Managing Florida's in a Jails Highly Competitive Market Place

Thomas F. Hall

Abstract

As the privatization of corrections movement gains momentum, Florida's public jail administrators must be prepared to compete for the opportunity to conduct business in an open marketplace. The market will drive dramatic changes in the qualifications of administrators, they will be required to have some exposure to the criminal justice system, but must also possess business management skills, public relations skills, and a good understanding of data processing and management.

This article looks at the qualifications of fifty public jail administrators from medium to mega sized jails throughout the state. The intent is to encourage sheriffs to raise the minimum qualifications of jail administrators and to encourage a change in the curriculum of criminology majors in the state university system.

Introduction

During nineteen years in the criminal justice system, I have noticed a dramatic change in the role of the jail administrator. I summit that the initial driving force for this change came from the courts system. The abuses propagated by well intended but poorly trained jail administrators led the court system to abandon its hands off doctrine and become involved in defining the constitutional conditions of confinement and treatment of inmates. In addition, the state of Florida established minimum training standards for correctional officer certification. Correctional academies were required to teach criminal law, constitutional law and numerous other subjects thus reducing the civil liability incurred by the public institutions. These actions have gone a long way to improve the image of our profession.

Have we continued to keep pace with the times? Computers, data management, and technology in general have changed the way we gather information about inmates and our operations. The courts appear to have shifted their focus from inmate rights to the rights of our employees. Taxpayer revolts have forced us to do more with less. The fact that private industry has now entered the market is support to the taxpayer that there are saving to be made. Whether this turns out to be the case or not remains to be seen. These multinational corporations are expanding their share of the market and are posting profits. Are Florida's jail administrators prepared to compete in this market place? Are they well educated and properly trained? This study looks at the background of administrators and attempts to answer those questions.

Methods

A telephone survey was conducted of fifty jail administrators throughout the State of Florida. Jails were selected from the National Jail and Adult Detention Directory published by the American Correctional Association. Only jails defined as medium, large and mega were chosen. Medium sized jails have inmate populations ranging from 50 to 249; large jails from 250 to 999; mega jails 1000+. It was felt those jails with a capacity of less than fifty would be less likely to have a director whose sole purpose was to run the facility.

Interviewers were provided a call list, a call-sheet, used to track dispositions, an introductory statement and the questionnaire. The introduction included a question that was intended to reduce sampling error and ensure that like positions among the facilities were compared. For the purpose of this survey, Jail Administrator was defined as the lowest level of supervision with twenty-four hour responsibility for the day to day operation of the facility. Participants were asked thirteen questions intended to describe their educational level and administrative skills. Responses were recorded on the questionnaire and returned with the call sheet for scoring.

According to Lavrakas (1993), the telephone survey method has several advantages. Data collection can occur much faster than other methods and provides opportunities for quality control. The only disadvantage to using this method would be the cost when compared to mail out surveys. Any future surveys will utilize a more current directory of facilities to decrease the number of callbacks needed to obtain working numbers.

Results

Of the fifty respondents surveyed, 48% had a high school education; 30% had an associates degree; 18 % had bachelors degrees and 4% had masters degrees. Those with a degree were more likely to have it in criminology (65%). Fifteen percent had a degree in Business Administration and the remaining 20 % in some other discipline. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were not involved in any continuing educational program. Those that responded positively to the question were most likely to indicate that they would attend in-service training.

The overall experience level for 88% of the administrators was more than ten years. Twenty four percent actually had been in their current position for less than a year and another 59% less than five years.

 Seventy-eight percent had no accounting experience. The same percentage felt that their current management information system provided them with enough information about their jail population to make sound business decisions. An even higher percentage, 98% thought that the information in these systems was easy to retrieve and understand.

Only twenty percent of those surveyed reported being under any court orders regarding the operation of their facility. Sixty one percent of the facilities were not accredited by any organization. Eighty-six percent of the respondents reported that the privatization of corrections was not an issue in their local.

Discussion

Jails are big business. If you don't thinks so, look at the operating expenses of some of the large and mega sized jails. Costs are in the millions of dollars. Would private industry be as willing to allow someone with a high school education to wield such responsibility? Three out of four public jail administrators have less than a four-year degree.

Kiekbush (1999) in a recent article states that "the make of a profession is the strength of its relationship to higher education". He points out that local corrections has fallen far behind the rest of the criminal justice system in this regard. This survey would support that claim. His article "Why and How Sheriff's Must Lead Corrections Into the 21st

Century" makes four recommendations for sheriff's to follow. Among these is for sheriff's to make sure the jail is properly run. Central to this issue is the selection of a competent jail administrator. According to Kiekbush, the primary selection criterion should be experience and proven competence. This survey shows that neither of those factors are an issue. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents had over ten years experience. Competence can only be presumed by their ability to be promoted. It is imperative that higher education be added to the list of primary criterion.

A proper education would have to include business classes as well as criminal justice classes. A review of the online class catalogues for Florida State University, University of South Florida, and University of Florida revealed that little to no exposure to business was required to receive a criminal justice degree. The courses did provide a broad base of criminal justice information for the practitioner at the entry level. Accounting classes were recommended as an elective at USF. Of concern was the fact that 65% of the administrators had no plan for continuing education. Where do practitioners plan to learn these business skills? Learning the hard way can be quit costly. A recent jail I visited had contract medical services. Built into the contract were annual percentage increases and renewal clauses. The administrator allowed the increases each year failing to realize that the medical market had dropped. In effect, they were overpaying for the services provided. To say the least, they re-bid the contract at a substantial saving.

The story above is a prime example of the importance of knowing your market. Jail managers should be actively involved in organization such as The American Jail Association, The American Correctional Association, International Order of Correctional Officers and other such state organization if they exist. These organizations provide valuable information regarding new products services and changes in the market. Also of value is the Certified Jail Managers program offered by the American Jail Association. The program requires community involvement and continuing education. What better way to improve the image of our profession and at the same time, sharpen our skills?

Jails are the repository of vast amounts of criminal justice information. My hypothesis was that this information was not easy to retrieve or understand. The results were just the opposite. Seventy-eight percent of the administrators thought that their management information systems provided them with up to date accounting information. These systems also provided them with information about their jail population in an easy to retrieve and understand format. What the survey failed to measure was whether they were asking the right questions. It would seem that private enterprise has reduced those question down to dollars and cents.

If we are to gain acceptance as professionals, we must be willing to invest in education opportunities that strengthen our image and our minds.

CaptainTom Hall is a Bureau Commander in the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

References

Lavrakas, P. J. (1993). Telephone Research Methods: Sampling, Selection and Supervision (Applied Social Research Methods, Vol.7) (2nd ed.). Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications

National Jail and Adult Detention Directory (6th ed.). (1993) Laurel, MD: American Correctional Association.

Kiekbusch, R. G. (1999). Why and how sheriff's must lead corrections into the 21st century. Corrections Manager's Report, (1999 December/January) pp. 3, 4, 11.

Facility Administrator

Survey

Please complete the following survey by circling the appropriate response.

1. What is the highest grade you completed?
   a.   High School   (if "a" go to question #3)
   b.   Associates
   c.   Bachelors
   d.   Masters
2. What was your Major?
   a. Criminal Justice
   b.   Business
   c.   Education
   d.   Other (specify or none) _____

3. Are you currently enrolled in a continuing educational program?
   a.   Yes, Please describe_____.
   b.   No

4. How many years have you been in current position?
   a.   Less than one year
   b.   More than 1 less than 5
   c.   More than 5
   d.   More than 10

5. How many years have you worked in the correctional field?
   a.   Five
   b.   Ten
   c.   Fifteen
   d.   Twenty or more

6.   Do you have any accounting experience?
   a.   Yes
   b.   No

7. Are you currently under any court orders regarding the operation of your facility?
   a.   Yes, describe_____.
   b.   No

8. Does you current management information system provide you with up to date financial information needed to make sound business decisions?
    a.   Yes
    b.   No

9. Does your jail management system provide you with information regarding your jail population?
    a.   Yes
    b.   No

10. Is this information easy to retrieve and understandable?
    a.   Yes
    b.   No

11. Is your jail currently accredited?
    a. Yes, by what organization _____.
    b. No

12. Is the privatization of corrections currently an issue in your local?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Appendix B
Facility Administrator Survey List

Alachua County Detention Facility	Lake County Jail
Baker County Jail	Lee County Jail
Bay County Annex	Lee County Stockade
Bay County Detention Facility	Leon County Detention
Brevard County Detention facility	Manatee County Jail
Broward County Main	Manatee County Port Stockade
Broward North	Manatee County Work Release
Broward Community	Marion County Jail
Clay County Jail	Okaloosa County Jail
Collier County Immokalee Jail	Okeechobee County Jail
Collier County Jail	Orange County Corrections (8)
Columbia County Jail	Osceola County Jail
Escambia County Jail	Palm Beach County Jail Bell Glade
Escambia County Road Prison	Palm Beach County Main Detention
Franklin County Jail	Pasco County Land O Lakes
Gadsden County Correctional Center	Pasco County New Port Richey
Hardee County Jail	Pinellas County Jail
Hernando County Jail	PutnamCounty Jail
Highlands County Jail	Santa Rosa County Jail
Hillsborough County Morgan Street	Sarasota County Jail
Hillsborough County Orient Road	St. Johns County Jail
Hillsborough County Booking	St. Lucie County Corrections
Hillsborough County Work Release	Volusia County Correctional
Indian River County Detention	Volusia County Jail Branch
Jackson County Jail	Walton County Jail

Introduction

Hello my name is _____ and I'm calling from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. We're currently conducting a survey on the qualifications of jail administrators in the State of Florida. This information will be utilized to encourage curriculum changes at the university level.

1. Is the person in charge of supervising the jail available? **If yes redo intro and proceed to step2.**

2. To ensure that we're interviewing comparable position I would like to ask you a couple of questions.

    a. Could your title be the facility administrator or warden?

    b. Is this the lowest level of supervisor that has 24hour responsibility for the facility as opposed to a shift or squad commander?

    If no, ask to speak to the person that does meet these qualification and repeat intro and step2.

3. Confirm the identity of the person being interviewed if you didn't catch the name on introduction. **Enter on call sheet.**

4. Before we get started, I would like to assure you that all response will be treated as confidential and that no ones identity will be divulged.

5. May I confirm your telephone number? **If different than that listed draw one line through the entry and enter new number.**

Proceed with questionnaire.

Jail Administrator Survey

Call Sheet

Facility: Respondents Name:_____

Telephone #:

Contact Attempts	Date	Time	Disposition Code	Pid
1.	__/__	__:__		
2.	__/__	__:__		
3.			__/__	____:__
4.			__/__	____:__
5.			__/__	____:__
6.			__/__	____:__

Disposition Code

10 No Answer (seven rings)

20 Busy

30 Not a working Number

40 Selected respondent not Available

50 Refusal by selected respondent

60 Partial interview

70 Completed

Notes: