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# Hiring in the Spirit of Service

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# Hiring In The Spirit of Service

by Chief Patrick K. Oliver, Fairborn Police Department

The recruitment, selection and retention of high quality law enforcement officers is one of the key issues of our profession today. In reality, it has always been an important issue, however, today quality candidates have been more difficult to find by many law enforcement agencies across America. Hiring employees, and of course police officers, is the single most important managerial task. This is because the quality of an organization is reduced to the quality of the employee with whom the customer is dealing. A law enforcement organization could be the worst in a given area, but if the officer treats a community member with care and compassion, from the citizen's perspective this agency is excellent. Conversely, a law enforcement agency could be the best in an area, but if the officer treats the community member disrespectfully, then as far as he or she is concerned, it is a poor agency. Every manager claims that people are their most important resource; if this is true, our process for identifying and selecting candidates should reflect this. Proper planning, sufficient time, and financial resources should be allocated to this most critical management task.

## The Two Most Effective Management Decisions

It is very sobering, but I have come to realize the two most effective decisions a manager can make. The single most effective decision a manager can make is hiring an effective employee. The reason for this is simple. Quality products or services are provided primarily by quality people. If the people in your organization are not competitive in the profession, how could the organization be competitive in the profession? Quality products and services are always obstructed by the ability to hire top talent. The second most effective decision a manager can make is to terminate an ineffective employee. Even though this may sound unkind, in reality it is not. People should have the ability to be successful at what they do every day. This can only occur if people are placed in jobs that match their talents and abilities. All hiring, special assignments and

promotions should match the talents and abilities of the individual. When a person is placed in a job that matches his or her talents and abilities, it is good for the customers, the organization and the individual. When they are not, it is bad for all three. The chief executive officer is driving the bus of professionalism. Your goal is to get the right people on the bus, get them in the right seats and get the wrong people off the bus.

## Training Versus Selection

The ongoing training of personnel is an important component of any healthy organization. However on many occasions, training is oversold because it fails to modify the behavior of trainees. The goal of any training program is behavior modification. As a result of the training, the trainee is doing things more effectively than prior to the training. Even if valuable information is provided, many training programs fall short of modifying the performance of the attendees. If the trainee lacks the motivation or desire to change, additional information will not encourage him or her to do so. The hiring of employees who are compatible with the agency's vision, mission, core values and goals is more productive than training individuals to be compatible with the agency's direction and philosophy. The agency is changed more in the interview room than it could ever be in the training room. In other words it's a better strategy to hire effective people than to attempt to produce effective people.

## Selection Criteria for Law Enforcement Officers

During 1999 and 2000, the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services along with the Ohio Law Enforcement Foundation conducted a study on entry-level hiring for law enforcement officers featuring the use of the Entry Level Assessment Center methodology (*The Complete Guide to Hiring Law Enforcement Officers* by Chief Patrick Oliver, et.al.). Job analysis instruments utilized to conduct this research have indicated that the following 12 traits are desirable to varying degrees at all law

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enforcement agencies regardless of size or type. In your selection process it is recommended that these knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors and traits be evaluated:

### **Integrity**

The candidate has high moral and ethical standards and possesses integrity in all matters, public and private.

### **Human diversity**

The candidate has the ability to act in an unbiased manner, and must have an understanding of human diversity issues.

### **Service**

The candidate has a service orientation: a desire and commitment to service above self.

### **Team compatibility**

The candidate has a team orientation. The candidate has the ability to work with others in a cooperative, caring and supportive manner to achieve goals of the group.

### **Written communication**

The candidate has the ability to communicate well in writing and the ability to convey an idea, concept or information in a clear, concise and appropriate format.

### **Oral communication**

The candidate has the ability to communicate well orally. The candidate is a good listener and can clearly transmit thoughts and ideas to others.



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### Motivation

The candidate has the ability to be highly motivated while working independently.

### Decision-making and problem-solving skills

The candidate has the ability to be a good decision maker and problem solver.

### Human relations skills

The candidate has the ability to interact with people, effectively demonstrating good human relation skills.

### Self-control

The candidate has the ability to maintain self-control under stressful circumstances. Self-discipline is critical to responding properly.

### Planning and organizing

The candidate has planning and organizing skills.

### Performance driven

The candidate is performance driven, and has the desire and motivation to be successful in achieving group and individual goals.

### Evaluating the Law Enforcement Officer Job at Your Agency

These traits represent a comprehensive list of qualities demonstrated by successful enforcement officers. It is important to understand that these behaviors and traits are pre-hire qualifications and not post-hire abilities that may be exhibited. The list of qualities your agency requires may include additional traits. To determine these additional traits requires conducting a job analysis for the entry-level law enforcement officer job. This entails reviewing, at a minimum, the following information at your agency: the agency mission, vision



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and core values; agency goals; job description for a law enforcement officer; community needs survey information; interviews and/or focus groups with individuals in the target job; interviews and/or focus groups with individuals who manage and oversee the target job (all levels of management area ideal), as well as community members and reviewing any previous job task analysis information if available. The addition of this information helps evaluate the list of traits and qualities desirable for law enforcement officers in your agency.

### **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities vs. Behaviors and Traits**

The key to hiring effective employees is selecting those individuals who possess the personality traits that lead to job success. Knowledge, skills and abilities are fundamental to determining if an individual is suitable

for a job. However possessing the knowledge, skills and abilities alone will take you only to moderate performance at best. To go from moderate performance to excellent performance one must possess the behaviors and traits identified for job success. To understand the significance of this, all we have to do is realize that whenever we take disciplinary action against an employee up to and including termination, is it for one's lack of technical ability or is it because of behaviors and traits displayed by the employee? The obvious answer is that it is behaviors and traits that cause most of the disciplinary problems in an organization. If behaviors and traits cause most of the problems, then why don't we evaluate them prior to making a hiring decision? The only thing that psychologists, all sociologists and human resource experts agree on is this: The best indicator of future performance is still current and past performance. To



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be effective in a job one must first have a basic level of ability which is the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities. Second, one must have a personality profile for success. There are two aspects of a person's ability, what they can do and what they will do. What they can do and what they will do are two different things. An evaluation of behaviors and traits gives a measure of what they will do based on what they are doing or have done in the past.

The following comparison illustrates between knowledge, skills and abilities and behaviors and traits. It indicates the importance, but limiting impact, of knowledge, skills and abilities alone. It also indicates the powerful impact behavior and traits can have when combined with knowledge, skills and abilities.

## KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Result in few personnel disciplinary problems
- Easier to teach/train
- Mainly acquired post-hiring by successful candidates
- By themselves lead to moderate performance at best
- Over-emphasized in the selection process of successful candidates

## BEHAVIORS AND TRAITS

- Result in the majority of personnel disciplinary problems
- Difficult, if not impossible, to teach/train
- Mainly acquired pre-hiring by successful candidates
- Plus KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) take a candidate from moderate to excellent performance
- Under-emphasized or ignored in the selection candidates process of successful candidates

Service is all we have to sell in the profession of law enforcement. To ensure that we deliver a high quality of service we must hire law enforcement officers with behaviors and traits that lead to job success. If we are successful as law enforcement administrators in doing this, then we are truly hiring in the spirit of service.

