recognize the changes and to adapt. The sole purpose for law enforcement is to provide a quality service to the community. Line personnel, who present the first impression of law enforcement in the community, most frequently render this service. There is no reason not to aggressively seek the best in the community to

provide a quality service and represent the department as a professional organization.

SUMMARY

Administrators need to recognize the opportunities of the future and to plan. Demographics are changing throughout the United States, especially in California and specifically in the City of Daly City. Demographic information indicates the ability and availability of the future workforce and the competition for qualified police applicants. Trends and events were identified that highlight the importance of recruiting personnel and the need for a plan. Diversity in the workplace is a reality. It has long range benefits to an organization and if not properly managed, devastating problems for the future of the organization. Stakeholders were identified during the strategic plan and implementation presented a collection of new and old concepts that need to be revisited for the benefit of the organization and its future.

Slow population growth, baby boomer retirements, workforce diversity, gender diversification, immigration and the level of education proficiency is all reasons to be concerned with the future. The time to understand is now. There is a sense of urgency to prepare for change. Law enforcement leadership must realize the time to plan for the change is now, because the future is tomorrow.⁷

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Richard W. Judy and Carol D'Amico, "Workplace 2020, Work and Workers in the 21st Century." Hudson Institute 1997, p. 108.
- ² Ibid. p. 53.
- ³ Ibid, p. 21.
- ⁴ Human Resource Institute, "Managing Diversity, Eckerd College, Florida, p.8."
- ⁵ The Commerce Appeal, Campell, May 14, 1995, p. 12a.
- ⁶ Human Resource Institute, pp. 89-90.
- ⁷ Judy, p. 64.
- ⁸ San Bernardino Sheriff's Office, "Public Safety Internship Academy" 1995, p. 2.
- ⁹ Robert Goldstein, "Problem Oriented Policing", Chapter 2, Progress in Policing, pp. 10-11.
- ¹⁰ Melissa Reuland and Gary Cordner, "Recruiting and Selection for Community Policing: An Analysis of Organizational Change." PERF Publications, April 1997, p. 8.
- ¹¹ Dave Pettinari and Dan Corsentino. "Quality Begins with Selection," Community Policing Exchange, March / April, p. 5.
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ Howard Lebowitz, "Academy Training Curriculum Minimizes the Physical Factor, Emphasizes Moral Decision Making," Community Policing Exchange, March / April 1997, p. 2.

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