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Recruitment, Selection & Retention of Law Enforcement Officers

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Recruitment, Selection & Retention of Law Enforcement Officers

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Chapter 1
**Selection Criteria for Law
Enforcement Officers**

Why Hiring is Critical

In the twenty-first century, law enforcement agencies face the great challenge of hiring the contemporary law enforcement officers in a market that appears to have a diminishing number of qualified candidates.

- What knowledge, skills, abilities, behavior, and traits should agencies seek?
- How do we determine what these qualities are?
- Have our needs changed?
- Is the candidate pool changing?
- How do we effectively develop and implement a recruitment plan?
- How do we structure our selection process and why?
- What are the key issues in law enforcement officer retention?

The hiring of a law enforcement officer is the single most important function of any law enforcement agency. The officers hired provide the service to our community members. The quality of all law enforcement service is reduced to the officer(s) our community member(s) are dealing with. No amount of organization or equipment will replace the human relation skills of the individual officer. Selecting the best candidates in the marketplace is paramount. It is primarily the officers hired at entry level that become the future managers for an agency. The quality of the individuals you hire will determine the quality of the organization. If the officers in your organization are not competitive in the law enforcement profession, how can your organization be competitive in the law enforcement profession? The single most important task of a law enforcement chief executive officer (CEO) is hiring people. Therefore, the CEO should be directly involved in the hiring process and treat it as a priority. Whoever controls the hiring process controls the effectiveness of the law enforcement agency. If CEOs are too busy to become involved in the hiring process, then they are just too busy.

It is the people who obtain the results and accomplish the mission of any agency. People are the most important resource in any organization. This fact is acknowledged by everyone, is not denied by anyone, written about by many, but practiced by very few agencies.

Successful Law Enforcement Officer Traits

Most law enforcement agencies have a multi-step hiring process that contains between six to twelve components from a written exam to a pre-employment physical examination. The components of the hiring process in many agencies have not changed in decades, even though the type of officer desired has changed. The first step in identifying the selection criteria for the law enforcement officers at your agency is to identify essential job functions, successful job-related behaviors and traits. In 1999 I was awarded a grant as the project director to conduct a study on the hiring of law enforcement officers within the State of Ohio. Approval of the grant was given to do a pilot study of five Ohio law enforcement agencies to evaluate the process and potential effectiveness of the hiring process for law enforcement officers. The five law enforcement agencies selected were of different sizes and types.

The following Ohio law enforcement agencies participated in this study: Ohio State Highway Patrol; Columbus Division of Police; The Ohio State University Police Department; Montgomery County Sheriff's Department; and the Zanesville Police Department. The diversity of agencies was for the purpose of making recommendations regarding the selection of law enforcement officers, which could apply to all law enforcement agencies in the United States. The 1999 - 2000 Ohio Law Enforcement Foundation Research Study grant for hiring law enforcement officers identified 12 common traits desired by law enforcement agencies regardless of agency size or type. Job analysis survey instruments used at five different Ohio law enforcement agencies indicated that these traits are desirable to varying degrees for all of these agencies.

The Ohio Law Enforcement Research Study indicated that the following traits are desirable for law enforcement officers. These traits are viewed to be foundational, and therefore, in your selection criteria it is recommended that these knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and traits be considered for validation:

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

Human Diversity Skills: The candidate has the ability to act in an unbiased manner and must have an understanding of human diversity issues demonstrating cultural competency.

Service Orientation: 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.

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

Written Communication Skill: 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.

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

Decision-Making: The candidate has the ability to be a good decision maker and problem solver.

Human Relations Skill: 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 Skill: 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.

The Five Most Important Traits

After completing this law enforcement hiring study in 2000, I had the opportunity of presenting the findings approximately 20 times over the next four years to about 2,000 law enforcement officers from the United States and Canada. These groups contained officers from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. In those presentations of the study, there was never an occasion in which any law enforcement official or administrator ever indicated (after being asked) that any one of these twelve traits did not apply to law enforcement officers at their agency. This is not to suggest that these traits should not be validated through a job task analysis. It is only to suggest that they are highly recommended to be considered for evaluating in a law enforcement job. Of these twelve traits there are five that are the most important. They all have value but I suggest these five are the most essential to screen for in a law enforcement officer job. When selecting for a law enforcement officer you are hiring an entry-level leader. If I was to summarize what all law enforcement agencies are looking for in one word, it is "leadership." I certainly understand that this is an overused word that has been highly researched and written about. However, it does provide the essence of what law enforcement agencies are looking for. I believe it also describes what the "military academies" and "Ivy league" schools are also seeking in their students. Here they are in what I would consider their order of importance.

It should be no surprise that **Integrity** is the most important. An American peace officer has more power and authority than any other job I can think of in our society. A peace officer can issue a verbal warning, a written warning, a citation (which is a summons to appear in court at a later time), make an arrest, make an arrest with force, can make an arrest with deadly force. Each one of these acts of law enforcement intervention may be deemed legal. A mayor, judge, congressman, or the president of the United States cannot do this. With this tremendous amount of authority comes the responsibility to be a man or woman of high moral character. The

peace officer wears the badge of trust, which is a privilege and not a right, reserved only for those who serve with honor.

Second is the trait of **Service**. Service is what is sold in the profession of law enforcement. Approximately 80 percent of the job is service and 20 percent of it is enforcement. This is true at a major city P.D. or a small town P.D. Community service is what is being most provided to residents, businesses, and visitors of the community. Helping, assisting, and guiding hurt people is a skill that is invaluable in a profession that operates 24 hours a day, as the most visible part of government. It is truly a helping profession.

Third is the trait of effective **Human Relations Skills**. The job of a law enforcement officer is meeting and dealing with people. A law enforcement officer is someone who has to go into a negative situation and attempt to leave people with something positive. If this is done properly then one leaves people better than they found them. If a person gets tired of people, or is easily frustrated with people, or is not caring and compassionate, he or she is not suited for law enforcement. There are many times law enforcement officers are dealing with people at their worst. It takes great human relations skills to manage conflict or problems in a patient, caring, and professional manner.

Fourth is the trait of **Team Compatibility**. Law enforcement agencies operate on the concept of team. This requires that the goals of the individual are subordinate to the goals of the team or organization. A peace officer must come in early, stay late, be on call, work weekends, evenings, nights, and holidays. This takes a team player who understands that a law enforcement agency is a service profession operating 24 hours a day for the benefit of the community. This person also understands that by accepting employment they agreed to do whatever needs to be done as long as it is legal or ethical with a positive mental attitude. They have made an individual commitment to the organization's success.

Fifth is the trait of being **Performance Driven**. Law enforcement officers generally work independently. It is a job that requires people who want to be the best they can be. The only real competition they face is being their best. They are involved daily in self-initiated activity. These individuals are serving the community other than the times when they get a call for service. They set and achieve individual and professional goals to become better tomorrow than

they were yesterday. They are contributors to the organization's standard of excellence.

The Value of Emotional Intelligence

You might summarize these five key traits as being "character centered." A law enforcement agency should do character-based hiring. The United States Community Oriented Policing Service several years ago labeled this philosophy as hiring in the "spirit of service." This federally funded project recommended that each agency prior to hiring identify a common core of "service-oriented" traits because the job emphasizes service more than enforcement (Scrivner, 2004). These five traits are indicative of an officer's emotional intelligence (EQ) versus their intelligence quotient (IQ). There has been much written about emotional intelligence over the last several decades. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the intelligent management of your emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 1999). Policing, more than other professions, demands that officers bring intelligent emotions to bear, especially when responding to calls for service involving conflict among people. It is helpful to understand that for all jobs that exist in the world EQ is more important than IQ (Goleman, 1995). Individuals hired in law enforcement should have the mental horsepower to do the job. However, beyond having the required level of intelligence (IQ), it is one's emotional intelligence that mostly contributes to job effectiveness.

Goleman indicated (1995) it is well known in psychology that grades, IQ or SAT scores, despite their popular mystique, do not predict unerringly who will succeed in life. At best it is estimated that IQ contributes about 20% to the factors that determine success in life, which leaves 80% to other forces. The ability to excel academically does not indicate how one reacts to the vicissitudes of life.

There are four domains that together constitute emotional intelligence. The first two are self-awareness and self-management, which are skills reflective of the individuals (personal competence). Self-awareness is your ability to perceive your emotions in the moment and effectively understand them across situations. Self-management is your ability to use your awareness to stay flexible to respond with positive behaviors to people and situations. The other two domains are social awareness and relationship management,

which indicate how you relate to other people (social competence). Social awareness is your ability to discern the emotions of other people to effectively understand their perspective. Relationship management is the use of the first three emotional intelligence skills to manage human interactions effectively. To expand on this understanding, intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ) and personality are three distinct qualities we all possess. Intelligence is your ability to learn, and does not change throughout your life (not flexible). Emotional intelligence is a flexible skill that is learnable. There is no connection between EQ and IQ. It is not possible to predict one based on the other. An individual may be intelligent but not emotionally intelligent, and people of all types of personalities can be high in EQ and/or IQ. Personality is the style that defines you. It is based on your preferences such as an inclination toward extroversion or introversion. Of these three, emotional intelligence is the only attribute that is flexible and changeable (Bradberry & Greaves 2005). I like to think of it this way; it's not how smart you are it's how you are smart. In the service-oriented profession of law enforcement, requiring men and women of character, agencies need to focus on the qualities that produce job related effectiveness. How do you evaluate a law enforcement candidate for these qualities? You must screen for them in several of the components of the selection process. Chapter 12 on oral interviews discusses how to do behavioral-based interviewing to select for these qualities.

Evaluating the Law Enforcement Officer Job at Your Agency

The 12 traits represent a comprehensive list of qualities desired for all law enforcement officers. The list of qualities your agency requires may include additional traits. To determine what these additional traits are requires conducting a job analysis for the entry-level law enforcement officer. This job analysis entails reviewing, at a minimum, the following information at your agency: the mission statement; core values of the agency; 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 are 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. Chapter 2 on Job Task Analysis provides some fundamental guidelines on this critical step of defining the job.

The qualities desired for law enforcement officers today have certainly changed. If you doubt this, then ask yourself if the job of law enforcement officers has changed in the last ten years in your community. Will the job probably be different in the future? I believe the answer to both of these questions is “yes.” The important question is: Has the criteria your agency utilizes for selecting a law enforcement officer changed? The starting place is to determine what the knowledge, skills, abilities, education, behaviors, and traits are desired for someone who effectively performs the job.

The development of a flexible profile of a contemporary law enforcement officer is critical to designing the recruitment and selection process.

Is the Candidate Pool Changing?

Is the candidate pool changing for law enforcement candidates? (Cole, Smith, & Lucas, 2002) I believe the answer is a resounding, yes! In research done by Arkansas Tech University, authors Cole, Smith & Lucas indicate certain characteristics among younger generations. There is an observable shift in many new generation law enforcement candidates. While there are some exceptions, some of these debatable changes include the following:

- Work is not a big part of their lives.
- Focus on lifestyle first, then work to support it.
- Less family stability.
- Want to have a direct “say” in how their work is done.
- General lack of a military background.
- They have a more global outlook, and
- Less flexibility to administrative requirements.

Candidates seem to have:

- More education— *Are they more intelligent?*
- Greater appreciation of diversity.
- More access to physical training equipment and expertise— *Are they in better or worse physical condition?*

- More technological abilities.
- More career options.

The change in the candidate pool of qualified law enforcement applicants dictates that law enforcement agencies evaluate and modify their methods of recruitment and selection of candidates on a periodic basis.

The chart that follows compares and contrasts the value of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), (generally IQ) and personal behaviors and traits (EQ). In the profession of law enforcement when officers are disciplined, suspended, or terminated is it because of a lack of technical abilities or skills, or is it because of negative behaviors or traits displayed on or off the job? The vast majority of times job actions are based on negative behaviors and traits. Because this is the case, why don't we screen and select for positive behaviors and traits? It is important to both eliminate candidates unsuitable for the job and identify candidates most suitable for the job. As you study this chart to comprehend its message, please note that the ability to do KSAs does not equal the desire to do. Just because someone has certain technical skills and abilities does not mean they are willing to use them effectively for the benefit of an organization.

Knowledge, Skills, & Abilities and Behaviors & Traits

| KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, & ABILITIES <i>[ability to do]</i> | VS. | BEHAVIORS & TRAITS <i>[desire to do]</i> |
|---|------------|---|
| Easier to teach or train | | Difficult or impossible to teach or train |
| Acquired post-hire | | Acquired pre-hire |
| By itself, leads to moderate performance at best | | Plus KSAs will take an individual from moderate to excellent performance |
| Causes few disciplinary problems | | Causes most of the disciplinary problems |
| Results in few employment terminations | | Results in most employment terminations |
| Over-emphasized in its value in the selection process of job candidates | | Under-emphasized in its value in the selection process of job candidates |
| Based on research contributes at most 20 percent to job performance | | Based on research contributes approximately 80 percent to job performance |

In their book, *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*, the authors Bradberry and Greaves, indicate that the concept of emotional intelligence can explain why two people of the same IQ can attain vastly different levels of success in life. You cannot predict emotional intelligence based on how smart someone is, this is good news because cognitive intelligence or IQ, is not flexible. Intelligence is your ability to learn, and it's the same at age ten as it is at age 60. Emotional intelligence conversely is a flexible skill that is learnable.

“Consistent with the principles of emotional intelligence, behaviors and traits, which are indicative of emotional intelligence (EQ), are more important for the entry level law enforcement job than knowledge, skills, and abilities, which are indicative of intelligence quotient (IQ).”
 — Patrick Oliver

Recommendations and Key Points for Law Enforcement Officer Selection Criteria

- The market for law enforcement officers appears to have a diminishing number of qualified candidates.
- The hiring of a law enforcement officer is the single most important function of any law enforcement agency.
- The quality of service provided in law enforcement is reduced to the quality of the officers.
- The chief executive officer of a law enforcement agency must give priority to the task of hiring.
- The Ohio Law Enforcement Foundation Research Study identified 12 traits desired by law enforcement agencies regardless of agency size or type.
- There are five of the 12 traits that are the most important qualities to screen for, of which integrity is the most important.
- It is recommended that a law enforcement agency do “character-based hiring.”
- One’s intelligence quotient and emotional intelligence both contribute to job performance. However, for all jobs EQ is more important than IQ for determining job performance.
- IQ is fixed and unchangeable, while EQ is learnable and changeable.

- To determine the attributes desired for a law enforcement officer at a specific agency, a job task analysis must be conducted.
- The change in the applicant pool dictates that law enforcement agencies evaluate and modify their methods of recruitment and selection on a periodic basis.
- The ability to perform effectively in a job does not equal the desire to be effective in a job.