

FUTURE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES
FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Article

California Commission on
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By

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This Command College 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).

In May of 2000, the Marin County Sheriff's Office was in the midst of an open and continuous recruitment and testing process in efforts to fill ten openings. We were no different than any other agency in attempting to hire large numbers of qualified people from a single recruitment and testing exercise. Although normally we don't have problems with attracting a sufficient number of applicants to apply and begin the testing process, it is the quality of the candidate in terms of ethical, moral and truthfulness that we struggle to find. Law enforcement continually recruits through the media, job fairs at college campuses, at high schools, and at other large public events throughout the year. We wanted to examine this process more closely and identify a strategy to make us more successful.

Our Professional Standards Unit held a meeting to discuss this issue and closely examined the entire recruitment and testing process. We started from scratch and began to build a strategic plan based upon what we identified as barriers in our existing process to hire qualified candidates. What was most important to us was maintaining our high standards and not to waiver on the organization's commitment to the employees and the community by constantly striving to uphold our credibility internally as well as externally. Also, we felt it vital to the process that the Marin County Sheriff's Office market the Marin County Sheriff's Office, and not rely on a disinterested third party. The first question we asked was obvious. Where do we go to find a large pool of perspective candidates? And once we identify a location, how do we tap into it? Our organization has strong leadership that encourages and supports creative ideas. So, we had the

confidence to push the envelope and challenge the conventional theory that public service can not compete with the private sector. Secondly, timeliness of the testing process in terms of administering, grading, conducting oral interviews and proctoring additional supplemental examinations needed to be addressed and refined. The existing process takes an average of three months to complete. At every turn in the process, the question remained the same. Why does it take two hours to complete the POST written test and then an average of seven days to have POST grade and return the results of the test? Why do we then wait nearly a month before we hold the oral interview process and the B-Pad scenarios? Why do we wait another ten to fifteen days to receive a certified list of those who successfully passed all the above before we commence the most critical component of the hiring process? The questions were endless as well as relentless.

We devised the following recruitment and hiring project based upon the internal factors of filling vacancies and the external factors of selling the Marin County Sheriff's Office as the best organization in law enforcement.

We started by contacting a former member of the Marin County Sheriff's Office who is a Professor at the California State University, Sacramento. This Professor acted as a recruiter for us by identifying ten students within the Criminal Justice Program whom, in his opinion, would be qualified candidates for the Marin County Sheriff's Office. The Professor identified five women and five men. It should be mentioned that through word of mouth an additional three applicants from the Sacramento region were added to the recruitment list. With the Professor's assistance, we scheduled a two-day testing project to be administered on the campus at the University. Applications, background questionnaires, and personal history statements were sent to the Professor for

the applicants to complete prior to the testing process. We contacted POST and the company that grades the written test and arranged for the written test to be graded immediately upon completion while the candidates continued with other scheduled examinations. At the end of the first day, we had administered and graded the State written test, our written exemplar test, and the physical agility test. All of the thirteen candidates had passed the first day of tests, and before going home for the day, were given times for the oral board and B-Pad scenarios scheduled for the next day.

On the second day, we held the oral boards and administered the B-Pad to all thirteen candidates, and again, all passed. By the time the Professional Standards Unit left the University on the second day, all thirteen candidates were set to begin the background investigation process. The following week we arranged with our Air Patrol to fly the candidates down from Sacramento, two per day, for Computer Voice Stress Analyzer (CVSA) exams and for tours of the organization. Also during their visits they were encouraged to talk to other members of the organization and ask questions in an effort to learn as much as possible about the organization. Here is where we believed the organizational culture would be a premiere selling point to the candidates, and we learned in interviews afterwards we were correct. At the end of the day, the candidates were flown back to Sacramento and given instructions as to the next step in the process and when it would occur. We began the legwork part of the background investigations and traveled to parts of Nevada, Northern California, and the Bay Area. During the entire process, constant communication existed between the candidates and the Professional Standards Unit. We explained in detail how, what, why and when we were doing what we were doing, as well as showed a continued interest in their educational development

at the University, giving the candidate firsthand exposure to the trusting, respectful and supportive environment that exists in the organization. We viewed this as an exceptional recruitment strategy.

The Marin County Sheriff's Office has a very good salary and benefit package including a twelve-hour shift schedule, many paid incentives such as educational, bilingual, shift differential, and FTO. These are attention grabbers that put the organization on the map in terms of attracting qualified candidates. But, how the organization markets the leadership culture of respect and support of all employees and other dynamics such as employee development and mentoring within the organization will be the key components to a successful hire of that qualified candidate. In this recruitment project at Sacramento State, we approached the issue from a standpoint of showcasing the candidate and not the organization. We put the candidates' needs first, thereby making the process more appealing, less stressful, and overall, a win-win for both parties. By accomplishing these objectives, we ultimately showcased the organization as the best environment for this group of candidates to commence their law enforcement careers.

As I mentioned, we started this project in May of 2000, and by December 2000 we hired five out of the original 13 candidates who began the process. The first three new hires were sworn-in during the month of August, and the two remaining new hires were sworn-in a week after graduating from Sacramento State University in December 2000. That's an overall success rate of thirty-eight percent. Looking at Sacramento State students only, it was a forty percent success rate. The numbers themselves do not appear large, but compared to our conventional recruitment and hiring success rate of two

percent to three percent this project was a huge success. It proves that there is a more user friendly and effective recruitment and hiring strategy than the proverbial method of throwing a large net out into the community sea of applicants only to realize a below limit catch. This strategy enabled us to be more successful by identifying a pool of candidates that possess the motivation to continually develop their knowledge, and a solid work ethic. What also needs mentioning is that we did not lower any testing standards or background requirements in hiring these candidates. We simply identified a qualified pool of candidates in which we could expect a greater return for our investment.

I conducted interviews of the successful new hires to further assess the outcomes of this project and to identify areas where improvement is needed. Overwhelmingly, they felt that being afforded the opportunity to stay within their environment and have the test brought to them alleviated a great deal of stress associated with scheduling travel to and from a jurisdiction where unfamiliar surroundings increases tension on test day. They felt they were treated with respect and dignity, which was an exception rather than a norm as was their experience with other testing processes. The speed of the testing process in terms of the grading and receiving results along with completing the process in just two days time was a large selling point to the group. Many of them shared their experience with friends and other students, who were amazed by the speed and professional presentation of the process. I was told by a couple of the new hires that talk around the campus was that many students were inquiring as to when the Marin County Sheriff's Office would return for another recruitment and hiring process. One of the written comments told the story

"The difference was amazing. I was constantly updated with current status information throughout the hiring process with you guys, and I really appreciated the treatment of feeling wanted and the family atmosphere of the Sheriff's Office".

Many of the candidates were not familiar with the Marin County Sheriff's Office prior to this process, and relied solely on the word of their Professor as to the quality of the organization. They felt strongly that the organization possessed the qualities that addressed their desires of a career in law enforcement, employee development, mentoring, a sense of belonging, and support throughout the organization. Even one of the new hires still residing in Sacramento, said that she did not object to the commute of ninety minutes because of the twelve hour shift, and that," the Marin County Sheriff's Office is where I want to be."

This project was an example of a creative approach to recruiting and hiring qualified candidates. The success rate was higher than in conventional processes that we all have experienced and our high organizational standards were not compromised, but rather were the marketing tools that can be directly associated with our success.

The strategy, bringing the entire testing process to the candidate, was only one part of the plan. The presentation of this project, how we conducted ourselves, and the caring and professional demeanor bestowed on the candidates needed to be credible. This is where we market the organization for the present as well as for the future. We need to take the time to be responsive to the candidates' needs as well as being courteous and professional throughout the entire hiring process. Simply stated, we need to remove the stigma that a candidate is merely a number in the process.

Today, and in the future, law enforcement leadership that encourages employee development, maintains the environment of respect and mutual support within the

organization, and allows creativity in adapting to change, will successfully compete in the job market.