CENTER FOR
INNOVATIVE PUBLIC POLICIES

Retention Planning and Stay Interviews

Retention is more than just about salary and benefits. Retention is about quality leadership that acknowledges and recognizes the corrections workplace employees and supports their job. The foundation of retention includes:

- A supportive and positive internal culture in which employees are acknowledged and recognized for their achievements.
- Pre-service, in-service and specialized training that regularly provides line staff, supervisors and managers with the skills, knowledge and abilities they need to be successful.
- A correctional training officer/field training officer program what is grounded in definable behaviors that help new employees learn the job, partnered with trained, experienced, and exemplary colleagues.
- A mentorship program to benefit both the mentor and the mentee.
- Credible processes for feedback from line staff to leadership to identify issues, consider solutions, and improve communications.
- Quality supervisors who are committed to those they oversee.
- A responsive and fair employee grievance process.
- Leadership that sincerely embraces corrections as a valuable career.
- Agency mission, vision and values that recognize and support employees.
- Linkages with the community and stakeholders to increase the knowledge about the jail and work to gain input and support.
- Transparency, inclusion and honesty in agency operations.

A jail needs a researched, written, updated, and resourced RETENTION PLAN and a planning process that involved employees, stakeholders, and the community. Few agencies, if any, have an articulable *plan* to retain employees. Here is a pathway to a retention plan.

A Retention Planning Process

1. Establish the process; manage change; respectfully challenge the status quo. Talk about why the initiative is important and how it will happen, who will be involved, and identify a realistic timetable for developing the plan. Importantly, describe how the agency will know if this initiative is a success through measurable outcomes. For example, when this plan is implemented, the jail will have a drop of x% in voluntary resignations; the jail will use mandatory overtime less than x shifts per month.

Identify and engage with criminal justice partners who are also experiencing the same retention challenges, and rather than seeing them as "competitors". If the jail is having retention problems so are the fire service, first responders, hospitals, and other local law enforcement. Find the common elements such as affordable housing, childcare, and elder care needs of current employees. Involve local elected officials, community business leaders, and stakeholders the common ground. Reach out and assess opportunities for joint ventures. Collaborate with any employee unions. (McCampbell, Core Competencies and Jail Leadership: Managing Change, 2015)

2. <u>Conduct a Community Environmental Scan</u> Only **3%** of jails surveyed indicated that the citizens who they serve are knowledgeable about their jail; 45% reported citizens as somewhat knowledgeable; and 52% reported that citizens were not at all knowledgeable. (McCampbell, How Transparant and Accountable in Your Jail?, 2021) This data helps explain why jails struggle to gain community support, translatable ultimately into funding. Yet is this another opportunity on which the jail can capitalize? How "livable" is your community for employees? The recent focus on both affordable housing and childcare are substantial barriers. While jail leaders could continue to throw up their hands and say solutions are outside their responsibilities, but that's no longer true. Holistic approaches are required for success.

3. <u>Gather and analyze the data</u>. Know the jail's attrition data by year, length of service of employees in the workplace, characteristics, generation, and job assignments. How long is the process to recruit and hire; how long do employees stay; what does attrition cost the jail in not only dollars and cents (e.g., overtime, recruitment efforts, training), but in morale? What is the profile of the aging of employees in the organization? Will vacancies occur among line staff, supervisors, mid-managers or leadership? Who may be the primary "competitors" to jail employment – both private and public sector? The cost of turnover is significant and calculable; and part of a compelling argument to expend resources on retention.

4. <u>Involve/Ask Employees</u>. Is there credible data from exit interviews? Are "stay interviews" part of the culture and practice? (Stinchcomb & McCampbell, 2006) What can you learn from employees' grievances? Is an old-fashioned suggestion box applicable? (McCampbell, Listening to Your Employees: Advice from Emerging Leaders, 2020) Current employees have as much to gain as the organization from welcoming qualified and well-trained newcomers. Employees' opinions and involvement are worth a lot. The single best source of new employees are current employees. See below for more specifics on stay interviews.

See also:

[Listening to Your Employees: Advice from Emerging Leaders](#)
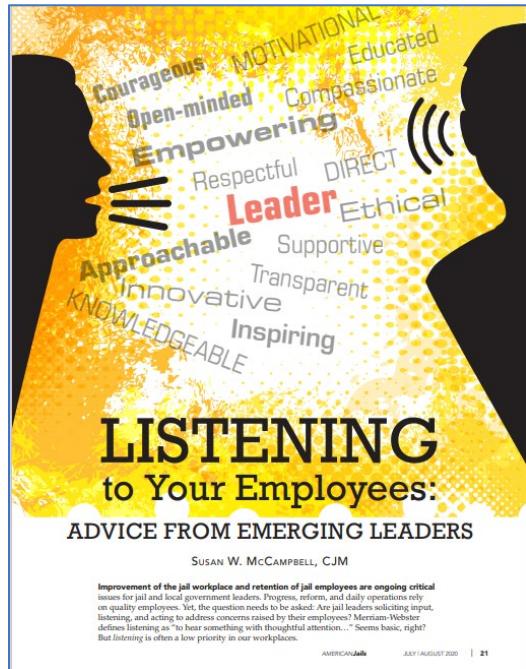
5. <u>Assess and Confront Internal Agency Culture</u> – Critically examine the internal culture of the jail. Would you recommend anyone work in the environment? There are pluses and minuses to every internal culture, and the culture may be different on each shift, in different facilities and in different work areas. Much has been written about examining internal culture but failing to correctly identify and address it will doom even the most innovative retention strategies. (McCampbell, Core Competencies and Jail Leadership: Positive Organizational Culture, 2018)

6. <u>Dissect Human Resources Processes – Recruitment, Screening, Hiring, Probationary Year and Retention</u> The critical and immediacy of jail staffing needs often fails to galvanize human resources practitioners to help. This part of the organization and these individuals are the gatekeepers to important processes of hiring – linked directly to jail safety and success. Some of those in charge of hiring, retention and employee engagement subscribe to the "we've always done it this way" philosophy. (Russo, Woods, Drake, & Jackson, 2018) Respectfully challenging the status quo to improve processes, while not diminishing the necessary qualification of new employees, is an urgent need.   Engaging in root cause analysis may help identify outdated, unnecessary, and counterproductive steps in the process. Use of technology, on-line applications and frequent and regular communication (via social media) with candidates is not an option. Accurate (current, realistic) job

descriptions, identifying the means to reach the newest generation of workers (e.g., social media), and an organized, resources, and constantly reviewed recruitment plan is part of keeping employees.   Asking recent hires how the process was for them provides insight.   Many organizations have employee incentives to recruit new employees, and some provide means to keep the referring employee linked to the success of the new hire through the probationary year. New hires are often abandoned after the first hour of work so assessing how staff are "on-boarded" – that is – formally and informally welcomed into the organization warrants review. Whatever the outcome of these evaluations of the human resources functions, developing an action plan, with measurable steps and accountability is critical to making change happens.

7. <u>Scrutinize Training</u> – Effective, up-to-date, and generationally relevant training (pre-service, in-service and FTO/CTO) is critical to keeping employees and maintaining a safe environment. With budget cuts, training is sometimes the first thing to be jettisoned, with negative far-reaching impacts. A deep look at all training components, even if reform and change may be incremental, is essential. Particular emphasis on the field training officer/correctional training officer component for new employees helps them see just how valued they are. (McCampbell & McCampbell, Center for Innovative Public Policies, Inc., 2020) Establishment of a mentorship program can so reap rewards for those mentored as well as those who are the mentors. (Center for Innovative Public Policies, Inc., American Jail Association, 2011)

8. <u>Prepare the Next Generation of Supervisors and Managers</u> – Waiting until someone is selected as a new supervisor or manager is too late to prepare them for their new responsibilities. The agency should assess:
   ❑ Are supervisors fully prepared for their job upon promotion?
   ❑ Do supervisors appreciate, empower, and recognize their employees?
   ❑ Are there barriers that discourage qualified employees from seeking promotion? If so, what could be done to address this?
   ❑ Is there a process for "marketing" promotional opportunities?
   ❑ Do the processes for selecting and training supervisors reflect the agency's Mission, vision, and values?
   ❑ Is succession planning accurately forecasting the upcoming need for new supervisors as well as managers and administrators?

9. <u>Researching and Networking</u> – The crisis in hiring extends to every segment of our communities. Reaching out to business and professional organization in the community and researching the work of other public safety organizations are part of the mission. Stretching research into non-public safety arenas, probing the community, and building partnerships are necessary to a plan that has examined all

options. Identifying the opportunities to partner or collaborate with other public safety organizations may present options for greater success.

Action Planning and Incorporating into the Culture

The end result of this work described above is an *action plan* that gets the process moving. The action plan, to be credible, should, at a minimum:

- Set measurable objectives;
- Assign the work to individuals for accountability;
- Establish achievable timelines;
- Identifies those who will help, including employees and community stakeholders;
- Define the outcome of the work, the documentation that assures the work is completed or on-going; and
- Determine if the work is completed, or if a revised action update is needed.

This should be a transparent process, with frequent updates and outcomes broadcast through the organization and the community. The process should allow for mid-course corrections as new information emerges, or new opportunities are available.

Incorporate into the internal culture of the jail the process improvements and changes in approach to retaining employees by allowing all to see that this is not just a "project" of short duration, but the way the organization will function into the future.

Staying Interviews

While many jails use 'exit interviews' to document why employees leave, this is the proverbial locking the barndoor after the horses are gone. The accuracy of exit interviews are often questionable due to the motivation of the parting employee – perhaps not wanting to burn bridges or feeling as if the agency cared – it would have asked before now.

Stay interviews, are a sincere effort to learn what employees are thinking and then develop a plan to act on the results. Interviews (or surveys) require trust to gain accurate feedback.

Among the questions that can be asked include a long list, but should be pared down to the essentials by the jail. (For more information see Appendix C – page 131 *FutureForce: A Guide to Building the 21st Century Community Corrections Workforce* http://www.cipp.org/uploads/3/7/5/7/37578255/021799.pdf)

- Are you proud to be affiliated with this agency?
- Do you recommend working for this organization to your friends (or relatives)? Why or why not?

- What can the agency do to attract and hire quality people?
- Are you respected as a professional by your supervisor and agency's leadership?
- If you were in a leadership position, what three things would you change?
- Do you have positive relationships with your peers?
- Are you challenged by your job? Describe something that recently presented an interesting work challenge.
- Has someone recognized you for a job well done in the last month?
- Do you feel comfortable providing suggestions at work?
- What value do you think the organization places on your suggestions?
- What is the mission of the organization?
- Where do you feel you fit into the overall organizational team? Do you feel valued for your contributions to the organization?
- Where do you see yourself in 2 years, 5 years. ...?
- Does the organization provide you with the training you need to do your job? What training would benefit you in your job?
- What does the organization do to invest in your career development?
- Do you have a mentor or career coach in the workplace?
- What can the organization do to help you achieve your goals for the future?
- What do you believe to be your most valuable talents?
- Does the organization recognize and use your talents?
- Describe your relationship with your immediate supervisor. Describe the avenues of communication between you and your supervisor.
- How do you feel about asking questions or asking for assistance?
- Describe your most difficult challenge at work.

Asking is not enough. Who asks is important – a credible person in the organization. Critical, *doing something with the results*. Failing to follow-up on outcomes undermines the integrity of the organization. While not all identified issues can be simultaneously addressed, prioritization and a plan going forward can be achieved. Communicating the findings and the strategy to employees creates momentum, identifies those who will help, and gives an optimistic and realistic picture of the future.

Employee recognition programs, to sincerely acknowledge the hard work of the jail workforce is also part of retention. Employee-designed programs with rewards that are generationally relevant are the most appreciated.

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