



Stand alone display,  
Shawnee CO DOC  
(Photo Courtesy  
SNDCC)

# Recruiting the Best!

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### Introduction

**As a jail manager, you would like to hire the best** possible employees for the jobs you have available. In order to be able to do this you have to have available and qualified applicants to choose from. Unless you are lucky enough to have a line of applicants that stretches outside the jail and around the block, you are going to have to recruit.

Now the questions become: What is recruiting? And how do we recruit? Recruiting is the process that we use to attract potential job applicants to apply for the job as a detention deputy. Various methods are used to recruit potential applicants including: referrals from existing employees, face-to-face contact with potential applicants, walk-in applicants, displays, recruiting literature, advertisements, etc. As I mentioned above, most places don't have enough walk-in applicants to meet their recruiting needs so we have to go out and find the potential applicants and convince them they would like to apply for our jobs.

### You are Selling a Product (Career)

While most jail employees do not view themselves as salespeople, when you are recruiting that is exactly what you are doing. You are selling your customers (potential

applicants) on your job and on your jail as a good place to work. Let's face it, the type of people we would like to apply for a job to work in the jail have probably never actually seen the inside of a jail unless they happen to work in one. Both types of prospective employees require a little different approach. The person who has never worked or been in a jail needs to have the type of work done in a jail explained to them and how it could become their new career. The prospect that has had previous experience will probably want to talk about pay and benefits, job conditions, and other job-related items. In either case you need to be prepared with facts and figures to answer any reasonable questions. If there is a question that you are unsure about, don't be afraid to say "I don't know, but I'll find out!" Then get their name and contact information. Be sure to get back with the prospective applicants in a timely manner. Even if they don't apply, it makes your agency look more professional.

Don't make any promises that you can't back up. Most employment decisions are handled by the agency head or other hiring authority. As a recruiter, your job is to encourage the prospective applicant to apply. Keep in mind you are not only in competition with all of the other jobs in



Above: Table top display with table throw, Platte Co S/O, MO (Photo by Lary Lehman, UCM, Sr CJ)



Left: Table throw with throw, Sedgwick County S/O (Photo courtesy SGSO)

town, you are in competition with other jails and correctional agencies for good potential job applicants.

### Go Where the People Are

Don't expect a line of applicants to magically appear outside your office door. You have to go where the potential applicants are. This means you will be attending job and career fairs, attending other public events (county fairs, state fairs, mall displays, etc.) and visiting community colleges and universities. Most of these events require you to register in advance so they know how many tables to provide and for advertisement purposes. In order to function in these areas you will need at least two things: some type of display and handouts describing your job at the jail.

### Design Your Display to Attract Potential Recruits

A display usually begins with a table. The table is usually provided by whoever is putting on the event. You will need something to cover the table with. In the display industry, this is called a table throw or cover. Table throws range from the inexpensive and simple to more expensive commercially produced items. They are simply a cloth to cover the table, often emblazoned with the

name and logo of your agency on it. Many agencies limit their display to a table throw and place their handouts on it. Throws are versatile, inexpensive (a simple table throw can be made by hand from a piece of cloth or crepe paper). A throw adds a professional look to your display for a low cost.

In addition to a throw to cover the table, many agencies use a table top display. Again these range from the simple science fair type of stand-up cardboard displays to more expensive commercially made products. The center of the display is what first draws the attention of the potential applicant. It should contain your agency's logo or something identifying your agency. Pictures of your facility and your people in action are attention-getters. Mount the pictures on foam board and place Velcro on the back to allow them to be moved around the display for different audiences, changed out with fresh pictures as needed, and to preserve the pictures during transport to the booth site.

### Design Informative Handouts

Handouts are essential to a successful recruiting effort. Handouts can range from a simple Xeroxed sheet to a commercially produced recruiting pamphlet. Pictures of your facility and people help to humanize your agency. Handouts should contain at least the following information:

- The name of the agency,
- Contact information (phone numbers, address, e-mails),
- A good job description of the type of entry level positions being offered,
- Job qualifications,
- Job benefits, and
- A description of how to apply for the job and whom to contact.

### When Possible, Give Away Freebies

Many law enforcement and correctional agencies have found that small items given away at recruiting activities and public relations events assist in promoting the agency's public image and help to remind the public to contact the agency if its services are needed. Something as simple as a pencil with the agency's logo, telephone number, and website can remind a potential job applicant about the opportunity that your agency offers long after the recruiting event is over. The items need not be expensive, but do need to have your agency's contact information and message on them. Many of these items serve a dual purpose in sheriff's offices that not only have a jail, but community policing or crime prevention responsibilities as well. Pencils are less expensive than pens. Small rulers are popular with students as are balloons. Refrigerator magnets are very popular and allow your business card or recruiting card to be displayed for a very long time. Probably one of the most innovative freebies that I have ever seen being given out was done by a juvenile correctional facility in Kansas. They were passing out *chocolate handcuffs* to prospective employees.

## Posters Work Well

Recruiting posters have offered jobs to prospective employees for hundreds of years. They still work. The best ones are fairly small (8 ½ x 11 works best). A smaller poster is likely to be displayed longer in the fight for display space on job bulletin boards at career centers, college placement centers, and college criminal justice departments. The poster is a visual medium and has to attract the eye. Place a picture or your logo on it. Also make sure you have a description of the types of careers that you are offering and how to contact your agency and apply for the job. If you are using a Xerox to make your posters, use colored paper (it better attracts the eye of the prospective recruit).

## List the Benefits of Your Job

All jobs have pay and benefits. The type of employee that we are hoping to attract knows that they will never get rich working at the jail. But frankly, in these days of layoffs and job outsourcing the stability of a career in detention is very attractive to many people looking for a job that will still be there in ten years. Most jail jobs offer health insurance, vision insurance, a dental plan, paid vacations, and a retirement plan. Some offer educational assistance to employees. All of these are valuable benefits; show them off. Even the fact that uniforms are provided is a job benefit!

## Tell People What You Do

As I have said before, most people only know about what goes on in a jail from television or movies. Tell the prospective job applicant about what it is that you actually do during a day's work. They will probably be surprised at the varied and different activities that occur inside of your facility. The modern jail is a high-tech facility and a lot goes on there. Skilled workers are needed. But people will never know unless you tell them about it. Hand out business cards to prospects so they have a point of contact.

## Describe the Hiring Process

Be prepared to describe the hiring process. In addition to how to actually apply for the job, prospective employees are going to want to know what happens next and when the next jail academy or hiring process will occur. They want to assess their actual chance of getting this job. Is there a written test? What should I study for? Are there any study guides? Is there a physical ability test? If so, what does it consist of? Do I have to appear in front of an officer's board? What about a physical exam, drug screening, psychological evaluations, background investigations? All of these are questions that a prospective employee will want to know the answers to.

## Smile! Be Friendly! Answer Questions. Offer Tours. Look Sharp!

Attitude is everything! This was never more true than when you are presenting yourself before the public. Look sharp, wear something that identifies you with your agency. You are a visual billboard for prospective employ-

ees. Smile and be friendly with prospective employees. Remember not only are you deciding whether you want them to work for you, they are deciding whether they want to work with you! It's a two-way street! The best selling point you have for a job in the jail is the jail itself. Offer tours to prospective applicants. If they like what they see they will apply; if not they wouldn't work out anyway.

## Electronic and Other Resources

Today's modern job applicants are "techno savvy." They know how to use a computer. Therefore, put your job out there on-line whenever possible. Job bulletin boards are maintained by college career centers, county or city human resources, and other places. Most listings are free. Use this. Some agencies such as the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office in Wichita, Kansas have prospective job applicants apply on-line to begin the hiring process. This has the advantage of encouraging applicants from out of state to apply for jobs in the jail. Maintain a webpage for your department. This not only acts as a public service, it provides prospective applicants a resource to look at what you agency does. It also provides a point of contact.

Other resources include radio, television, newspaper advertisements, and billboards. Sometimes radio and television will donate public service announcements to a law enforcement or corrections agency. These reach a lot of people, but you can't pick when they will be broadcast. You don't get prime time. You get two in the afternoon or two in the morning. However, these do work. Some billboard companies will donate space on unrented billboards. Again you don't get to pick location or control how long these ads might be up (when the billboard is rented, it's gone). This is an effective way of reaching some prospective applicants. You might have to purchase the materials to cover the sign. Newspapers might do a story on how your facility is expanding and offering new jobs, but the actual job ad will most likely cost you the going rate. Make sure the ads list the job offered, benefits, and a point of contact.

Another source is the career counseling or career placement offices at surrounding community colleges and universities. These offices have a interest in finding jobs for their graduates. They will post your job on their lists and often display your posters. The same can be said for the criminal justice departments at these schools. Don't forget to contact both places.

## Summary

Attracting prospective employees to work in your jail is not an impossible task. It will take some work, effort, and planning on your agency's part to attract the best prospective applicants. By attracting a large, diverse pool of qualified applicants, the hiring authority can select the best possible applicants for the jobs they have to offer. 

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