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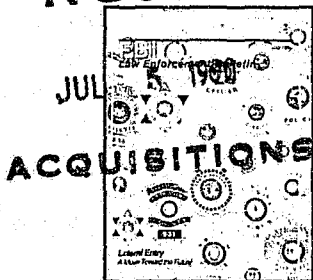


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Lateral Entry

A Move Toward the Future



By
J. EDDIE NIX

One of the most frequently asked questions by police administrators is, "How can we hire qualified, experienced personnel?" The answer to this question may come in the form of lateral entry. In fact, one of the keys to successful recruiting in the future will be the practice of a full-scale lateral entry program.¹

Basically, lateral entry is the ability of a police officer in one

geographic location to enter employment in another area. The officer's pay at the new department is based on experience, job knowledge, and the ability to do the job.²

The concept of lateral entry is not new. It has existed for some 25 to 30 years. Unfortunately, however, police departments overlook the advantages of lateral entry, even though its potential to improve a

department's recruiting efforts and professionalism is evident. This article discusses several of the benefits of lateral entry and some of the obstacles to implementing such programs within police departments.

ADVANTAGES OF LATERAL ENTRY

For most law enforcement departments, there are four areas

that benefit the most by lateral entry:

- Recruiting
- Individual mobility
- Training and cost effectiveness and
- Competition and educational growth.

Even though most departments will benefit from lateral entry programs, some departments may not experience advantages relating to all four of these areas.

Enhanced Recruitment

The recruitment of qualified personnel becomes more difficult as time passes. In the past, all that was necessary was a pool of applicants. Today, this is no longer the case. In fact, in many police agencies, position vacancies outnumber the applicants.

However, when initiated and administered properly, lateral entry could open up a new source of qualified applicants to help meet future recruiting needs.³ Lateral entry programs attract innovative, administrative, professional and technical personnel, especially for the small department.⁴ For example, many former police officers have left law enforcement because of inflexibilities, such as the lack of mobility and promotional opportunity. Yet, these officers would be desirable candidates in many police departments, if they were available for employment. Lateral entry is a way to gain access to such an untapped resource.

Individual Mobility

Another benefit of lateral entry pertains to police officers who are currently employed in law enforcement, but would like to relocate.⁵ Typically, officers desire relocation in order to move from a

smaller department to a larger department, for more promotional potential, more job responsibilities or enrichment, or because of spouse relocation. All of these are valid reasons for mobility and should in no way detract from the individual seeking lateral entry.

Today, with community and corporate growth, mobility is becoming even more of a concern. One reason for this is the changing role of women.⁶ Women also are thinking "careers." In fact, dual-career couples have become the rule rather than the exception in American society.⁷

Dual-career couples create problems for law enforcement. Now, a police officer with a family must consider the spouse's career opportunities in the decisionmaking process. In many cases, a spouse may have more advancement and earning potential than the law enforcement officer, and relocation may be necessary in order to advance within the organization. Often times, husbands or wives are giving up or changing professions so that their spouses can pursue their careers.⁸

In addition, officers may look toward mobility for other reasons, such as caring for ill relatives or wanting a change in climate. In today's law enforcement community, a police officer who is fully qualified and capable of performing the job should have the option of lateral relocation without fear of losing rank and/or pay.

Training and Cost Effectiveness

Police officer training is both time consuming and expensive. It is



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**Lateral entry
is essential to the
professionalization of
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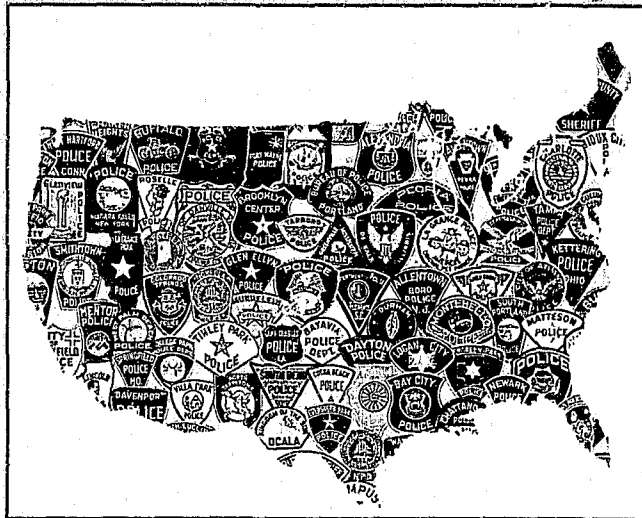
Lieutenant Nix is the Training Section Commander for the Cobb County, Georgia, Department of Police.

not only costly from the view point of salary, benefits, and uniforms but also because of down-time prior to achieving patrol officer status. For this reason, lateral entry police officers provide substantial savings to police departments. In cases where the lateral entry applicant comes from within the State, the savings could be even greater. For example, in most States, individuals must meet certain basic minimum standards and must complete a prescribed training program in order to be employed anywhere in the State.⁹ This is usually a one-time process and permits a certified officer to transfer. Adapting police standards and training legislation is a good first step toward lateral entry.¹⁰

In many areas, the Field Training Officer (FTO) Program is the second step in the training process. This is an important phase and should be required of every new officer, even the lateral entry officer. However, even if the FTO phase of the training is included, the lateral entry candidate still saves police departments both time and money.

For example, in 1985, the Cobb County, Georgia, Police Department estimated that each new police officer costs the department between \$18,000 to \$20,000 before that officer can work a shift without direct supervision. Lateral entry candidates save a large portion of this cost. These savings could be better used to pay the increased salaries of lateral entry employees.

When considering the variables of cost and time, it is easy to see that the savings realized from the lateral entry candidate can be spent on higher salaries. What the police administrator really gets



“...lateral entry is one of the keys to the competitive spirit needed to enhance the police profession.”

from lateral entry is an experienced officer who is assimilated into the department faster. In today's fast moving world, this is very much desired.

Competition and Educational Growth

Support for lateral entry also comes from the Nation's leadership. In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement in its *Task Force Report: Police* stated:

“To improve police services, competition for all advanced positions should be opened to all qualified persons from both within and outside of the department. This would enable a department to obtain the best available talent for positions of leadership. If candidates from within an agency are unable to meet the competition from other applicants, it should be recog-

nized that the influx of more highly qualified personnel would greatly improve the quality of the services.”¹¹

The commission's recommendations and farsightedness were optimistic that lateral entry is one of the keys to the competitive spirit needed to enhance the police profession. This prescription for the success of the police field is as valid today as it was in 1967. Lateral entry is essential to the professionalization of the police function. It also disturbs the status quo and avoids the we've-always-done-it-this-way approach.¹²

In addition, lateral entry affects positively the educational processes of the upwardly mobile department members. It helps provide fresh points of view because people with different experiences and insights introduce variety,

change and innovative ideas.¹³ Many officers are finding out, or will find out, that in order to keep up with the competition, they must refine skills already developed. Lateral entry also bolsters management and technical strength, as well as increases competition and productivity, by providing new talent and ability.¹⁴ It also provides management with a better yardstick for evaluating executive performance and forces management to compare the present group with outsiders.¹⁵ And, once police departments start using lateral entry, law enforcement executives will no longer have to accept marginal employees. Lateral entry could also help to merge effective policing concepts from various police

departments, thereby raising the levels of education and training in participating departments. This creates a better understanding of law enforcement affairs.¹⁶

OBSTACLES TO LATERAL ENTRY

Despite the obvious benefits, obstacles to lateral entry still exist.¹⁷ Police personnel at the patrol level and upper management seem to have the least resistance. And, as expected, the more established the department, the more restrictions there seem to be to the lateral entry concept.

Department Personnel

Mid-level police administrators present the biggest

obstacle. At one time, police officials believed that lateral recruiting was the equivalent of "raiding," and police chiefs even had pacts that they would not hire each other's personnel.¹⁸ However, the resistance and obstacles to full implementation of lateral entry are not limited to department personnel. Roadblocks can arise in the form of civil service, retirement plans, maximum age limitations, and legislative restrictions.

Resistance to Change

Change in law enforcement comes slowly, and this is the case with lateral entry. In fact, some believe that it will never reach the level that the President's Commission on Law Enforcement envisioned in 1967. To achieve this goal, all of the obstacles to lateral entry must be addressed individually and systematically. Many departments have already dealt with some of the obstacles. Obviously, eliminating the obstacles is not easy, but the result to law enforcement will be well worth the effort.

CONCLUSION

Acceptance of lateral entry will continue to be a long, uphill battle. However, it is imperative that those in law enforcement who support lateral entry, both academically and professionally, continue to chip away at the resistance until it is universally accepted. The future of police improvement in all jurisdictions will be handicapped if there are not forthcoming changes in the acceptance of lateral entry.¹⁹

Some believe that the key to the success of lateral entry is at the State and Federal level. In a real

Benefits of Lateral Entry

- Enhances the recruiting effort
- Offers individual mobility
- Reduces training time and is cost effective
- Increases competition and self development
- Attracts innovative, administrative, professional personnel
- Provides for fresh points of view
- Bolsters management and technical strength
- Disturbs the status quo and avoids the we've-always-done-it-this-way-approach
- Provides management with a better yardstick for evaluating executive performance
- Creates a better understanding of law enforcement affairs

Unusual Weapon

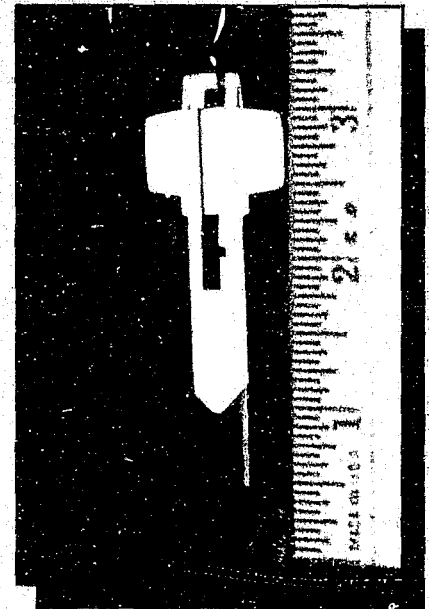
sense, this is true because through legislative reform and financial encouragements, the State and Federal Governments can do much to implement lateral entry. Some advancements in this area have been made, such as legislative reforms that contribute to the cause of lateral entry and the statewide training requirements that are recognized anywhere in a given State. But, the battle for lateral entry is not going to be won at the State and national levels. It will be won one police department at a time, and one geographic area at a time.

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Key Knife

During a recent arrest, officers of the Vinton, Virginia, Police Department discovered a set of car keys attached to an additional plastic key that contained a small hidden knife blade. The approximately 1/2-inch blade extends and retracts by pressing a small button on the key's casing. With the blade extended, the weapon is 3 inches long.

LEB



Footnotes

¹ W.H. Hewitt, "Police Personnel Administration: Lateral Entry," *Police*, January-February 1971, p. 13.

² The salary will be at a level higher than starting pay. A. Stone and S. Deluca, *Police Administration: An Introduction* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1985).

³ C. Swank and J. Conser, *The Police Personnel System* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982).

⁴ *Supra* note 1.

⁵ P. Weston and P. Fraley, *Police Personnel Management* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980).

⁶ M.H. Sekas, "Dual-Career Couples—A Corporate Challenge," *Personnel Administrator*, April 1984, pp. 37-45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸ *Supra* note 6, p. 40.

⁹ *Supra* note 2, p. 293.

¹⁰ O. Wilson and R. McLaren, *Police Administration* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1977).

¹¹ The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *Task Force Report: Police* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).

¹² *Supra* note 1.

¹³ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁴ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁵ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁶ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁷ W. Bopp and P. Whisenand, *Police Personnel Administration* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn Beacon, Inc., 1980).

¹⁸ *Supra* note 5, p. 56.

¹⁹ A. Cohn (Ed.), *The Future of Policing* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1978).

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The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* is always on the lookout for dynamic law enforcement-related photos for possible publication in our magazine. We are interested in photos that visually depict the many various aspects of the law enforcement profession and illustrate the numerous tasks law enforcement personnel perform.

We can use either black-and-white glossy or color prints or slides, although we prefer prints (5x7 or 8x10). In particular, we are always on the lookout for dynamic photos in a vertical format for use on the cover. Appropriate credit will be given to contributing photographers when their work appears in the magazine.

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