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Police perceptions : external influences affecting work satisfaction

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Police Perceptions: External Influences Affecting Work Satisfaction

By

Ryan Wayne Morgan
B.S., George Mason University, 2003

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the Degree of

Master's in Human Resource Management
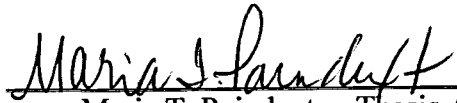

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Maria T. Poindexter

Thesis Advisor

Abstract

There are many individuals that apply for police officer positions. Some of those hired find the job challenging and rewarding, others leave unexpectedly. The newly hired that separate from the organization early in their career can have a negative impact on the police department. It is believed many of newly hired officers that leave unexpectedly may have not had an accurate perception of what the job entailed from the beginning. To gauge where police applicants form their perceptions of police work, newly hired police officers in Fairfax County were surveyed. The study was designed to take into account common perceptions of police work prior to and after police employment. The findings suggest the media, movies, television and family affect a person's perception of police work to some degree. To overcome inaccurate perceptions of police work, police officials need to form greater partnerships with adolescent children, and other potential police applicants.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master's in Human Resource Management.

Signature

Maria T. Poindexter

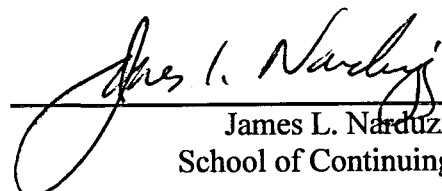Maria T. Poindexter, Thesis Advisor

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rationale for Selection

I have been a police officer for ten years. My family consisted of many people in the public safety sector in the Northern Virginia area. I grew up with certain perceptions of what police work was about and what I could expect when I joined the police department. After being hired to the position of police officer in the Northern Virginia area, I came to learn that the job was quite different than I had expected. Some that join police departments around the country may have similar backgrounds or experiences, and some may have had very little contact with police officers or a police department before taking a job as a police officer.

I am primarily interested to learn if there are sources that influence an applicant's perception of police work. Secondly, I am interested in understanding if once appointed as a police officer how close their perceptions of police work are to reality. I have a strong passion for this topic and believe if the prospective employee has a realistic view of what to expect when appointed to the position of police officer, recruitment efforts may be more productive or efficient and attrition rates may slow.

I have chosen to study police officers of the Fairfax County, Virginia Police Department. I am specifically interested in officers working in a street patrol capacity and serving with less than three years. In Fairfax County, those newly appointed to the Department are generally placed in a street patrol assignment. These officers are in a position to experience many challenges, because of their newness to the job and the nature of their position. I believe the population of police officers to be studied and those

serving with less than three years will be in a better position then those with more service time to recount their life prior to the patrol police assignment. I further believe the same segment of officers would be in the best position to give an accurate account of there true perceptions of what police work is like after their appointment. I feel that if I focused on a segment of police officers with more patrol service time, an accurate account of perception both pre and post employment may be less than accurate.

By selecting only those individuals with a predetermined amount of service time, I am in a better position to take a snapshot of only those officers hired during a particular time in Fairfax County, Virginia. The hiring practices and personnel would have been consistent for the population to be studied therefore believed to produce more accurate data.

Significance of the Topic

I believe the issue of pre-police work perception and post-police work perception is significant. I believe perception has a great consequence for those looking for a position within the police department. To give a better understanding of perception, Webster's Dictionary defines the word as; the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding.

Police work seems to be different than many other jobs. First, Police officers in Virginia take public oaths to defend the Constitution of the United States and of The Commonwealth of Virginia. Not many jobs in America require any kind of oath from there respective employees. Second, Police Officers tend to be more visible in their role than in other jobs (Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995). While working, officers wear shiny metal badges, uniform clothing and equipment that are distinct. They drive vehicles

that let others quickly recognize their role in society. A Police officer's salary is even available for the public's inspection. One can turn on the news on any given day and see the latest police investigation or perhaps in some cases watch as the media explore a police corruption scandal. Some television shows even attempt to explore in a reality fashion the exciting and dangerous aspects of law enforcement (Gunter, 2001).

Regardless of which source is portraying and attempting to identify the role of a police officer, the fact that the work is very public and viewed by so many can cause people to perceive the work in a certain light (Bradley, 1998). Most other jobs are much less public and visible than police work and do not draw the same attention.

Currently it takes anywhere between nine months to two years to be hired with the Fairfax County Police Department. Once hired, that new employee will spend approximately six months in the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy and then another three months with a Field Training Officer prior to working in a solo capacity (C. Kaeppel, personal communication January 12, 2007). It would be a shame if a motivated employee joined the Fairfax County Police Department, spent almost three years of her life, only to learn the work was not as expected or perceived. The monies spent by the Department for that individual could be considered a poor return on investment.

Many people chose a job because they perceive aspects of the work to be beneficial or personally rewarding. People's perceptions guide them to make many choices in life (Weaver & Wakshlag 1996). For instance, people may decide to buy a Volvo instead of a Chevrolet based on perceived safety aspects or people may choose to live in a particular area because they perceive it to be safer than another. These are only a couple examples. I feel if people applying for the role of police officer have a better

understanding of what to expect when hired, and individual perceptions discussed during the application phase, there may be more employee satisfaction. Secondly for recruiters, their may be less attrition within the Department if those recruiters are hiring people that have true insight as to what to expect once serving in a police patrol capacity. I believe the return on this investment could be a significant savings to the department's recruiting and training budget. An example could include a police recruit that is otherwise qualified for the job of Police Officer but resigns from the department soon after being trained because the job was not as perceived. "In Fairfax County, The police department loses an average of 25 new officers every year. In exit interviews within the same police department a common theme that occurs is the training was good, but the job was not as expected (C. Kaeppel, personal communication January 12, 2007)".

I spoke with one individual, Joshua Ryechek who left the Fairfax County Police Department with less than one year of service. He stated, "I thought the job would be much different. I found the job to be more stressful than perceived. I realized the long hours were worse than expected and the compensation was not adequate for the services I was performing (J. Ryechek, personal communication June 7, 2006)". After speaking with Mr. Ryechek it was clear to him that the role of a police officer in Fairfax County was much different than he originally perceived.

I have spoken with many other new Fairfax County Police Officers in casual conversation. Many of them are quite happy working in a police officer capacity, but readily admit the work is different then they perceived. Many see the job as rewarding, while others simply exist in the police officer role until a perceived better opportunity becomes available.

Currently there are many avenues where a prospective employee could gain a perspective of police work. There are many movies, television shows, and news outlets that depict police officers and their work in many different lights. We have all viewed movies, or television shows where the police are either perceived as good or as evil. Many people have seen police movies such as Lethal Weapon or Police Academy. While it is realized people would not ordinarily base their entire perception of police on one particular movie or show, thoughts can be formulated as to how police act and what actually occurs during a police shift. If a person remembers watching the movie Lethal Weapon, one could get the impression that police work is always action packed and always violent. If a person had little to no idea what police work was like, it would be reasonable to suggest that a movie could add to ones perception of the work. Again if a person remembers watching the movie Police Academy, and had no other meaningful experiences with police or their line of work one could perceive police as basically good, but bumbling idiots.

In regards to media outlets many people have seen Breaking News, which shows an officer or officers beating another individual. The first example that comes to mind is Rodney King. How do you think people perceived police and their line of work after watching that video? Whether warranted or not, media outlets can take a real event, present it to a viewer to be the judge of what police work might look like. With the outside stimulation of police perception mentioned, others gain their perspective of police work based on actual interaction (Worrall, 1999). I would expect based on logic that most people would have a view or perception of an officer that rescues a person in distress that is different to an officer that is issuing a traffic citation or arresting your family member.

Like me, many have formed positive perceptions of police by socializing with other police officers on a regular basis (Kirby, 2006).

As you can see there are many stimuli that can influence a person's perception of police work. From a young age people make perceptions about many different topics. I think it is safe to say that from a young age people form a perception of the police and police work. Whether perception of police work is gained through family influence, news, movies, or television, the role of a police officer and police work is different to different people. A major factor that separates a police role from the majority of other workers is the visual impact the role has on the public (Orr, M., & West, D.M., 2007). I am interested in understanding how an individual's perception of police work influences their decision to become a police officer and if other sources have an influence on the perception.

Delimitations

Hopefully my focus regarding pre-hire police perceptions and post-hire police perceptions will encompass similarities and differences in those perceptions among those newly employed as police officers within the Fairfax County Police Department. I do not plan to study police officers that are well established members of the Fairfax County Police Department or citizens that participated in the employment process, but were not hired. I believe that the segment of established police officers may have useful knowledge that is worth collecting, but I find it reasonable to suggest that individuals with more than three years service to the Fairfax County Police Department may not be able to accurately account for their perceptions of police work prior to being hired. If that

segment were studied, I believe there would be a greater chance that true information regarding pre hire perceptions would be lost or inaccurate.

I would speculate that those officers serving with greater than three years would be able to provide accurate post hire perceptions, however for this research project both pre and post hire employment expectations are equally important. In my research I hope to discover commonalities among both pre and post hire police employment work perceptions. I am hopeful that a better understanding of any commonalities will help police recruiters limit the costs associated with attrition and or training costs. I am also hopeful that an understanding of any realized commonality will help prospective police employees make more educated decisions whether or not to apply for a police officer position in Fairfax County.

Client

The Fairfax County Police Department was formed July 1, 1940 to take over some of the duties grated to the Fairfax County Sheriffs' Office. Since the Department's inception, it has been led by a Colonel, more commonly referred to as the Chief of Police. The Department is structured in a hierarchal fashion (appendix A). During the early years the Fairfax County Police Department employed a total of eight individuals, both civilian and sworn. Now the department employs nearly 1,350 police officers and 400 auxiliary and civilian personnel. The Fairfax County Police Department is noted as the largest local police department in the state of Virginia. The Police Department patrols 400 square miles of land mass and has a population exceeding one million (Fairfax County in Brief. (n.d.). Retrieved February 1, 2007, from http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/police23/htm).

There are eight district stations throughout the county to serve the diverse population of Fairfax County. While population changes and personnel have grown since the 1940's the mission has remained basically the same. The mission of the Fairfax County Police department is to protect persons and property by providing essential law enforcement and public safety services, while promoting community involvement, stability and order through service, assistance and visibility (Mission-Police Department. (n.d.) Retrieved February 1, 2007, from

http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/police23/htm.)

CHAPTER TWO

Research of the Literature

There is an understanding that perceptions can vary widely from one person to another and effect people in different ways. The existing research on how external factors affect both police applicants and new police officer's perceptions is limited; however police officer perceptions alone seem to have been documented well over time. It seems much research has been conducted on how external sources affect a citizen's perception of police. That research stretches over three decades. Most of the published research used is relatively new. Other sources found seem relevant today, but are somewhat dated. The following represents an examination of existing research on how external sources such as the media, movies, television, and family affect a person's perception of police.

Media

From many sources it is well documented that news media influences a persons perception of police, however there are mixed opinions as to what degree one is influenced. Surveys of the public indicate that nearly all people consider the media as their main source of information about crime (Surrette, 1998) For the most part the media focuses on specific police issues, or trends affecting an area. The police or the investigating officers are usually not the focus of the report. The police are usually only mentioned to advise that the incident has been recognized and is being addressed (Surette, et al). This philosophy can fail to capture the big picture in some aspects. Generally, police are portrayed as trying to do their job and trying to do he right thing, however people considering only media coverage as fact may view it as police are an

ineffective measure to fight crime (Brandl, Frank, Wooldredge, & Watkins, 1997). People may not be able to form an objective opinion basing their opinion solely on media accounts.

Albert C. Gunther suggests that the media plays a far larger role on how people formulate opinions. People that use media as a major source of information gathering are more likely to believe the information presented. The reasoning seems to be a belief that the information presented by the media is closely correlated with the majority views of society. Studies have suggested that depending on how an article is written, whether favorable or not can lead the reader or viewer to a similar viewpoint.

Recently some researchers have identified a trend in news media of the criminal justice process characterized as "tabloid Justice" (Fox & Van Sickle, 2001). Essentially the media focuses on absurd, unimaginable, and the embarrassing aspects of investigations or trials. This trend treats news more as entertainment. If media outlets are concerned about ratings, this method might be a good approach.

A problem realized with this approach is that sensationalized news might give a person a false sense of truth. An example that comes to mind is the O.J. Simpson case. The Los Angeles Police Department had a reputation of being a premier law enforcement agency. The media went wild for months showing videos of a run-a-way Ford Bronco and talks of damaging evidence that would likely prove the guilt of a famous football player. Though the trial commentary was endless, I believe the media wanted to be unbiased but at times seemed to draw premature conclusions of guilt or innocence and focused its coverage on the absurd. For days the media focused on catch phrases such as one spoken by O.J. Simpson's Counsel, Johnny Cochran, "If the glove don't fit, you must

acquit", and possible secret relationships among prosecutors. The publics availability to the information provided by many media outlets may have led many to reasonably conclude early in the judicial trial that the prosecution team was out of its league and unprepared for such a high profile case.

Television and Movies

Television and movies can affect one's perception of police work. There are not many studies available that discuss the relationship between movies and perception. There is not a lot of research on how television specifically influences one perception of police work, however studies of this medium repeatedly demonstrate the obvious. Television and movies show a distorted view of police work (Surette et al).. Most portrayals of police though television and movies depict police violence, crime fighting and individualism Effective police work in many instances is characterized by not following procedure or law and taking exceptional measures to solve cases (many of which include an arrest and conviction in under an hour). In other shows the police are not able to solve the crime and matters are left to citizens to resolve.

Entertainment media may play an important role in framing a citizens' impression about police. Movies and television show that present police in a positive light is expected to sway citizens more positively towards police generally, especially those with little direct personal contact with police (Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, &Reisig 2001).

Family

There is existing research regarding family influence that is applicable to perceptions of police work. From an early age children look to their parents for guidance as to what is right or wrong. Children form moral opinions and immolate parental behavior and actions (Zamble & Annesley, 1987). Children look to family as a means of reference and can be a captive audience. Parents that practice a religion are likely to promote their belief system to their children. Without any other framework for the child to reference, the child is likely to copy what is perceived to be the proper behavior exhibited by the parent.

This influence does not have to be confined to such strongly held beliefs as religion and can be tied to police perceptions and perceptions of police work. A specific example could be a parent that holds negative views of police, their philosophy and the job in general. That parent is more likely to present negative views of police work to her children. The child's only frame of reference of police would most likely be the parent. The child is likely to process the parents' beliefs as truth (Beehr, Johnson, Nieva, Hurell, & Joseph 1995). Family can be very influential in instilling a perception during adolescence years. Reinforcement from family about whether police are perceived as good or not so good is not out of the realm of influence (Gilmartin 2002).

Research indicates a family is more likely to have a more favorable perception of police work if a family member is currently employed as a police officer, however the statement is based on multiple variables. The family's Perception may be less favorable for those have had negative contacts with police officers or those family members that live in neighborhoods considered being in disorder. In areas considered to be in disorder

there is a lack of trust of police officers. In areas considered to be in disorder there is a lack of trust of police officers. In such areas the idea of becoming a police officer is less appealing than to people who come from more orderly neighborhoods (Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, & Reisig 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

Actual Research

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what sources influence an applicant's perception of police work. To guide this study the following research questions were used: 1) What are the perceptions that applicants have about police work before they begin training; 2) What are the perceptions do newly hired patrol officers have about police work within the first three years of employment; and 3) How similar are these perceptions to the reality of the job. The target population used in the study was patrol officers hired within three years. The sample included street patrol officers of the Fairfax County Police Department. This group was selected due to their newness to the department and their ability to recollect their true perception prior to being hired.

Two dependent variables were used in the study 1) pre hire perceptions and 2) post hire perceptions. Media and family were used as independent variables to measure their impact on perceptions of police work. These variables were selected based on a review of the literature that indicated that they have a direct impact on perceptions of how police work is viewed by the public.

Validity

This study investigated relationships between perceptions of police work and the actual reality of the job. The following threats to internal validity were considered: history and instrumentation. History was a threat to internal validity because the impact of participant's previous experience with surveys was unknown. Unfavorable

experiences could have lead to item responses that were not true. Not all police officers that are hired remain with the force for up to three years. The group that left may have had valuable knowledge to add to the study. This group was not available to the researchers. The survey used for this study was created by a novice researcher. Great time was taken in the design of survey items; however, the survey was used for the first time in 2006 and could have been identified as an unreliable instrument.

The findings of this study can only be inferred to the sample. Findings reveal that perceptions vary greatly, therefore individual perceptions must be considered in every case. Findings can only be generalized to this sample.

Survey

Survey research was conducted to gather information from a sample of individuals in the Fairfax County Police Department (Scheuren, 2004, p. 9.). The survey was used to gather self-report descriptive information about the attitudes and behaviors, of this population (Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, 1995, p. 548) and offered a systematic approach to the collection of information (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983, p.1).

Prior to the research, the topic of perceptions in police work came to light. It is understood that people are leaving, but information gleaned from exit interviews were not drawing definitive answers. The reasons for new officers leaving the department were vague. In an effort to better understand why employees were leaving there was much support from the department heads and senior staff for a survey of new officers and how perceptions of the work influenced their decision to apply for employment. Those department heads are interested in the outcome and conclusions.

I was able to gather much preliminary information about the subjects available to be surveyed. With the support of department heads I was able to develop a key sample population. This information was important as I was able to gain insight about a segment of officers that were most likely to leave the department unexpectedly. An initial draft survey document was established based upon key perception issues. Other members of the organization had an opportunity to review the draft document and make suggestions about issues such as the order or relevance of certain questions in the survey. After several corrections a workable pilot survey was completed. The pilot survey was distributed among several organizational members who had originally reviewed the document. Additional errors were found in the survey and corrected. Most of the errors discovered during this phased were questions that might have seemed confusing to a reader. After some editing concerns were corrected the final survey was complete. Those that would complete the survey would hopefully answered answer all 41 questions, most of which had five response options.

Once the Survey was complete an e-mail was sent to employees advising them that a survey would be disseminated shortly. The communication option that was selected was utilized as a cost effective means to reach a large number of employees within the organization. I was able to discern through the departments e-mail system that a large portion of the employees had read the e-mail. The e-mail described my intentions and the support of the department heads as an effort to better the organization and help future recruitment efforts. The e-mail closed with a time frame at which the finding would become available, which was determined to be less than 10 weeks from dissemination and collection.

Seven days after the mentioned e-mail was sent the surveys were distributed. Of the available population, a 50 percent sample or 150 people was determined to be more than adequate. I believed that less than 100 percent of those receiving surveys would actually complete and return the survey. The survey instructions advise that participation is voluntary. Attached to each survey was a letter of confidentiality and instructions to complete the survey. The surveys were sent by inter-office mail. This method was the most cost effective method of delivery. It was expected that the surveys would be returned by inter-office mail within one week. The last completed survey arrived 14 days after it was distributed

Two surveys had to be discarded as important information on the completed survey was outside established parameters. The remaining surveys were checked for errors and incomplete responses. As mentioned before, most questions had five response options. Each of those options was assigned a numeric value that was unavailable to the person surveyed. Once each question was evaluated and a numeric value was given to a particular response, that information was entered into a database for comparison with the other respondent's answers. Through analysis and interpretation of the responses key themes started to emerge and were noted.

The initial findings were shared quickly with the members that helped formulate the pilot study. At this point only major themes were realized and shared with the project support members. The confidentiality of individual responses was highly guarded. Once my position was explained in reference to confidentiality issues, there was a high level of understanding and acceptance. Within three weeks, the information analyzed and discovered from the survey was prepared for review by senior management and

department heads, and within eight weeks the general findings were presented to those that participated in the survey. An e-mail communication of the highlights was sent to the original population studied. It was important to ensure the communication distributed was within the 10 week window I had established earlier in the process.

Research Findings- External Sources

From the research findings it is important to understand factors that may influence the applicant or new officer's perception. Factors that influence ones perception can come from many different sources. External sources would be considered sources where there is a strong disconnect between the applicant or new officer and the influence being examined. It is believed there is a strong disconnect between the applicant or police officer and the media, movies, and television. These sources generally lack a lasting emotional connection with the officer. Semi-external sources would be influences with a stronger emotional attachment such as family and in some cases friendships.

As I looked at the research findings and gave each response a numeric value in Part I, I began to see trends within those survey responses. As far as external sources that may have an effect on a potential officers' perception of police work movies and television ranked highest. From the responses, I found that applicants wanting to become police officers are affected by these external sources. 60 percent of those surveyed said television had a little to a moderate influence as to what they perceived actual police work to be like. 20 percent said television shows have no influence over their perceptions. Shows like COPS readily report that it takes hours and hours of film and riding with police officers to make one minute of acceptable television footage.

Now as new officers, the survey results show a substantial change. Of those surveyed, 95 percent said that television shows have a little to no effect on how they perceive police work. 5 percent still find that television shows have a moderate effect over their perception of police work. The change suggests the role of police officer may be quite different than what is viewed on television.

50 percent of those surveyed said as an applicant, movies had a little to a moderate influence as to what they perceived actual police work to be like. While some movies may be closer to reality, an overall motive for movies is to either educate or make money. I would imagine watching an officer drive around for hours during a shift would do neither. As the survey changed to perception of movies influence as an officer, again a major change was realized. 90 percent of the newly hired officers state that movies have a little to no influence on their perception of police work. 10 percent of those surveyed still believe movies play a moderate influence over their perception of police work.

News media did not rate as high as television or movies as an external source affecting an applicant's perception of police work. While 25 percent of the applicants said it was unknown how the media affected their perception of police work, 60 percent advised it had a little to no effect. As new officers 95 percent of those surveyed said the media has a little to no influence over their perception of police work.

Research Findings-Semi-External Sources

The survey included some semi-external sources that may effect how an officer perceives police work. The results from these sources were not as dramatic as the external sources, but could still have a significant impact on an organization.

The Survey asked how family members influence the respondent's perception of police work. As an applicant, it seems that family plays a large role. For instance in this survey, family accounted for 45 percent, of moderate to much influence of the applicant's perception of police work. On the same scale, only 25 percent of family influence effects how the newly hired police officer perceives his work. I found it odd that the survey revealed 45 percent of the time the applicant family had little influence over the applicant's perception, and similarly as a new officer, family had little influence over police work perceptions 40 percent of the time. I had expected family to have a stronger impact on influence and perception.

Secondly, the survey asked how pleased was your spouse or significant other about applying for and becoming a new officer. This question may have some flaws. For the most part those surveyed reported that they were single, which would have a direct impact on how pleased a spouse or significant other would be about the process. Another issue discovered would be those officers that were single during the application phase but were married with in the three year window of officers that are being surveyed, or were married during the application phase and divorced, separated, or widowed during the three year window that is being studied. Due to the many variables, I decided not to include any statistics for the question.

Third, and probably a close second only to family would be how close friends influence ones perception of police work. When I became a police officer, I had close friends that were not pleased with the decision. They were mostly concerned about danger issues and felt it would be better to consider a different profession. From a young age we all experience peer pressures and know what kind of influence a close friend

might have on major decisions. Once established in the police profession, those that once were concerned became pleased with my decision. Of those surveyed, I noticed only 5 percent of the applicant's close friends were not pleased with the decision to be a police officer, while 95 percent said friends were pleased or very pleased about the applicants decision. As a new officer on the department, 90 percent of close friends were pleased or very pleased with the decision to become a police officer. The results are consistent with my experience. I found the responses for this question were numerically high. Aside from a few people surveyed that did not know how their close friends felt about the applicant becoming a police officer or performing in the role of a police officer, most surveyed had tremendous support from close friends.

CHAPTER FOUR

Application

Implementation

After completing and analyzing the survey questions I realized that there is much that can be done to improve an applicant's view of what police work entails on a day to day basis. I hope the Fairfax County Police Department will consider the research findings and the forgoing approach as an effort to help the organization run more efficiently. I would ask the Fairfax County Police Department implement the following five recommendations to improve an applicant's perception of police work.

Partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools

Currently there are only a couple of schools in Fairfax County that officer a class that teaches law enforcement theory and application. The class is considered an elective for students who wish to become more familiar with the workings of the Police and the public service arena. I would recommend that the Fairfax County Police Department further develop a relationship with the school system to make the elective program more wide spread.

There is a School Resource Officers (SRO) currently assigned to each high school in Fairfax County. Their main function at this time is to provide security for the students, staff, and visitors. They also are the primary point of contact should a crime occur on the school's grounds. The SRO is in a unique position, as those officers are usually the only visible portrayal of a police officer during a students adolescence years. Unfortunately,

the SRO typically only has face to face contact with students in trouble or with those involved in an investigation. I would recommend the SRO have additional duties that might show the SRO and the police department in a more favorable light. I recommend high schools currently providing a law enforcement curriculum partner with an SRO as a resource for students. I believe students having more positive contacts with police and the opportunity to converse about the role of a police officer will affect their perception of police work. The SRO would be able to give an accurate description of what is expected from police officers and identify the pros and cons of the profession.

A SRO would roughly come into contact with somewhere in the neighborhood of 25 children per class, times six or so classes a day over the course of a school year. A high school is a great place to speak to a captive audience at a cost that is no greater than currently realized. This program would touch the lives of many more students over the years than the other mentioned recommendations, and would be considered a top priority.

A police officer may or may not make a great educator, however the SRO's primary function would be a visible employee that is qualified to discuss the police profession, trends in law enforcement, and case law that would be applicable to the students. The schools would provide the space necessary to facilitate learning; more specifically the school would provide classroom space. School personnel would also be a valuable resource to help the SRO gain knowledge of how to effectively teach high school children. If the recommendation is successful, more schools might be willing to adapt a similar curriculum.

Students that successfully complete the class could be considered for a role of Police Cadet upon meeting the appropriate age and background investigation. Currently,

the police cadet program accepts individuals at least 18 years of age to operate in a civilian capacity. As a cadet, they become a part of the police culture in Fairfax County. Cadets are also provided with tuition reimbursement for college and are strongly encouraged to attend classes. At the age of 21 cadets are routinely hired as police officers and sent to the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy. The Police Department should focus on communicating with individuals at a young and impressionable high school age. This recommendation will help students form a more accurate perception of police work and allow a potential candidate make a more informed decision if the work is appropriate for them.

Citizen Police Academies

Currently, the Fairfax County Police Department has adapted a citizen police academy. The academy is a short eight week school, meeting once or twice a week for a few hours. The meetings help to give an overview of the police department, the basic functions of police work, and certain police protocol to incidents. The system is directed to give a Fairfax County citizen a more in depth view of what the Fairfax County Police Department doing today. Few candidates that participate in the voluntary program apply for an actual police job. The classes are taught by Fairfax County Police Officers and instructors assigned to the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy. A major downfall of the program is participation. Routinely the Citizen Police Academies have low enrollment. One reason for the low enrollment would be lack of advertisement. Aside from information posted on the Fairfax county Police website and outdated brochures, there is very little information about the program.

I believe the Police Department's Citizen Police Academy is a step in the right direction, but has much room for improvement. I am going to ask that the Fairfax County Police Department take additional steps to make this program more marketable to the community. I recommend that the Police Department invest funds to distribute updated brochures to the community and to advertise on the Fairfax County cable channel. The cable channel would be a free method to disseminate information, but should not be considered a primary method for updating citizens. I believe many people would flip right over the Fairfax County channel, due to its lack of desired programming. With that said, distributing brochures to the community informing them of the Citizens Police Academy is likely to draw more interest than hoping the citizen finds a copy machine brochure at a local police station.

Brochures would be an important tool. It is highly likely that the recipient will at least physically handle the information as it is retrieved from the mailbox. The Brochures would be mass distributed in a business mail format to many diverse communities across the county, and could help gage a level of interest in the program. Diversity is a major factor in today's marketplace and the Fairfax County Police Department is no exception. The Department needs to be able to reach a number of ethnicities. Those that are interested would supply contact information, such as a phone number or e-mail address, and mail the brochure back to a central receiving location preferably the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy. Additional information that would want to be considered would be the most beneficial time to hold class. Of those brochures received there would be a liaison that collects the returned information, enters

that information into a database, and makes contact with those that are interested in the program.

Class size would be determined by the Criminal Justice Academy staff. The instructors of the Academy would be the primary instructors for the sessions, supplemented by police recruiters and other police officers. I would recommend that the classes be held during a time frame that would most encourage attendance. It is reasonable to suggest that people interested in the program would be hesitant to use leave or take time off from a paying job to attend the Citizen's Police Academy.

The Citizen's Police Academy would be much more then just classroom lecture. The sessions would include actual practical exercises and an opportunity for the citizen to better understand the physical requirements of police work. Upgraded tests would be given to understand the citizen's recollection of instruction. The program is not intended to be a pass/fail, but as a means for the citizen to gather a realistic appreciation of the discipline needed for the profession. The benefits for entering the Citizen's Police academy would be the ability to ride with a police officer while the academy is in session. Under current policy a citizen can only ride with a police officer once a year and has to meet additional requirements. Essentially most of the red tape involved with what is commonly known as a ride-a- long will be waived. It is expected that riding with an officer on multiple occasions will give a citizen a better sense of the work expected. Upon completion of the Citizens Police Academy, graduates would receive a gift or certificate indicating a successful completion of the course.

The benefits of this program will help the Fairfax County Police Department and its citizens. Good training is likely to have a positive impact on the citizens. Not only will

a better understanding of police work occur, but potential recruits would be recognized. Recruiters would be able to better assess the citizens as they complete the academy course and be able to form more solid inferences on attributes desired by the organization. It is believed that that the Citizen's Police Academy training would be a near immersion experience that would dissolve any untrue perceptions of police work.

Auxiliary Police Officers

The Fairfax County Police Department has within the last two years come to understand that an unpaid auxiliary police force is desirable. Upon completion of an Auxiliary academy, Auxiliary officers carry the same authority as a typical paid police officer, although departmental policy regulates the duties and activities an auxiliary officer may handle. I have recognized that the role of Auxiliary Police officer seems to be a transition phase for some citizens that contemplate working in a police officer role without giving up their day job. Auxiliary officers do not receive compensation and do not carry a side arm. One of the only monetary benefits the organization provides to its auxiliary officers is a waiver of personal property tax on one vehicle. That benefit only applies to auxiliary officers that live in Fairfax County.

I recommend a strong push to recruit more auxiliary officers. On many occasions auxiliary officers join the department as a means to provide a public service to the community, without sacrificing their current paying job in private enterprise. Many auxiliary officers have realized that police work suites their needs and is a more desirable work than with their current employer. The auxiliary role is used by some as a means to understand if police work is an avenue to explore for paid employment. Currently, due to the voluntary nature of the job, auxiliary officers can work as much as they like and have

full access to all police buildings and facilities. They are however, expected to serve a minimum number of hours a month and to keep up certain proficiencies.

I would recommend that from the top down, all police officers treat auxiliary officers with the same respect and dignity as any fellow officer. Currently, auxiliary officers do not do much of what most might consider police work. Auxiliaries perform more of a support role. They direct traffic at large events and take calls for service that would not generally involve investigation or calls of an urgent nature. Their uniforms are much different then of their paid counterparts. I understand not all auxiliaries officers want to do the same job as their paid counterparts, so I recommend two levels of auxiliary officers. Auxiliary officers that prefer to act in an administrative fashion and those that wish to be more closely tied with the paid officers. For those auxiliary officers that wish to perform more administrative functions I feel the current uniform is adequate. It distinguishes them from those dressed in casual attire and makes them recognizable should a citizen need assistance.

For those that wish to get the full experience of what police work entails, I would recommend those auxiliaries be issued a side-arm and dress in a manner that more closely resembles a paid police officer. Obviously no equipment, especially a side-arm would be issued to the auxiliary until that auxiliary has shown an adequate proficiency using the weapon. I believe the attire would help grow a sense of pride among the auxiliaries. Paid police officers may be more willing to ask for their assistance in stressful situations knowing the auxiliary has met required standards and has a certain level of proficiency with the issued tools of the trade.

Auxiliary officers would be held to the same standard and expectations of paid police officer for the most part, but would have to act in a back-up capacity to a paid police officer in more serious calls for service. This measure is a necessity for the auxiliary. The major factor for the measure centers on knowledge skills and abilities. With the burden of having to work another job and the hassles of life, it is recognized that auxiliary officers will be unable to obtain the same level of training provide to a paid police officer in Fairfax County. As auxiliaries ride in mark patrol vehicles they may be closer than or observe an incident that requires immediate attention. Without the proper tools to calm an escalated event would be detrimental to the auxiliary and the police department.

By including auxiliary officers in more aspects of police work and embedding more closely within the police culture, the experience is bound to remove any preexisting notions as to what police work might be like. The auxiliary office would have a unique experience quite different than the Citizen' Police Academy. The Auxiliary would essentially experience the same ups and downs as a paid officer, therefore gaining a true understanding of police work. The auxiliary officer performing in a near exact role as a paid officer is in an optimal position to decide if leaving the existing paid job is worth a career as a paid police officer.

Police Recruiters

Police recruiters and mentors are in a unique position when it comes to addressing perceptions of police work. I recommend the recruiter review the analysis of the survey. Police recruiters have to be able to get into the head of the applicant to understand why

the applicant wants the job. The recruiter should assume the applicant has made assumptions of what police work entails and how those assumptions came about. I recommend the police recruiter simply ask questions surrounding external sources such as media, television, and movies and if the applicant thinks the work will be similar to any of those sources. I recommend that recruiters talk with the applicant's family to ascertain what motivated the applicant to apply. Obviously, the recruiter needs to be concerned with other issues such as criminal behavior and character. Attempting to understand why someone wants to be a police officer and gauging how external factors and semi-external factors influenced the decision to apply needs to be strongly emphasized.

I recommend the recruiter make a checklist of any external and semi-external factors and use that checklist while interviewing applicants. The police profession is different than many other professions. The senses of excitement, the rush of adrenaline are not everyday occurrences despite the depiction of movies, television, and media outlets. I recommend police recruiters be less concerned with a body count and making numbers and be more concerned with hiring individuals that will want to stay with the organization and have a clear understanding of what is expected.

Sleep and Eating

One of the most troubling data collected surrounded sleep and eating issues among newly hired officers. Essentially, many new officers had no clue the requirements of the job would affect sleep and eating habits. Most of the work shift is spent in a car and a work shift is nearly 12 hours; Couple that with mandatory assignments outside of

normal working hours such as court or community meetings and it becomes apparent why officers are tired. Eating habits seem to be affected because fast food is just that, fast. Officers going from call to call may not be afforded an opportunity to eat at a sit down restaurant and may not have the discipline to pack a meal from home.

My recommendation is for the Police Department to consider hiring nutritionalists and personal trainers willing to work with police officers to solve poor eating habits. In order to limit costs, educational facilities with departments focusing on nutrition could assign projects to interns that would help officers with poor eating habits and at least help the officer realize a better lifestyle. Currently the police department has no concrete solution to this concern. Some programs have been hit or miss. The only program that is available at this time is a wellness program. Officers are allowed one hour twice a week to work out on company time. I would recommend this program be expanded and even made mandatory. Other Public Safety entities such as the Fairfax County Fire Department require their employees to meet certain physical standards comparable to standards the employee met when hired.

I have not been able to find an acceptable recommendation for the sleep factor that seems to be affecting so many employees. Fairfax County is adamant that police service needs to be available 24 hours a day. They are also adamant that a minimum numbers of officers are needed available at all times to safety handle calls for service. I would recommend that further research on sleep and public safety be conducted as a separate inclusive topic.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Summary
When I was hired as a Fairfax County Police Officer, I realized that the profession was different then I had perceived. I believed that growing up in a family consisting of public safety employees to include police officers gave me a more accurate perspective of what police work entails. The Fairfax County Police Department is experiencing a turnover rate, which is costing the department thousands of dollars. From my experience I found that my perceptions may have been influenced by external sources such as television shows, movies, and the media. I also understood that other factors such as family and friends helped me form a perception of police work.

I was curious if others were in the same predicament. Research has shown that perception is ones reality. Once police applicants are hired and performing what they perceive as police work, they may become upset or disengaged because the job was not as perceived. Other research suggests that being unhappy with work can cause sleep and eating disorders. Employees who have spent many hours preparing for the role of police officer may feel they have wasted years of their life perusing a career that did not live up to expectations. Large amount of money spent recruiting, hiring, and training are lost every time there is an unexpected separation from the department.

I created a survey as a method of determining how external and other factors affected new police officers perception of their work and how those same factors affected their perception during the application phase. 150 surveys were distributed among an available 300 person core sample. Of those 150 surveys 50 were eligible for analysis. Of those surveyed several issued were discovered. It seems that external factors during the

application phase of employment with the police department changed once employed as a new police officer. Television shows, movies, media, family, and friends all seem to play a part in how an applicant forms a perception of police work. Those external factors carry over as the applicant is hired and actually performing the job. The only difference is the perceptions were scaled down to a lower degree. Among the most notable issues found during the survey analysis was a general unknowing of information as it regarded sleep and eating habits among police. Many individuals applying for a police officer position had no idea how their sleep would be affected by accepting the job. Most felt that sleep and poor eating habits are major negative concerns having a high impact on their life.

In order to more accurately provide potential applicants with a realistic view of police work entails five recommendations were realized. The Police department needs to form a more proactive partnership with the local school system and promote elective law enforcement type classes. Giving young impressionable people the ability to become informed by continual contact with School Resource Officers is important to facilitate communication about the job requirements, perceptions and expectations.

Citizen police academies afford people with a possible inclination of police employment an opportunity to experience some aspects of the job. Due to low enrollment, lack of participation, and lack of information surrounding the problem have rendered the program less than a success. Better marketing of the program and more acceptable hours for classes would make the program more efficient. The participants are in a position to better perceive the actual duties of a police officer and can make a more informed decision if applying for police employment is appropriate for their situation.

Fairfax County Auxiliary Police Officers are non-paid swore police officers that carry out many of the non urgent functions of a typical police officer in the same department. Many auxiliary officers hold a paying job and join as an auxiliary to gain insight to the role of a police officer. The problem is that the police department is fairly strict on what functions the auxiliary may perform. I recommend that the department more closely examine the positions and allow those officers more flexibility. Being assigned administrative duties might not help give an accurate perception of police duties and expectations. Those that apply for a paid position may realize the job is not for them and a terrible mistake was made.

Lastly, recruiters play a pivotal role when it comes to delivering finite perceptions of the job. Honestly, openness, and conversation addressing perceptions of the job is paramount. Recruiters have to understand that applicants may not know what they are getting into when applying for a police officer position. The recruiters need to take the time to ensure the applicant is right for the job. Simple checklists noting external factors affecting perception of the job is important to discuss with the applicant. Failing to ensure these issues are understood by the applicant may result in unsatisfied employees who leave unexpectedly.

Personal Learning

People may not be accurately informed as to what police work entails. An individual can form a perception of police work based on many factors. I thought that family would have more of an impact on whether a person would apply for the position of a police officer. It seems that having a positive view of police work aids in ones decision despite potential negative or unknown perceptions of the work. An inference can

be drawn that outside factors to a degree influence a person's decision to apply for a police officer position. Those that can handle the difference between the actual work from the perceived view of police work remain. Those that find the actual work to be a hardship will most likely leave.

I do not think many people can gage accurately what police work entails unless the person has made an effort to research the position. It seems that police for the most part play an important role trying to ensure the safety of citizens and their property. Police officers tend to be called when there is a problem that needs to be handled and little communication occurs outside formal contacts. People may get a one sided view of the profession if the only see the police dealing in negative situations. Positive outreach to the community and those interested in the job might help increase the perception of police and the work performed. Being less concerned with getting applicants through the door and focusing on obtaining qualified candidates that are truly informed should be job number one.
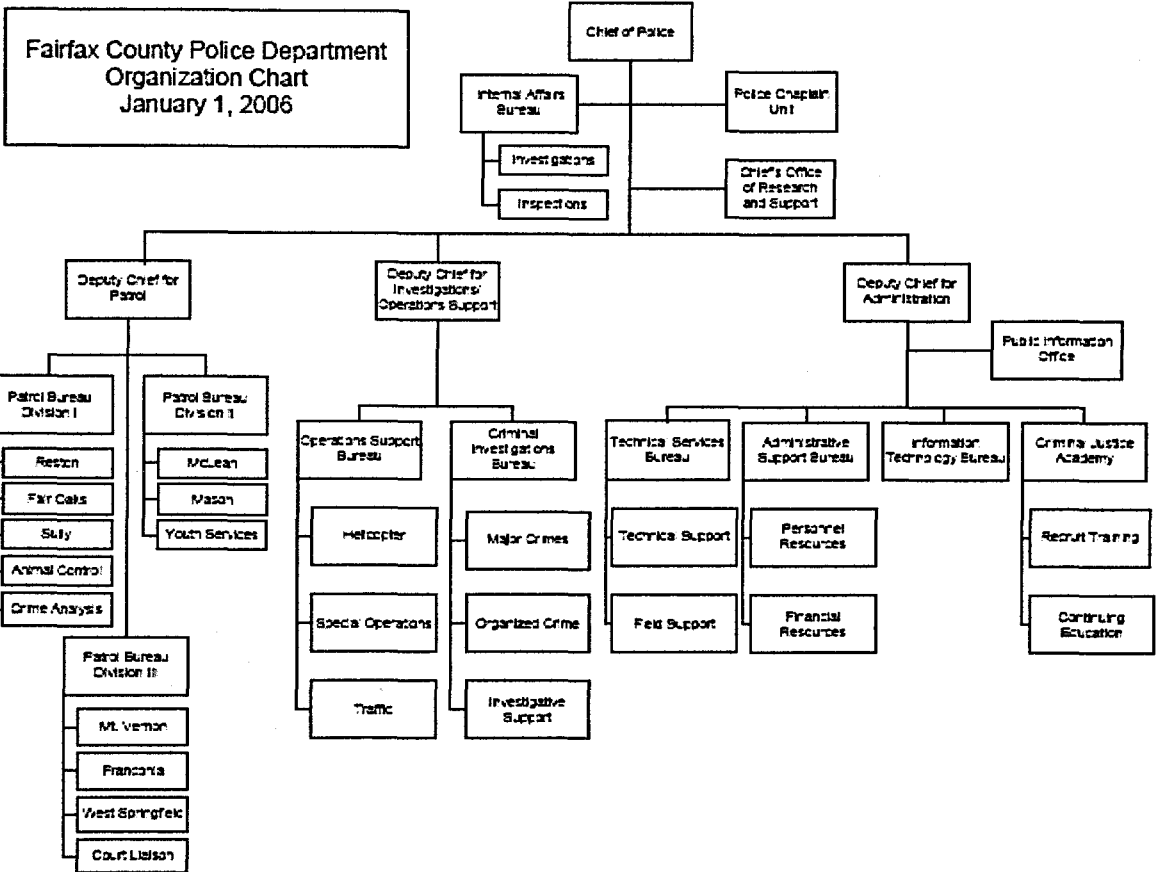
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Appendix

Appendix A

Fairfax County Police Department Organization Chart January 1, 2006

- Chief of Police
  - Internal Affairs Bureau
    - Investigations
    - Inspections
  - Police Chaplain Unit
  - Chief's Office of Research and Support
  - Deputy Chief for Patrol
    - Patrol Bureau Division I
      - Reston
      - Fair Oaks
      - Sully
      - Animal Control
      - Crime Analysis
    - Patrol Bureau Division II
      - McLean
      - Mason
      - Youth Services
    - Patrol Bureau Division III
      - Mt. Vernon
      - Franconia
      - West Springfield
      - Court Liaison
  - Deputy Chief for Investigations/ Operations Support
    - Operations Support Bureau
      - Helicopter
      - Special Operations
      - Traffic
    - Criminal Investigations Bureau
      - Major Crimes
      - Organized Crime
      - Investigative Support
  - Deputy Chief for Administration
    - Public Information Office
    - Technical Services Bureau
      - Technical Support
      - Field Support
    - Administrative Support Bureau
      - Personnel Resources
      - Financial Resources
    - Information Technology Bureau
    - Criminal Justice Academy
      - Recruit Training
      - Continuing Education

Appendix B

Survey Instructions

This survey is intended to establish a baseline measurement for determining pre-hire expectations of a police work compared to the actual role of a Fairfax County Police Officer. It will also serve as a starting point for making improvements to the hiring process. The survey is very important so please take the time to complete it.

The survey is separated into two parts, labeled Part I and Part II. The last response in Part I and in Part II is for write-in comments. For the remaining questions, please fill in or circle the response that most appropriately reflects your perception or experience. Please consider the full range of responses before making a choice. Space is provided at the end of the survey for any comments you may have. These comments will be transcribed and grouped with others according to common themes as a part of the survey results analysis.

Your individual responses will not be released to anyone within the Fairfax County Police Department. This survey is completely confidential. After scoring, your answer sheet and write-in commentary will be destroyed. The aggregate information collected will be presented to a group of graduate students in an informal presentation.

When you have completed your survey, seal it in the envelope provided. If you have any questions regarding the completion of the survey, Please contact Ryan Morgan at 703-360-8400 or ryan.morgan@fairfaxcounty.gov .

Thank you for participating in the survey. Your opinions can only add value to the Department and make it a better place for future police officers

PART I – <u>Pre-employment</u>. *Please fill in or circle your response to the following questions.*

1. How many years have you been a police officer in Fairfax County?

2. What was your age when you applied to be a Fairfax County Police Officer?

<20	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	>40

3. What was your education level at the time you applied to be a Fairfax County Police Officer?

G.E.D.	High School Diploma	Some College	Associates Degree	Bachelors Degree	Graduate Degree

4. What is your Gender?

Male	Female

5. At the time you applied for a Fairfax County Police Officer were you;

Single	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed

6. Did you have a family member or significant other serving in law enforcement at the time you applied with the Fairfax County Police Department?

Yes	No

7. If #5 was answered **yes,** what was the rank of that family member or significant other?

8. *Prior to applying* with the Fairfax County Police Department, how much interaction did you have with police officers?

No interaction	Little interaction	Unknown	Moderate interaction	Much interaction

9. *Prior to applying*, how much did movies influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

10. *Prior to applying*, how much did the news media influence your views of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

11. *Prior to applying*, how much did television shows influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

12 *Prior to applying*, how much did personal experiences with police influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

13. *Prior to applying*, how much did family members influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

14. From your overall perspective, how pleased were close friends (non-police) about your decision to apply?

Very unpleased	Unpleased	Unknown or not applicable	Pleased	Very pleased

15. From your perspective, how pleased was your spouse or significant other about your decision to apply?

Very unpleased	Unpleased	Unknown or not applicable	Pleased	Very pleased

16. *Prior to applying*, how did you perceive most police officer's ethical standards?

No ethical standards	Little ethical standards	Moderate ethical standards	High ethical standards	Very high ethical standards

17. *Prior to applying*, how did you perceive most police officer's overall physical condition?

Poor physical condition	somewhat poor physical condition	Average physical condition	Good physical condition	Great physical condition

18. *Prior to applying*, how much paperwork did you think was required for the job?

No paperwork	A little paperwork	Moderate paperwork	Much paperwork	Overwhelming paperwork

19. *Prior to applying*, how dangerous did you view the position?

No danger	Little danger	Unknown	Moderate danger	Very dangerous

20. *Prior to applying*, how much did you believe the job would effect your sleep?

No effect	Small effect	Unknown	Moderate effect	High effect

21. *Prior to applying*, how much did you believe the job would effect you eating habits?

No effect	Small effect	Unknown	Moderate effect	High effect

22. *Prior to applying,* how much stress did you believe was associated with police work?

No stress	A little stress	Unknown	Moderate stress	High stress

23. *Prior to applying,* how much did you believe the department would prepare you for the job of Police Officer?

No adequate preparation	Little adequate preparation	Unknown	Adequate preparation	More than adequate preparation

24. *Prior to applying,* what was your opinion as to how well the police department was organized with respect to efficiency?

Very poorly organized	Poorly organized	Unknown	Well organized	Very well Organized

25. *Prior to applying,* how did you believe the Fairfax County Police Department rated among all other Virginia police departments?

Much worse than other police departments	Worse than other police departments	Unknown	Better than other police departments	Much better than other police departments

PART II – Post-Employment- *Please fill in or circle your response to the following questions.*

26. *As an officer,* how much do movies influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

27. *As a police officer,* how much does news media influence your view of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

28. *As an officer,* how much do television shows influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

29. *As an officer,* how much do personal experiences with other police officers influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

30. *As a police officer,* how much do family members influence your perception of police work?

No influence	Little influence	Unknown	Moderate influence	Much influence

31. From your overall current perspective, how pleased are close friends (non-police) with your appointment to police officer?

Very unpleased	Unpleased	Unknown or not applicable	Pleased	Very pleased

32. From your current perspective, how pleased is your spouse or significant other with appointment to police officer?

Very unpleased	Unpleased	Unknown or not applicable	Pleased	Very pleased

33. *As an officer*, how do you perceive most police officer's ethical standards?

No ethical standards	Little ethical standards	Moderate ethical standards	High ethical standards	Very high ethical standards

34. *As an officer*, how do you view most police officer's physical condition?

Poor physical condition	somewhat poor physical condition	Moderate physical condition	Good physical condition	Great physical condition

35. *As an officer*, how dangerous do you view the position?

No danger	Little danger	Unknown	Moderate danger	Very dangerous

36. *As an officer*, how much do you believe the job effects your sleep?

No affect	Small affect	Unknown	Moderate effect	High effect

37. *As an officer*, how much do you believe the job effects you eating habits?

No affect	Small affect	Unknown	Moderate effect	High effect

38. *As an officer*, how much stress do you believe is associated with police work?

No stress	A little stress	Unknown	Moderate stress	High stress

39. *As an officer*, do you believe the department prepared you for the job of Police Officer?

No adequate preparation	Little adequate preparation	Unknown	Adequate preparation	More than adequate preparation

40. *As an officer,* how well do you believe the police department is organized with respect to efficiency?

Very poorly organized	Poorly organized	Unknown	Well organized	Very well Organized

41. *As an officer,* how do you believe the Fairfax County Police Department rates among all other Virginia police departments?

Much worse than other police departments	Worse than other police departments	Unknown	Better than other police departments	Much better than other police departments

Appendix C

Notable Findings from the Survey

Movies

Applicants- 70 percent do not believe their perception of police work is highly affected by movies.

Officers-   90 percent do not believe their perception of police work is highly affected by movies.

Media

Applicants- 15 percent believe their perception of police was moderately affected by media during the application phase.

Officers-   95 percent do not believe their perception of police is highly affected by media.

Television

Applicants- 60 percent do not believe their perception of police work is highly affected by television.

Officers-   95 percent do not believe their perception of police work is highly affected by television.

Family

Applicants- 45 percent believe family is a significant factor on how applicants perceive police work.

Officers-   25 percent believe family is a significant factor on how officers perceive police work.

Pledge

On my honor I hereby affirm that this work was created by me, the writings and conclusions are entirely my own, I actually completed the research (surveys, interviews, etc.) noted in this thesis, and all ideas from others are properly cited and referenced.

Signed: _Ryan W. Morgan_____

Biography

Ryan Morgan is a second generation police officer for the Fairfax County Police Department. He has served in Fairfax County PD for 10 years and has held the rank of Patrol officer and Sergeant. As a first line supervisor he has seen recruiting and retention problems and is committed to making Fairfax County a premiere law enforcement agency. Prior to obtaining a Masters in Human Resource Management through the University of Richmond, Ryan Morgan received his undergraduate degree from George Mason University in Administration of Justice.