

# Retention: Addressing a Growing Problem

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## *Abstract*

*Employee retention is a growing problem throughout the nation and trying to retain qualified law enforcement officers is not an easy task. Competition between law enforcement agencies is fierce because agencies are actively seeking experienced officers and stealing them away from other agencies in the process. Many officers are lost to larger agencies offering higher salaries, upward mobility, better benefits and better training opportunities. This paper will identify other contributing factors pertaining to retention issues and offer solutions.*

## Introduction

The recruitment and retention of quality employees is vital to an effective organization. However, recruiting is not an easy task and retaining qualified applicants has proven to be an even harder challenge. Officers leave agencies for various reasons and once they have decided to leave, very little can be done to change that. The importance of retention should be brought to the attention of recruits during both the recruitment and the hiring process.

The hiring process can mimic a revolving door at times. For every one officer that is hired, two or three will leave; often being lured away by other agencies with offers of more pay or better benefits. The recruiting, hiring and training process is time consuming and costly for any agency. But, what is the answer to the million dollar question...how do we keep them? Whatever the reasons may be for the departures, they can have a big impact on the departments. This paper will explore the reasons officers leave agencies. Three survey tools were created, with two being directed at sworn officers. The first survey targeted officers that left one agency to work for another and the second survey targeted officers that opted to work for one agency. The third surveyed HR Directors.

## Literature Review

For years a readily available workforce enabled police administrators to ignore the importance of recruitment. However, in recent years, law enforcement agencies across the nation have experienced increasing levels of staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting and retaining officers. The problem becomes more complex when experienced officers that have been the heart of the agencies' operations for years begin to retire. Some agencies are finding they do not have enough experienced officers to replace those leaving. If agencies are unable to address this issue, a serious disparity will form in many departments between the number of experienced officers and newer officers. As a result, the average years of experience for patrol officers will drop considerably. Over time, agencies with higher turnover and less experienced officers will suffer a reduction in productivity and lower quality of service (Orrick, 2000).

Orrick further stated, "A number of studies have documented the level of turn over and contributing causes. However, little research has been done to establish a benchmark of 'acceptable' or 'normal' turnover rate for law enforcement" (Orrick, 2000).

Jeff Church best said it when he wrote in an article in the California Post, "retention is not as easy as it sounds, but is far cheaper than retraining new officers." He also noted a study on retention concluded that 54 percent agreed retention was a problem, but only 29 percent had taken definitive steps to address it (Church, 2006).

A South Portland Maine committee conducted a study last year because 20 percent of the department's officers were eligible to retire within two weeks notice. The thrust of the committee's recommendation was aimed at giving preference to veteran officers. The study concluded hiring experienced officers doesn't require extensive training; plus, they know what they are getting into. Scarborough, Maine Police Chief Robert Moulton feels when departments hire experienced officers; they know that they are hiring someone who knows the sacrifices of being an officer which includes working night shifts, weekends, and the potential for confrontation (Hench, 2008). Orrick says that hiring former officers reduce the training process as well as enable agencies to recover their investment, and limit the uncertainty associated with new hires (Orrick, 2008).

In the March 2008 issue of Law and Order magazine, Dwayne Orrick focused on awareness as a priority when targeting recruitment and retention. According to the article, when recruiting a sufficient number of qualified employees to meet the department's needs, human resources are the most fundamental process in a police department. As such, the success of the organization's recruitment program influences the effectiveness of every other departmental function (Orrick, 2008).

If an agency is unable to attract the quality of personnel needed, it will more than likely experience difficulty reducing crime, building community relations and maintaining a positive image. Orrick also wrote, "...leaders must first recognize that the department has a problem attracting candidates and make recruitment and retention of staff an organizational priority." Once the problem is

recognized, the department's present practices should be re-evaluated. They should explore more innovative ways to recruit and retain officers. However, regardless of what programs or practices are implemented, recruitment needs to be made an organizational priority and must be supported by all levels of the organization. Anything less would be perceived as unimportant (Orrick, 2008).

While young qualified officers are scarce, departments are now directing recruiting efforts at experienced officers. The competition between law enforcement agencies has increased tremendously and officers are being lured away with offers of better compensation packages and other benefits. Some departments are paying for job experience to attract and retain good officers. Police departments in Scarborough and Westbrook are offering officers the opportunity to retire after 20 years at half their salary. Cape Elizabeth Police Department in Maine is allowing retirement after 25 years at two-thirds of the officer's salary. According to the executive director of the Maine Association of Police, Paul Gaspar, "We have a consistently dwindling pool of candidates for a job that's becoming increasingly more difficult and demanding." If these pools continue to decline agencies across the nation may be forced to increase benefits and pay in order to keep the personnel they have (Hench, 2008).

Another key element to the retention of highly qualified employees is the organizations' understanding of staffing practices. Since recruitment is broad and intensive, managers must continue to identify employees whose talents are easily developed. According to authors Bohlander and Snell, "Too often, organizations try to save money by doing a superficial job of hiring. As a consequence, they run the risk of hiring the wrong people and spending more money on training and/or outplacement, severance and recruitment of replacement." Such a methodology is prevalent within law enforcement agencies due to the competition of hiring qualified recruits. Law enforcement agencies are consistently addressing retention from within with "fresh" strategies to develop tomorrow's qualified applicants. To hire and retain a quality workforce, it must start with a comprehensive approach to organizational behaviors (Bohlander & Snell, 2007).

Understanding organizational behaviors can assist with retaining a structured workforce. Corporate organizations as well as law enforcement must evaluate the labor habits associated with employee turnover. Author Ellen Galinsky made the following conclusion in an article on developing work/family life. "The majority of workers no longer relate to work with a single focus; instead, work is just one critical priority that competes with others for attention." She continues, "We have found that the real issue of managing work and personal life boils down to how people assess and decide about priorities, about what's most important for them to do at any given moment and over time." Law enforcement agencies must concentrate on the bottom-line issues to overcome the difficulties of retention at every level of management (Galinsky, 2003).

Managers and supervisors are instrumental in understanding their role as the focal point of employee retention. Clearly, management is a complex system of incorporating organizational goals with employees' development, ultimately evaluating the process through quality production and job satisfaction. In an

article on organizational management, authors Longenecker and Fink commented on the United States automotive manufactures challenges, "...things are changing so fast that it is tough to keep up ... it's just my opinion but I think that the dynamics of management development change significantly when organizations experience large scale change in a very competitive environment..." Continual insight into the manager's role will add essential qualities to achieve organizational goals through developing people, providing direction, resources and evaluating successful managerial decisions (Longenecker & Fink, 2001). Dean Elumti wrote, "In order to attract, retain, motivate, and promote this new and diverse workforce management must recognize the unique needs and backgrounds of the workers. Yet, most employers are not prepared to deal with it. Nor are their managers." A manager's role sharply affects the mainstay of an organization. If recognized as a positive influence, managers will change and empower employees to be a part of organizational success. Managers who continue to ignore the benefits of the changing workforce will continue to struggle with retention, labor shortage, unskilled workers and low productivity (Elumti, 1996).

After managerial insight, employees must be involved and adequate training should provide the means to accomplish such a task. Arguably, employee retention can be related to inadequate and poorly designed training programs. A thorough training program focuses on knowledge, skill and ability as foundations to improve employees. Modern corporations are familiar with the need to have quality improvement systems to improve areas such as recruitment, selection, retention, and appraisal systems but lack an organized system to maintain continuous development. Organizational managers should stay alert to the kinds of training that are needed, where they are needed, who needs them, and which methods will best deliver the needs to employees (Bohlander & Snell, 2007).

A study conducted in Canada analyzed and compared "on-the-job training for low-paid workers" and individual factors associated with their on-the-job training. The research argued, "For all workers, learning, particularly job skills training and skills upgrading, is an integral part of maintaining their competitive employment profile." When targeting retention, an employees' profile for upward mobility is an integral part of remaining at an agency and outlining a specific training program adds organizational value (Zeytinoglu, et al, 2008).

Another employee retention strategy is the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP), which has been introduced into the law enforcement community as a method to proactively target retention. DROP is defined as "structured as a delayed distribution from a qualified employer defined benefit plan, and it is adopted to encourage employees to remain in the workforce (with the same employer) beyond their earliest retirement date". The DROP provides organizations a system to employ veteran employees, which allow recruits a process to experience longevity. This program allows a participant who qualifies for normal retirement to continue working and puts emphasis on retaining employees (Willett, 2005).

Some agencies use mentoring programs as an avenue to retain personnel. Mentoring relationship initiatives have a powerful impact on professional growth, career advancement and career mobility. One theory on mentoring research concluded that mentorship might prove crucial to a new hire's successful transition into an organization. Whether the agreement is non-formal between two employees or a formal, structured program mentoring involves the provision of wise assistance by a mentor to a protégé. Like the recruitment program, the mentor program must have support from all levels of the organization to succeed. The participants must be carefully selected and receive formal training to make the program a success (Williams, 2000).

According to an article on Best Practices Orrick states, "Employee referral systems (ERS) are the most effective recruitment techniques available. Much of the success of referral systems is attributed to officers doing some form of informal assessment of the individual to determine if he or she can perform well within the organization before approaching him or her or making a recommendation to the agency." The article continues, "Some research has found that officers who are recruited through employee referral systems are more likely to succeed in the selection process and be retained by the agency (Orrick, 2008).

However, there are potential issues with employee referrals. Referrals have been linked to inbreeding, violations of Equal Employee Opportunities (EEO) and invites nepotism, which can adversely affect current employees. Whether positive or negative, "managers have found that the quality of employee-referred applications is normally quite high, since employees are generally hesitant to recommend individuals who might not perform well" (Bohlander & Snell, 2007).

## Method

This paper was initiated to identify the reasons officers left their agencies, often to go to others. Police departments throughout the state of Florida similar in size, 150-160 sworn, of the Ocala Police Department, were invited to participate in surveys. Three survey tools were designed. The first survey targeted officers that had previously worked for other agencies before their current one. Some of the questions asked were: (Appendix A)

- How long have you been a law enforcement officer in Florida?
- How long were you employed with your previous agency?
- Was there anything that could have been done to make you stay there?
- What made your current agency appealing?

The second survey tool targeted officers that chose to work for only one agency during their career. Some of the questions asked were: (Appendix B)

- How long have you been employed by this agency?
- Why did you choose this agency?
- Were your expectations met?

The third survey tool was directed at Human Resource Directors. The questions that they were asked are as follows: (Appendix C)

- What is your sworn count?
- How many officers did you lose during the 2006-2008 time frames?
- What were the reasons for the departures?

Phone calls were placed to the offices of the chiefs' and the sheriff prior to the surveys being emailed and the following agencies were invited to participate: Palm Bay Police Department, Davie Police Department, Miramar Police Department and Sumter County Sheriff's Office; the three latter declined. Charlotte and Manatee Counties were invited to participate in the Human Resource survey, which they obliged.

A total of 73 police officers from Ocala Police and Palm Bay Police Departments were surveyed. The Ocala Police Department, Manatee County Sheriff's Office and Charlotte County Sheriff's Office participated in the HR survey.

## Results

This research paper was initiated to determine the factors behind the large number of departures of law enforcement officers that occurred during the 2006-2008 time frames. During this period the Ocala Police Department lost a total of 48 police officers. Further research revealed that 21 left because they were retiring while eight departed to pursue other law enforcement agencies. Another eleven were terminated, five of which was during their probationary period and the remaining eight left because of military, college, medical or personal reasons.

Three surveys were created with one targeting law enforcement officers that had worked for previous agencies; a second one targeting law enforcement officers that had worked solely for one agency; and a third one targeting Human Resource Directors. Those interviewed included personnel that ranged from police officer to deputy chief in rank.

Appendix A surveyed officers that left one agency to work for another while gender, race, age, and rank were looked at. A total of 21 sworn officers

employed by the Ocala Police Department and the Palm Bay Police Department were surveyed.

Four white females ranging in ages 35-47 were among this group. Their tenure as law enforcement officers in the state of Florida varied between 0–25 years. A total of 17 males were surveyed ranging in ages 29-56. Eleven were white; four were African-Americans; and two being Hispanic. The majority had spent 0-5 years with their previous agencies and 0-5 years with their current one. Their race and age varied.

Of the total, only three had reached a supervisory level: a 47 year old white female at the rank of major; a 53 year old white male at the rank of captain; and a 42 year old white male at the rank of sergeant. The major has been in law enforcement in Florida between 21-25 years and has been with her current agency between 16-20 years.

The captain has been in law enforcement 26+ years and has been with his current agency between 21-25 years. The sergeant has served in Florida between 16-20 years and has spent 16-20 years with his current agency. The remaining officers were police officers, patrolman first class or corporals.

When asked the primary reason for leaving their previous agencies they concluded that higher salaries made their current agencies more appealing. The prospect of upward mobility was also important and ranked second with poor morale ranking third. Better benefits and a take-home-car program were cited as well. Others reasons cited were:

- women were treated poorly
- lack of specialized units
- personal reasons
- lack of equipment
- lack of strong leadership
- less stress
- additional training
- fairness in promotion
- more testing prior to hiring

When asked if anything could have been done to make them remain with their previous agencies, they unanimously responded “no”.

**Data Collected from  
Appendix A Survey  
Ocala PD & Palm Bay PD**

Gender	Race	Age	LE/FL	Yrs. Prev. Agency	Yrs. Current Agency	Rank	Department
M	B	56	21-25	21-25	0-5	Ofc	OPD
F	W	45	16-20	16-20	0-5	Pfc	OPD
M	W	36	0-5	0-5	0-5	Cpl	OPD
F	W	36	11-15	6-10	0-5	Cpl	OPD
M	W	31	0-5	0-5	0-5	Cpl	OPD
M	H	35	0-5	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
F	W	35	0-5	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	B	31	6-10	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	H	35	0-5	11-15	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	W	37	0-5	11-15	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	B	29	0-5	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	W	35	6-10	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	W	47	6-10	6-10	0-5	Ofc	PBPD
M	W	35	6-10	0-5	6-10	Ofc	PBPD
M	W	37	16-20	0-5	16-20	Cpl	OPD
M	B	47	21-25	0-5	16-20	Cpl	OPD
M	W	42	16-20	0-5	16-20	Sgt	OPD
F	W	47	21-25	6-10	16-20	Maj	OPD
M	W	46	21-25	0-5	21-25	Cpl	OPD
M	W	53	26+	0-5	21-25	Capt	OPD
M	W	49	21-25	21-25	21-25	Ofc	PBPD

Appendix B surveyed 51 officers from Ocala PD and Palm Bay that have worked for only one agency. Once again, gender, race, age, and rank were looked at. Of these officers 32 were white males ranging in age 20-60; six were African-American males that ranged in ages 39-50; two Hispanic males, 42 and 43 yoa; five African-American females ranging in ages 36-45, four white females ranging in ages 25-43; a 35 year old Hispanic female and a 39 year old Asian female. When asked what the determining factors were in choosing their agencies, the size of the agency was the biggest factor. The location was second and benefits came in third. Others reasons cited were:

- familiarity
- community policing philosophy
- first to process application
- wanted to stay close to home



When asked if their expectations of their current agencies had been met the majority answered yes. However, one answered no; one indicated initially, and one indicated there were no expectations.

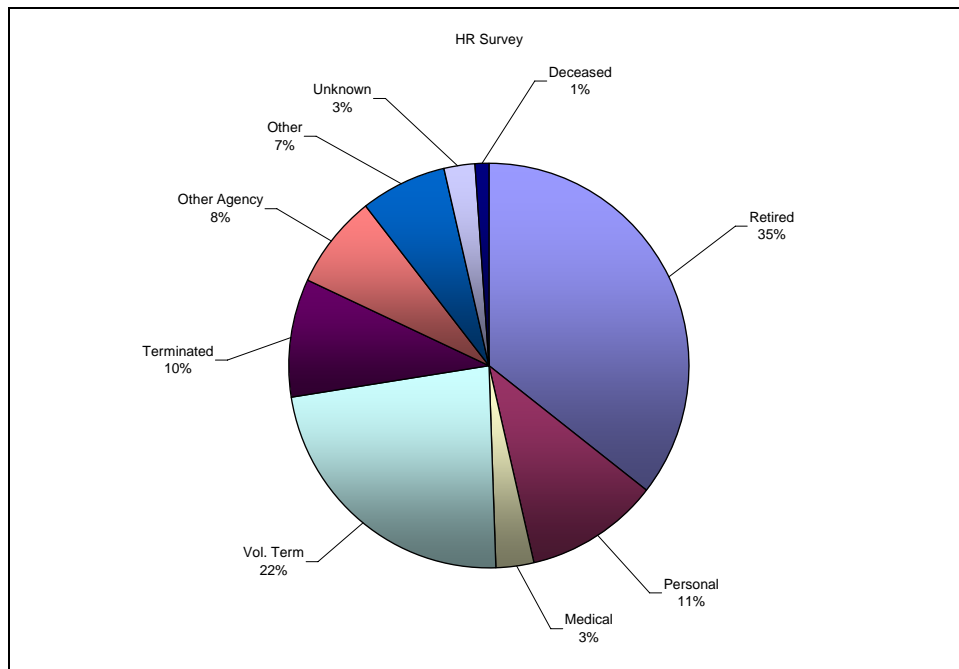
**Data Collected from  
Appendix B Survey**

**Ocala PD & Palm Bay PD**

Gender	Race	Age	Tenure	Rank	Expectations	Department
M	W	25	0-5	Ofc		OPD
M	W	20	0-5	Ofc		OPD
M	W	33	0-5	Ofc		OPD
M	W	27	0-5	Ofc		OPD
F	H	35	0-5	Ofc		OPD
F	B	44	0-5	Ofc		OPD
F	W	25	0-5	Ofc		OPD
M	W	22	0-5	Ofc		OPD
F	W	43	0-5	Ofc		OPD
M	W	26	0-5	Cpl		OPD
F	W	39	0-5	Ofc		PBPD
M	W	40	0-5	Cpl		PBPD
M	H	42	0-5	Cpl		PBPD
M	W	38	0-5	Ofc		PBPD
M	H	43	11-15	Cpl		OPD
M	W	36	11-15	Lt		OPD
F	W	37	11-15	Sgt		OPD
M	W	42	11-15	Sgt		OPD
M	W	36	11-15	Sgt		OPD
F	A	39	11-15	Sgt		OPD
M	W	31	11-15	Sgt		OPD
M	B	45	11-15	Sgt	No	OPD
F	B	45	11-15	Cpl		OPD
M	B	39	11-15	Cpl		OPD
M	W	50	16-20	Capt		OPD
M	W	44	16-20	Sgt		OPD
M	B	45	16-20	Sgt		OPD
M	W	41	16-20	Sgt		OPD
M	W	40	16-20	Sgt		OPD
F	B	42	16-20	Sgt		OPD
M	B	47	16-20	Cpl		OPD
M	W	51	16-20	Ofc	Initially	PBPD
M	B	50	21-25	Capt		OPD
M	W	50	21-25	Capt		OPD
M	W	44	21-25	Lt		OPD
M	W	44	21-25	Lt		OPD
M	W	45	21-25	Sgt		OPD
M	W	44	21-25	Sgt		OPD
M	W	50	21-25	Sgt		OPD
M	W	46	21-25	Sgt		OPD
F	B	42	21-25	Cpl	Had None	OPD
M	B	45	21-25	DC		OPD
M	W	46	26+	Lt		OPD
M	W	54	26+	Lt	No	OPD
M	W	50	26+	Cpl		OPD
M	W	51	26+	Ofc		PBPD
F	B	36	6-10	Cpl		OPD
M	W	36	6-10	Cpl		OPD
M	W	34	6-10	Cpl		OPD
F	W	26	6-10	Cpl		PBPD
M	W	42	6-10	Ofc		PBPD
M	W	60	6-10	Ofc	No	PBPD

Appendix C surveyed Human Resource Directors with the following agencies: Ocala Police Department, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office and Manatee County Sheriff's Office. A total of 48 officers left the Ocala PD; 67 deputies left Charlotte County SO; and 82 left Manatee County SO. This study revealed the following findings:

- 35% left as a result of retirement.
- 22% voluntarily terminated their employment but failed to disclose why
- 11% left for personal reasons
- 10% were terminated
- 8% left to go to other agencies
- 7% left for other reasons
- 3% left for unknown reasons
- 3% left for medical reasons
- 3% left for medical reasons
- 1% was attributed to deaths



**Data Collected from Appendix C Survey**

## Discussion

At the onset of this research paper, the intention was to determine why there was an influx in officers leaving agencies for others. The rate of departures continued to increase, causing concern. Appendix C surveyed three Human Resource Directors which included Charlotte County SO, authorized 471 law enforcement officers, Manatee County SO, authorized 471, and Ocala PD, authorized 158.

However, based on the findings of the Human Resources study it was determined that 35% of the separations were attributed to retirement. Though findings revealed only eight percent had actually left for other agencies, it is suspected within the 22% that voluntarily separated the 7% that left for other reasons, and the 3% that left for unknown reasons; some could have possibly gone to other agencies.

Officers choosing to change agencies showed a higher rate among white males however, there was no correlation regarding ages and years of service varied. Officers' that choose to work for sole agencies was also dominated by white males with no particular correlation to ages or years of service.

Though upward mobility was cited second among the reasons they changed agencies, only three out of the 21 surveyed had actually become supervisors. However, the majority of those surveyed fell in to the 0-5 year category which, more than likely contributed to the low numbers.

Interestingly, the officers that chose to change agencies listed higher salary as their primary motivation. On the other hand, the officers choosing to work for a sole agency cited the agency's size as theirs. What was also interesting was the only common reason shared between both groups regarding choosing their respective agency was benefits.

While the increase in staff turnover continues to plague administrators, another issue comes along with it. When officers separate, recruiting difficulties often follow; the larger the number of separations the bigger the recruitment problem. Though it is getting harder and harder to find qualified applicants to fill these vacancies, it is next to impossible to create a pool of "hirable" applicants. A big emphasis was never placed on recruitment 10 and 15 years ago. It was taken for granted that good qualified applicants would always be available. Those days are over and law enforcement agencies are pursuing experienced officers. They are literally stealing them away from each other; enticing them with higher salaries and better benefits.

## Recommendations

Explaining the financial impact of the hiring process to new officers may help them to take ownership and accountability for their actions related to employee turnover. They should be made aware of the costs involved in their hiring and training and the adverse effects their departures have on organizations. They should also understand stability is extremely important and

constantly moving from one agency to another affects their future economic well-being.

When targeting retention, an employees' profile for upward mobility is an integral part of remaining at an agency and outlining a specific training program adds organizational value. Some departments are used as training grounds and once the officer is trained he/she moves on to a larger agency for higher salaries or other benefits. Competitive starting salaries are important and should be considered.

The Take Home Vehicle Program is a big incentive for retention. This program can also benefit the department as well as the community due to the mere presence of the vehicles in the community. This can actually serve as a catalyst to deter crime.

The Deferred Retirement Option Program is a method used to proactively target retention. The DROP places an emphasis on retention by encouraging veteran employees to remain in the workforce beyond their earliest retirement date.

Employee referral systems (ERS) are effective recruitment techniques that are available and costless. The success of this technique is attributed to officers informally assessing individuals. Some research has found that officers who are recruited through employee referral systems are more likely to succeed in the selection process and be retained by the agency. The Ocala Police Department reward employees that recruit minorities with 40 hours of vacation. This is contingent upon the new hire completing the FTO program.

Mentoring programs is an avenue to retain personnel. Mentoring relationship initiatives have a powerful impact on professional growth, career advancement and career mobility. One theory on mentoring research concluded that mentorship might prove crucial to a new hire's successful transition into an organization. The participants must be carefully selected and receive formal training to make the program a success. Every officer that is persuaded to stay is money saved.

Requiring HR personnel to conduct exit interviews for separating officers would assist in collecting data. This information would assist in determining problems areas.

Director Lynn Cypryan has been a civilian member of the Ocala Police Department since 1982. She has served in Communications, Investigations, Patrol and Crime Prevention. She currently serves as Director over the Support Services Bureau. Lynn has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Questionnaire I

Sex \_\_\_\_\_  
Race \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the answer or fill in the blank with the appropriate information.

1. How many years have you been a law enforcement officer in Florida?

- a. 0-5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11-15 years
- d. 16-20 years
- e. 21-25 years
- f. 26 or more

2. How long were you employed with your previous agency?

- a. 0-5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11-15 years
- d. 16-20 years
- e. 21-25 years
- f. 26 or more

3. How long have you been with your current agency?

- a. 0-5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11-15 years
- d. 16-20 years
- e. 21-25 years
- f. 26 or more

4. What made your current agency appealing?

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5. Was there anything that could have been done to make you stay?

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6. What was your primary reason for leaving your previous agency?

- a. Higher salary
- b. Benefits
- c. Morale
- d. No upward mobility
- e. Personal Reasons
- f. Lack of Special Units
- e. Other (explanation if needed)

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7. What is your rank or title?

- a. Officer
- b. Corporal
- c. Sergeant
- d. Lieutenant
- e. Captain
- f. Major
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. In your opinion what would make your current agency a more desirable place to work?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix B

### Survey Questionnaire II

Sex \_\_\_\_\_  
Race \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the answer or fill in the blank with the appropriate information.

1. How long have you been a law enforcement officer with this agency?
  - a. 0-5 years
  - b. 6-10 years
  - c. 11-15 years
  - d. 16-20 years
  - e. 21-25 years
  - f. 26 or more

2. Why did you choose to work for this agency?

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3. Were your expectations of this agency met?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What is your rank or title?
  - a. Officer
  - b. Corporal
  - c. Sergeant
  - d. Lieutenant
  - e. Captain
  - f. Major
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### HR Survey Questionnaire III

Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The number of sworn officers in agency?
2. How many officers did you lose during the 2006-2008 time-frame?
3. What were the reasons behind the departures?