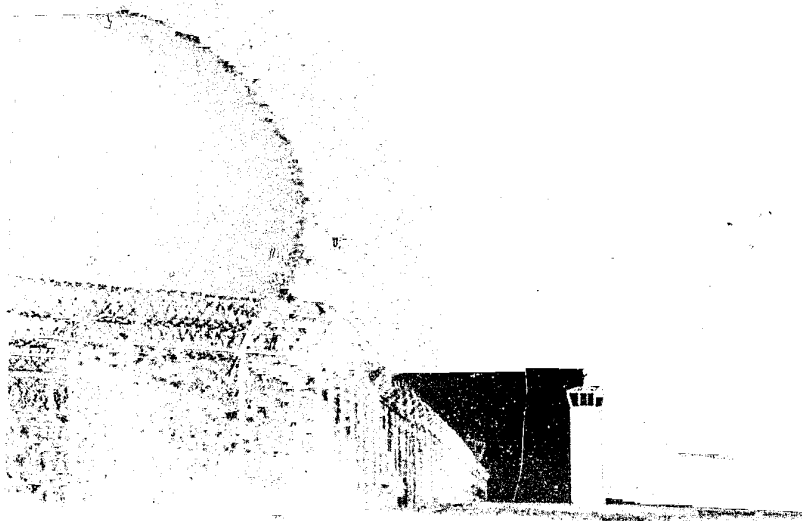


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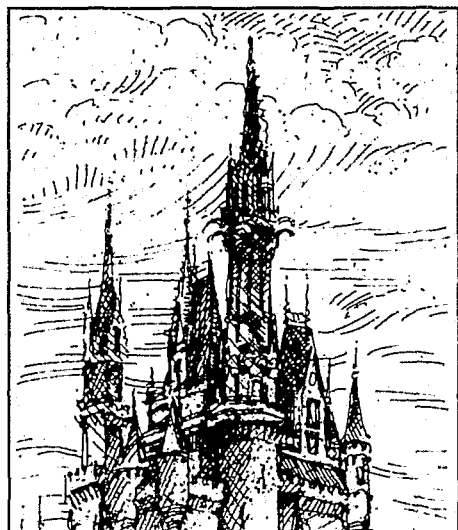
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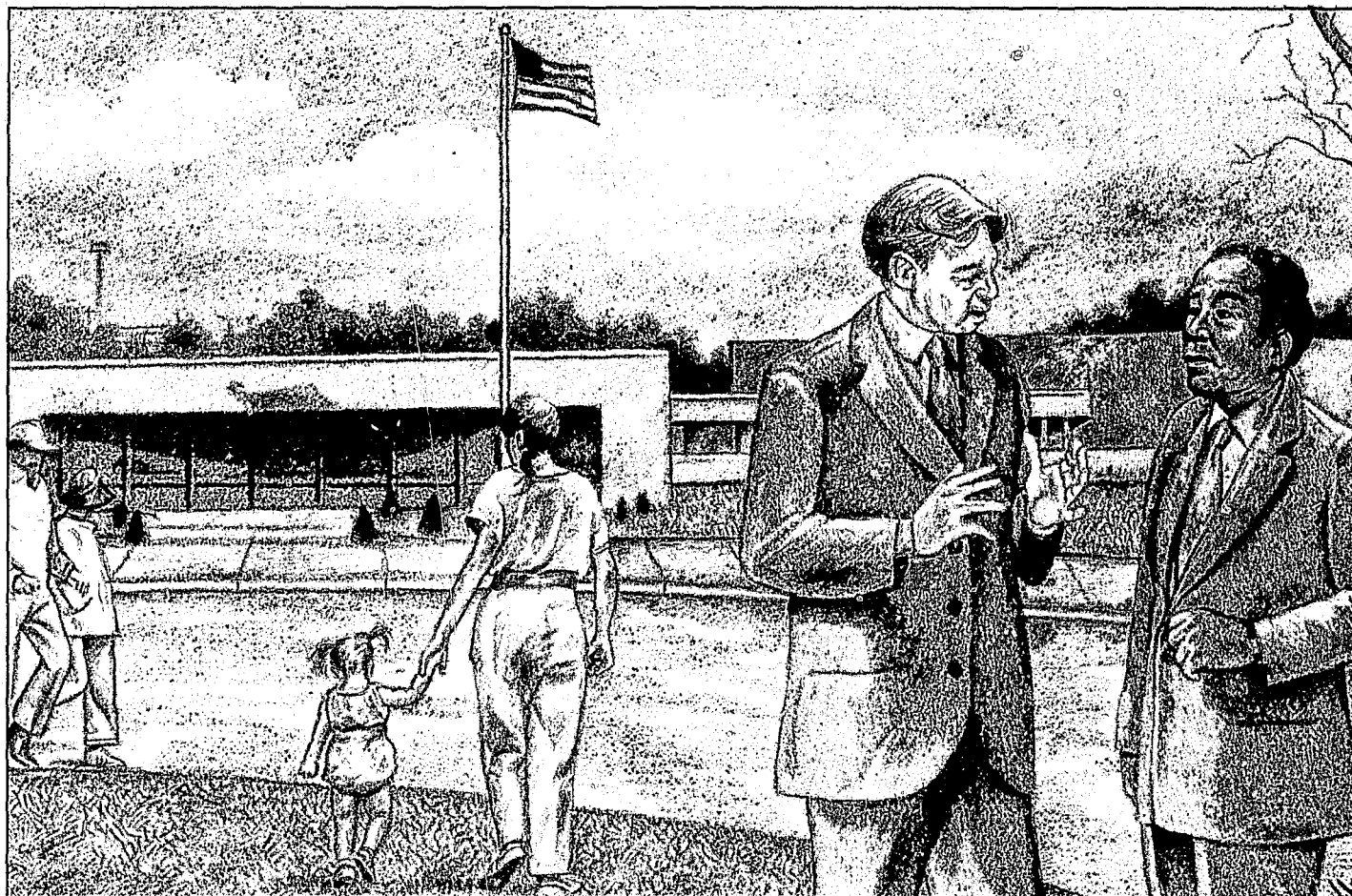
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Career Day at Otisville

Recruitment through employee involvement



*Michael G. Janus, Leslie Dickhoff,
and Mike Brock*

In December 1989, the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) at Otisville, New York, changed its mission from that of a typical FCI to a pretrial operation. An additional 63 positions were allotted to the institution, more than 30 of which were in the Correctional Services department. Otisville, which has always had serious recruitment problems, faced a major challenge in filling these positions.

The following January, Otisville sponsored a "Career Day" at the institution's training center. More than 375 attended—248 of whom were potential applicants who participated in 28 separate tours of the institution and turned in 170 applications. Most applicants were interested in correctional officer positions, but there was a wide range of potential employees—from a candidate for chaplain to several sewage treatment plant operators. It was clear that most attendees were qualified, and that many were exceptional candidates. How did this successful event come about?

The recruitment situation

FCI Otisville is in a high-cost-of-living area, about 70 miles northwest of New York City, which has traditionally been a difficult area in which to recruit. In recognition of this economic fact, special salary rates for correctional officer and psychologist positions at Otisville have been approved by the Federal Office of Personnel Management.

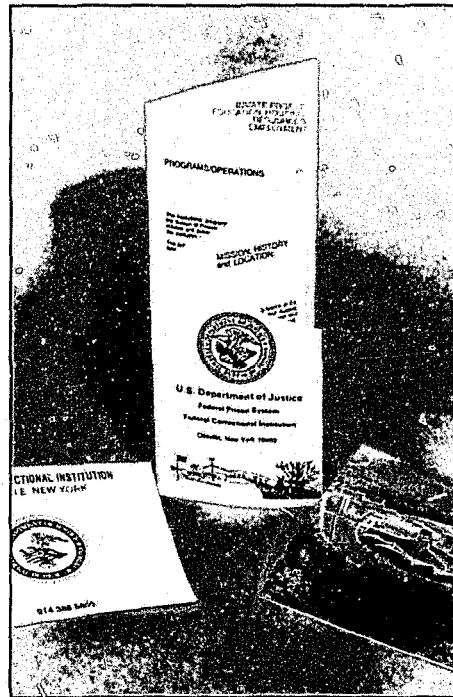
Turnover of all staff, particularly line staff, is high at Otisville, and primarily involves promotion to other institutions rather than employees who go to other jobs in the community. Typically, Otisville staff are eager to transfer to areas where the cost of living is substantially lower. This situation has handicapped the institution in several ways. Correctional staff were often detailed to difficult-to-fill departments, particularly in Inmate Systems Management, where the special salary rates do not apply. Turnover, in conjunction with such detailing, left 10 to 20 vacancies on average in Correctional Services at any time.

Shortly after the December announcement of increased staffing, the institution's department heads held a planning retreat. One full day was devoted to discussions of recruitment, generating a number of promising ideas. The warden decided to appoint a task group (headed by an associate warden, and including the associate wardens' secretary and the chief of utilities) to put these ideas into operation.

The group's first task was to develop priorities, as follows:

Establish a target.

The institution had 63 new positions. There were already 22 existing vacancies, meaning that close to 90 vacancies needed to be filled. The executive staff at Otisville made some quick projections and estimated that about 55 correctional officers would be needed from outside the agency, as well as a variety of other positions—legal technician, recreation specialist, sewage treatment plant operator, and so on. The task group decided to cast a broad net for correc-



Craig Crawford/DOJ

Otisville has continued to market itself to potential employees, as these items show.

tional officers, hoping to pick up other qualified candidates in the process.

Establish a theme.

It was clear that the Bureau of Prisons could not recruit at Otisville solely or even primarily on the basis of wages and benefits. Most local companies and State and municipal organizations were far more competitive. What Otisville and the Bureau could offer was a challenging, high-quality career, with both stability and growth. The recruitment group adopted the theme "Quality Growth: Accept the Challenge." This had meaning to both potential recruiters (all Otisville staff) and recruits. The theme was used in all materials developed by the recruitment group.

Gather resources.

Whatever other steps were to be taken, recruitment materials—pamphlets, posters, pictures, handouts, and flyers—

were needed. In addition, the group sought out the names and addresses of community leaders, local job placement, unemployment, and recruitment offices, and local advertising media. The group turned to existing institutional resources, and to the Northeast Regional Office in Philadelphia and the Central Office in Washington, D.C., for assistance in obtaining these resources quickly. Line staff, solicited at a staff recall held the last week of December, provided valuable information regarding possible recruitment sources. Local telephone directories and news media proved useful in developing contacts.

Establish a focal point.

A focal point was needed to summarize the institution's recruitment effort. Recalling the points made at the retreat, it was clear that once potential recruits overcame their preconceptions about what working in a correctional facility might be like, they would be more interested in the message of career development and growth. Toward this end, a Career Day was scheduled for January 17. Personnel specialists would offer advice and assistance in filling out Government personnel forms (SF-171's). All departments would be represented to discuss vacancies and career paths in their disciplines. Finally, and most importantly, potential recruits could sign up for tours, with key Otisville staff as tour guides. The logistics of Career Day were not simple, and a department head who was particularly good at organizing was put in charge of the event.

Involve staff at all levels.

The key to pulling these efforts together was to involve all staff at the institution. The goal of recruiting 63 extra staff for

the institution was easily understood. There is also a recruitment award at Otisville for staff who bring in new employees. The warden sent a personal letter to each staff member, along with a packet of recruitment materials. Packets of applications were made available at key areas around the institution for staff to pick up at their leisure on all shifts. Assistant department heads and line staff participated in the planning and operation of Career Day as well.

Responsiveness and followup.

The recruitment team made sure that all phone requests for applications were responded to quickly—with a personalized letter, including help in filling out and processing forms, and an invitation to Career Day when appropriate. A note was sent to each applicant, regardless of the quality of the application, indicating that the application was received and giving some general idea of the next steps. Finally, the team was quick to recommend awards for staff who became involved beyond their scope of their duties. In addition, the warden sent a memo to all staff thanking them for their involvement in Career Day, as well as a memo to inmates noting their positive involvement in the event.

Planning beyond the initial recruitment.

The recruitment effort would have yielded very little positive benefit if applicants became bogged down in the interview, vouchering, and selection process. Early on, plans were developed to hold special interviews, involving two teams of interviewers working for 4-5 hours per day, 3 days a week. The

**You don't want
a typical career.**


**You're just the
person we want.**

At the Federal Bureau of Prisons, our rewards are special. And so are the people who build their careers with us. Because we serve all Americans, the Bureau strives to represent the country accurately by achieving a balance of men of various ethnic cultures and ethnic groups in our workforce. Diversity is our strength.

The Bureau, an agency of the Department of Justice, offers rewarding careers to people in a wide variety of career paths. Everything from Accounting and HR with Care to Succession and Security.

from Administration to Industrial Operations and much more. There are many benefits in a Bureau career. There's a high degree of job security, and an excellent opportunity to advance through the merit-based promotional system. You'll enjoy good pay, plus Government benefits such as low-cost health insurance for you and your family. You'll also gain a sense of teamwork and camaraderie with your fellow Bureau employees. It's a field with plenty of room for personal and professional growth.

If you know a career with the Bureau could be right for you, write to: Career Information, OHIO your field of interest, to: The Federal Bureau of Prisons, Human Resources Office, 320 First Street, NE, Room 446, Dept. HQ, Washington, DC 20534.



Do Your Career Justice.

This is a sample advertisement, produced as part of a nationwide recruitment campaign, scheduled to appear in various magazines and newspapers during summer 1991. Depending on where they run, the actual advertisements may be in color and include photographs.

warden also solicited department heads' assistance in completing telephone vouchering for promising candidates.

Evaluation.

Data base programs on a personal computer were developed to track the progress of applications, interviews, and vacancies filled. The team was careful to record as much of its activity as possible. The evaluation focused on the process. This program allowed staff to determine whether the goals of the project were satisfied, which activities worked, and which did not.

Lessons learned

Career Day, and the whole recruitment effort, was a resounding success. As of August 1, 1990, the following results were achieved:

- 392 applications received.
- 225 interviews conducted.

- 102 new employees hired.
- Of the new employees, 74 were correctional officers, 5 were legal technicians, and the rest filled a number of different positions.
- The new employees (despite the fact that they filled entry-level positions) had higher levels of formal education (67 percent had training beyond high school) than existing staff (59 percent had such training).
- Currently, 144 applicants on the Bureau's correctional officer register indicate Otisville as their first choice for a geographic location—versus 19 in December 1989.
- The recruitment team was in place for only 1 month before being disbanded.

These results were good for both custody and noncustody positions. Apparently, casting the broadest possible net was successful. Numerous other applicants were developed for legal technician, secretary, sewage treatment plant operator, recreation specialist, and other positions. In addition, a review of the applicants' background and interviews indicates that many who applied for office worker, case worker, and other positions are willing to start as correctional officers.

Otisville's experience provided a few lessons that other institutions should find useful:

Special salary rates are beneficial.

While the recruitment effort focused on career growth, discussions with applicants indicated that an acceptable salary rate was a necessary condition for them to even consider a position. The special

salary rate for officers at Otisville was one of the cornerstones of the recruitment effort.

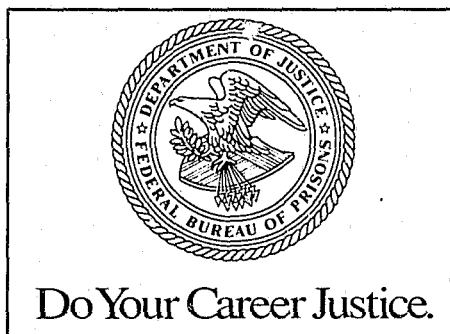
Employee involvement has potential long-term benefits.

The warden, the personnel office, and the recruitment team could have tried to tackle this problem on their own. They did not. One of the keys to the success of this operation was the involvement of staff at all levels. From the discussions at the department head retreat, to the mailing of individual letters, to the announcements at the staff recall, most staff were aware of and involved in the recruitment effort. Career day was a success because there was a sense of pride and teamwork throughout the institution. It is too early to tell exactly how many of the new staff were recruited directly by existing staff.

Beyond the initial recruitment push, we anticipate that all staff will now have a better sense of how new employees are brought into the "family" of the Bureau of Prisons. Because existing staff either recruited the new staff, or contributed to their recruitment in an indirect fashion, they will treat the new staff more as colleagues than if their first interaction with them was after 2 weeks of institution familiarization training.

Advertising—The saturation effect.

A little over \$5,000 was spent on advertising—all of it local, running one or two weekends before Career Day. From the requests for applications and from those who attended Career Day, it



A professional advertising campaign provides themes that institutions can adapt and use in their own local recruitment efforts. The slogan "do your career justice" plays to motivated employees' desire to do well while doing good—much as "be all you can be" does for the Army.

was clear that the most successful medium was the local newspaper in Middletown, New York, in which Otisville has advertised in the past. There were also a number of applicants from new areas, where Otisville had not yet advertised, but which were within commuting distance.

In addition, local (free) public service announcements and a press release got the word out to an even broader audience. There seemed to be a saturation effect, in that Career Day became common knowledge in the community. One applicant reported that he was so tired of hearing about it from one source or another that he just had to come look around (and apply). The lesson is that saturating the area with advertisements seemed to work much better than hitting the same media over a longer period. One area that we did not pursue was radio advertising, for which we just did not have enough time.

Career Day as a focal point.

Career day allowed Otisville to show off. We could talk about professionalism, but Career Day gave us a chance to exhibit it.

The tours, although brief, gave applicants a view of their potential place of employment. As usual, most of them told us that they never imagined a prison could look like this. Certainly the way they were treated by staff (and inmates) made the negative images of the entertainment media melt away. Having staff available to answer questions helped applicants start thinking about their future. Important too, was the instant assistance provided by personnel specialists, who helped applicants with their SF-171's and answered their many questions. Applications were tentatively scored on the spot, and employment interviews set up.

In summary, FCI Otisville successfully recruited, interviewed, and selected a large number of staff in a very short time, in an area that traditionally had a recruitment problem. The primary reason for the success of this operation was a team approach that emphasized the involvement of line staff. The next challenge is to effectively train and acculturate this group to meet the standards of FCI Otisville and the Bureau of Prisons. ■

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Courtesy Stackig, Sanderson & White