

THE VALUE OF A REGIONAL APPLICANT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON LAW
ENFORCEMENT RECRUITING

Article

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Introduction

So there you are. It's the bottom of the ninth and you're up by a run. The bases are loaded and the opposition has their best batter coming up to bat. The situation calls for an ace closer, but when you look into the dugout, you realize another person for the team is needed.

A few years ago, the Oakland Athletics, had the 2nd lowest payroll in all of professional baseball. A new general manager was hired to win baseball games, but he was told... don't raise the payroll... to do it. Billy Beane's future, and the A's future were tied to this question: What do you do when your opponent is spending three times what you're spending for players and has more in reserve?

Billy Beane's response, "What you don't do is what they are doing, they will beat you every time." In 2002, just a few years after Beane took over the team, the A's set a new record for consecutive wins, and were one of the most successful teams in baseball. Beane found that alternative solutions could be powerful factors in shaping a successful future for an organization. His approach was simple: Alternative solutions allow an organization to expose preexisting illusions to solving problems.¹

For law enforcement, the future points to a human resource crisis. The bottom of the ninth is on the horizon and the question for organizations in the future will be similar: What will law enforcement do to find the right person, at the right time, with the right skills, when everyone else is spending more money to do it?

The applicant development program was designed as a way to find the right person, at the right time, with the right skills, right in their backyard, while everyone else was spending more money to do it.

The Recruiting Issue

The issue of hiring qualified applicants has always been challenging and a somewhat overwhelming endeavor. The challenge, it has been said, can be broken down into a complex formula: "get the right people... in the right position... at the right time... with the right skills... to perform the right role... to achieve the agency's mission".² For law enforcement organizations hiring applicants, that is certainly a lot of rights to get right.

Today, throughout California, the recruitment arm of law enforcement agencies has developed new and unique solutions to the recruitment problem we face as a state. From military service advertisements (Sacramento County) to hiring bonuses (Contra Costa County) larger agencies have developed specialized recruitment divisions and unique approaches to recruit the applicants of tomorrow. The latest edition of PORAC Magazine or the POST Internet website lists hundreds of jurisdictions at every level tempting new recruits and lateral transfers to their city or county. And, in the case of the state's largest agencies, many have a television show about their agency. ABC's newest police drama "10-8" is about a diverse group of new recruits in the field training program in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, which assists in their recruitment efforts.

Smaller agencies throughout California have fewer resources than those of the larger jurisdictions. Smaller agencies must rely heavily on their Human Resource Departments for recruitment activities, unlike these large agencies that have developed specialized recruitment arms within their own departments.

The Pending Human Resource Crisis

“All those aging baby boomers are massively exiting the profession,” Alan Deal, a bureau chief with the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, recently said in a Los Angeles area newspaper.³ “There just has not been a sufficient pool of people to take up the gap as there has been in previous years. We know it’s a serious problem.”

The California Employment Development Department (EDD) predicts that 19,400 new peace officer positions will be created in California by the year 2010. These new positions will increase the peace officer positions in California from 64,500 to 83,900.⁴ EDD also projects that 15,600 officers will retire by 2010, creating a total of 35,000 job openings during the next decade.

Redondo Beach’s police chief put it this way, “This is not a regional problem. This is not a state problem. It’s a national problem. The resource pool we draw from is getting smaller and smaller and smaller.”⁵

The Future of Recruiting

Richard Ayers, the director for the Center for Labor-Management Studies, said that enlarging the applicant pool was critical to resolving the recruitment crisis of the future.⁶

Ayers said:

If we want to attract more people to law enforcement and increase the pool of candidates, we need to tell them what we do, why we exist, what business we are in, and why this is a more rewarding career than other occupations that can provide higher wages and benefits. Let’s develop marketing strategies based on one of law enforcement’s greatest strength – its mission.

Ayers contends that Generation Y (our core generation of applicants in the year 2009) will want jobs that provide meaning in their lives, where they can make a difference, rather than those that just mean a big paycheck.

Dr. Sullivan suggests another approach for the future of recruiting personnel for an organization. Dr. Sullivan is a Professor and Department Head of the Human Resource Program at San Francisco State University. He asks, “If you wanted to hire a great ‘Santa Claus’, would you wait until November 15th and then run an ad? Or would you instead use a more advanced approach?”⁷

Dr. Sullivan suggests that most companies that wish to hire someone use the wrong approach. They place ads at the beginning of their hiring season or when an additional person is needed. This, he states, is almost guaranteed to bring in mediocre talent. A superior approach to finding top talent is “field identification.” Field identification (FI, he suggests) is a recruiting strategy that sends out employees, in the course of their day, to identify the best possible candidates for a position. FI, he explains is a “push” process, where one can find the best possible talent that is already employed and less likely to respond to a job flyer or attend a job fair. It turns out that this simple process enables an organization through its peers to identify top talent in any given area. And the advantage, he states, is if an organization starts early, the organization has the greatest degree of success in identifying and attracting a large applicant pool.

Ernie Ortiz, the President of the National Law Enforcement Recruiters Association, stated that in his experience one of the most significant factors to creating a large applicant pool were barriers within the law enforcement recruitment and testing processes.⁸ These barriers, Ortiz said, appear in many forms:

- Predetermined stereotypes of law enforcement officers, and potential applicants who feel they do not meet this image.
- Misunderstanding of the law enforcement mission.
- Diverse applicants who feel they may not fit well within the culture of the profession.
- The applicant testing process (physical, written, oral board) and an applicant's perceived ability to successfully compete in the process.

Ortiz said that one of the most significant ways to overcome these barriers was through the relationship established between applicant and recruiter. To assist in creating this relationship and the development of applicants, Ortiz's agency (Aurora Police Department, Colorado) has begun to experiment with potential applicant training programs. This program is conducted during a recruitment phase. It consists of a number of workshop-type settings to educate potential recruits about the department and to prepare them for the testing process.

The Need for Change

While conducting an informal survey of the California Police Chief's Association and Command College alumni, most agencies responded that they have created some form of training program (cadet, explorer, informal internship, or paying for increased reserve level training) out of the need to have an avenue for finding top-talent individuals. Executives expressed that many of these informal methods have not had the desired positive impact on their recruiting efforts. Instead, the executives expressed a surprisingly common theme: a need to establish a formal system, similar to the fading reserve officer system, for identifying and developing top-talent individuals for their agencies.

The Applicant Development Program

The idea of a formal applicant development program is based on the increasing call for change. To recruit potential applicants in the future, a recruiting effort must be attractive to the next generation of applicants. The future will not allow agencies the ability to wait and see who responds to their job announcements. Instead, agencies will need to actively seek out, field identify, and help develop a pool of potential applicants. And, law enforcement must find new ways to eliminate perceived and real barriers to entry into the profession for the pool of applicants of the future. The applicant development program was designed as a tool for smaller departments (an alternative to full-time recruiting officers), to proactively enhance the applicant pools of the future.

From these ideas, a vision for the future was created: Increase the number and quality of the future law enforcement applicant pool through the use of a formal applicant development program. The applicant development program concept has three purposes:

1. To develop a larger applicant pool for the future, one that is better qualified for entry into the profession;
2. To develop an applicant pool of the future that is both ethnically and gender representative of the projected future community being served;
3. And, to develop an applicant development approach for recruitment, rather than the advertise and wait approach.

With these three purposes in mind, the model of an applicant development program was formed. This model was created for smaller departments and utilizes personnel from the sponsoring agency to facilitate the program, act as recruiter-trainers, and mentor students.

Workshop Format

The applicant development program is designed around four workshops. These workshops would be scheduled throughout the year and advertised throughout the community, encouraging those with an interest in law enforcement careers to participate. The workshops would be scheduled for weekends, so that the best-possible, already-employed talent can participate.

Workshop Areas of Learning

The curriculum for the workshops would be designed so that participants can join at any stage throughout the year, and over a year's time, learn about each step in law enforcement's hiring process. This includes:

1. A career opportunity in law enforcement, law enforcement's mission, testing process overview, and the agency's hiring standards, and hiring disqualifiers.
2. Physical agility and written testing preparation.
3. Oral board preparation.
4. Testing process overview, resume preparation, application procedures, and further opportunities, such as academy locations and orientation dates.

Practical Education Format

Rather than an informational, lecture format, the workshops include a practical education portion (e.g., a practice written exam, and practice oral board exam). By allowing the student's learning to be an active process, the student can examine areas where self-improvement is needed. This approach prepares students at their own pace for the rigors of law enforcement testing and eventually a career in law enforcement.

Regional Approach

Smaller agencies hire more infrequently than larger urban agencies. Because of the greater likelihood that one of the agencies will be in a hiring phase, using a regional approach to applicant development and recruitment, agencies can encourage more potential applicants to participate.

Partnerships

Although not a requirement for an applicant development program, a partnership with a regional community college offers many advantages. The community college with its unique mission to provide job-training education (as well as preparation for a 4-year degree) has a large diverse student base. Agencies with this type of a partnership can increase their ability to reach the region's potential applicant pool. The college can also provide college credit for participants, on-campus remedial training resources, and advertisement of the program in course catalogs and by career counselors.

Referral Component

Many of the potential applicants in the development program will not immediately be hired, or may wish to continue to develop their employability. A referral component within the program offers a number of advantages. It can provide applicants with additional sources for self-improvement, assist applicants needing financial aid opportunities to move towards a basic academy, or simply assist potential applicants in finding basic academy classes and learning how to enroll.

Program Objectives

An applicant development program can take many forms, from an in-house, stand-alone program, to a regional partnership approach with many agencies. In all cases the

objectives of the program should be outlined early, and designed into the training program. This applicant development program was designed around a number of objectives, which may meet the needs of other agencies:

Objectives

1. A regional approach for the applicant development program is designed to increase participation by potential applicants.
2. Practicable learning will be used in the program to assist as many individuals as possible through the process and offer applicants an avenue for self-improvement.
3. By teaching applicants the hiring standards of law enforcement, participating agencies will help ensure the quality of potential applicants.
4. The applicant development program will target local, already employed, best talent individuals.
5. A partnership approach between participating agencies and a local community college will provide alternative learning resources for potential applicants that participate.
6. The use of long-term mentoring will help develop loyalty of applicants to region and participating agencies.
7. To increase participation, the applicant development program will stress the salary and benefit comparisons to other careers in the region for potential applicants, as well as the stability of the law enforcement profession.
8. To attract to generation Y applicants need for careers that contribute to a community, the applicant development program will stress service to the community and the tie between an officer and the community they serve.

9. To recapture those who have left the region, but desire to return, the applicant development program will allow for distance learning component.
10. To entice further participation in the program, the applicant development program will advertise those who succeed through the program: The, “If they could do it, so could I,” factor.

Summary

Although, an applicant development program is not the only answer to the recruitment issues of the future, its use by small departments appears to be valuable. Larger jurisdictions are beginning to use similar programs to increase potential applicant pools. The Aurora Police Department in Colorado has begun to experiment with a pilot program. And, the Sacramento Police Department in California is about to institute a similar type of applicant workshop program for potential applicants. While these large departments begin to implement these types of programs, it is the smaller departments that may be impacted the most by their development.

An applicant development program offers smaller agencies these benefits:

1. Assists departments in identifying top-talent individuals for recruitment.
2. Expands current potential applicant pools by opening the door to the law enforcement testing process for additional potential applicants.
3. Increases the success rate of those successfully completing probationary periods, by identifying a potential applicant’s weaknesses early, and mentoring applicants in ways to improve their performance.
4. Provides small departments with a cost effective way to develop recruiter-applicant relationships for their organizations.

5. And, provides a valuable community service to potential applicants, the community and the participating agencies, which:
 - a. Results in greater interest by potential applicants and community members in their departments,
 - b. Provides the community with a sense that the department is truly recruiting from the community it serves,
 - c. And, increases both the quality and quantity of potential applicants for a participating agency.

While smaller departments hire more infrequently than larger departments in more urban areas, potential applicants in small rural areas have less educational and career opportunities available in their area. The applicant development program is ideal for creating additional opportunities and preparing potential applicants for careers in law enforcement. Most importantly, it will give smaller agencies another tool to find the right person, at the right time, right in their community.

End Notes

¹ Michael Lewis (2003) *Moneyball, The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*, W.W. Norton & Company.

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³ Larry Altman, (2002) *A thinning blue line: Police agencies struggle to keep officers*, Daily Breeze, May 2002. www.dailybreeze.com

⁴ Frank Benest, (2003). *Preparing the Next Generation: A Guide for Current and Future Local Government Managers*, International City/County Management Association.
<http://www.icma.org>

⁵ Larry Altman, (2002) *A thinning blue line: Police agencies struggle to keep officers*, Daily Breeze, May 2002. www.dailybreeze.com

⁶ Richard Ayers, (2001) National Executive Institute Associates, Major Cities Chief's Association and Major County Sheriff's Association Article: *Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Officers: Can Your Agency Compete?* www.neiassociates.org

⁷ Dr. John Sullivan, (2000) *Using Field Identification to Hire Santa Claus (or other Customer Service Talent)*. www.drjohnsullivan.com

⁸ Data from interview with Ernie Ortiz, President of the National Law Enforcement Recruiters Association, 2004 National Conference on Law Enforcement Diversity Recruiting, Arlington, VA 2/10/2004.

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