

# Why Detectives Decline to Participate in the Promotional Process

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## **Abstract**

*The focus of this research project is to determine why sworn law enforcement members of the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations choose not to participate in promotional processes. The issue facing the Bureau of Fire and Arson investigation is the ability to have a large qualified applicant pool for promotion to first line supervisor. This issue has been around for many years and there has been no direct opportunity to gather data to help describe and answer the problem. This research project will describe previous research on the topic and the data collected from a survey involving the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations.*

## **Introduction**

Every law enforcement agency faces challenges. Those challenges can be external, such as gaining respect in the community; or they can be internal, such as maintaining equipment. No matter what the challenge, the agency has to address them. If the challenge is left unanswered, it begins to create issues for everyone involved. For the Division of State Fire Marshal, Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigation, one of those internal challenges is promotions. For years, the question of "Should I promote?" has challenged the rank and file. And with one question comes more and more questions, such as, "why should I promote"?

The decision to seek a promotional opportunity always appears to be a difficult one, especially in the field of law enforcement. When an opening becomes available due to retirement or other promotions, the thoughts of who will be the next one to promote arises. The agency expects there to be a line at the door, while the rank and file freezes and begin to wonder, "Should it be me"?

The goal of this paper is to uncover the reasons why the members of the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations choose to forgo the opportunity to promote within the agency and what, if any solution could be made to change the mind set concerning promotions.

## **Literature Review**

Police officers are often creatures of habit and many find it difficult to make a change, let alone seek one. Change brings uncertainty; and uncertainty brings nervousness to those who are faced with the change. Do I promote, or do I stay where I am comfortable? Shall I take a risk, not knowing what lies ahead for this agency? It is

not unusual for a large contingent of qualified officers to decline to participate in the promotional process. While some officers may not possess appropriate supervisory skills, administrators still expect a healthy pool of candidates to surface. A shortage of aspirants may well be a cause for organizational alarm (Whetstone, 2001).

The Bureau of Fire Arson Investigations provides a variety of opportunities within the agency. Those opportunities are not just limited to supervisory positions, many are specialty units (e.g. canine, EOD) or are specialty topics (e.g. instructor, CVSA operator). In the past, these specialty designations have been a source, past and current, to fill supervisory positions within the bureau. In many cases, once promoted the supervisor maintains the specialty designation. Within the bureau, the detective has the opportunity to choose a certain career path by moving forward or laterally.

In reading the material that is present concerning promotions, one author sought his answer concerning why officers do not promote within the agency by examining a multitude of reasons that included: opportunities within the agency, educational level, and boredom. His thoughts on opportunities and education indicated that they do little to answer the fundamental question of why officers, even college-educated ones, elect not to compete in the promotional process. His study showed that officers who decline to participate in the promotional process invoke a variety of reasons within the personal, professional, and organizational domains. Some of those were fear of pay cuts, child care, support of their peers, and a strong preference for their present assignment (Whetstone, 2001).

Gary Bonner discussed in an article he wrote that there are really only two kinds of people in the world: those who work to live and those who live to work. He likened it to people who see their occupation as something they enjoy doing but it is not their preoccupation or people who are more focused on their profession or their goals. This seems to point to the fact that people are motivated by many different reasons, but ultimately the person has to be satisfied that they are doing it for the right reasons (Bonner, 2008).

Are some of those motivations tied to job satisfaction, salary/wages and conditions of service, or a combination of many different factors? In a study conducted of library personnel in academic and research, the researchers seemed to suggest that in order to create a better working environment, the organization should look to certain strategies that will motivate their workers. The strategies included: salary, wages and conditions of service; staff training; information availability and communication. This challenges the idea that the decision to not promote could be somewhat due to the employee being satisfied with what the agency currently does (Tella, et. all, 2007).

Michael Argyle writes that there is no research on the effects of overall happiness or life-satisfaction on productivity. However, there is a lot of research on the relationship between job satisfaction and work performance. Job satisfaction is quite highly correlated with overall happiness, and can be looked at as one of its main components (Argyle, 1989).

Today's officers find that other needs are more important – notably, in this study, esteem and self-actualization. Work systems that make benefits in these areas more explicit are likely to be more successful in moving officers into higher ranks (Scarborough, et. all, 1999).

Another author wrote that contrary to previous generations of being comfortable at one job; today's generation wants to follow their own desires. He indicates that whatever the change in job status, it all leads the individual to change (Harr & Hess, 2010).

Abraham Maslow theorized that his Hierarchy of Needs reveals much about a human beings needs. Human basic needs are instinctoid, equivalent of instincts in animals. Humans start with a very weak disposition that is then fashioned fully as the person grows. If the environment is "right", people will grow straight and beautiful, actualizing the potentials they have inherited. If the environment is not "right" (and mostly it is not) they will not reach this same potential. He developed a hierarchy of five levels of basic needs (Physiological Needs, Safety Needs, Needs of Love, Affection and Belongingness, Needs for Esteem and Needs for Self-Actualization). Maslow added that once these needs are established there exist even higher levels of need. These include the need for understanding, esthetic appreciation and purely spiritual needs. Within the levels of the five basic needs, the person does not feel the second need until the demands of the first have been satisfied, nor the third until the second has been satisfied, and so on (Simons, et all, 1987).

## **Methods**

The site for this study is a state police arson investigation unit that employs 104 sworn law enforcement officers and serves the citizens of the State of Florida. A survey was distributed to all of the sworn law enforcement officers who have been employed with the agency for more than one year (95 Officers). The intent of the survey was to involve as many sworn members as possible. The supervisory staff makes up approximately one fourth of the sworn members and most were promoted from within the agency. Due to this attribute, most of the current supervisors had been faced with a promotional consideration within the agency.

Each survey was sent out using a private survey website with the results being automatically calculated by the system. This method was chosen to provide those being surveyed the ability to anonymously take the survey and provide the data without concern for identification by the member.

The survey has the potential for a successful completion because it provides a mechanism to vet the opinions the members have discussed for years regarding the promotional process at this specific agency. However, some may have reservations for complete honesty due to the small size and close relationships developed within the agency.

## Results

The survey consisted of eight questions that challenged the sworn members to evaluate those issues that had been previously known as stumbling blocks or rewards for promoting within the agency. The questions focused on what considerations the sworn member entertained, both professionally and privately, when deliberating a promotional opportunity. The rate of return for this survey was sixty-four percent (64%) of those surveyed.

After examining the demographics of the survey, the survey was broken down into two main areas. The first area deals with the overall consideration to promote and the reason why the sworn member would choose to promote. Table 1 indicates that a vast majority (86.9%) of those surveyed indicated that they had considered promoting within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations.

**TABLE 1**

### **Consideration to Promote within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigation**

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	<b>Considered Promotion</b>
<b>Yes</b>	86.9%
<b>No</b>	11.5%
<b>Not applicable</b>	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	100%

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Table 2 explores the reasons why sworn members choose to participate in the promotional process.

**TABLE 2\***

**Choices in Considering Promoting within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations**

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<b>Choice for Considering to Promote</b>	
<b>Personal Goal</b>	<b>57.4%</b>
<b>Career Opportunity</b>	<b>60.7%</b>
<b>Salary</b>	<b>44.3%</b>
<b>Leadership Role</b>	<b>34.4%</b>
<b>Manager Encouraged</b>	<b>19.7%</b>
<b>Other Encouraged</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

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\* The question referenced in Table 2, was a “mark all that apply”; therefore, the percentages show the overall thoughts in making a decision.

Overall, the most compelling reasons to choose to participate in the promotional process were centered on the goals and future of the sworn member in the agency. The sworn member was interested in the Career Opportunity and Personal Goal of promoting. Interestingly, the salary increase associated with a promotion is not a primary concern. The common opinion within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations is that promotion to a first-line supervisory post generally results in a reduction in take home pay because of the loss of overtime and on-call compensation. In addition, the first-line supervisor does not have a better work environment, as the work load and hours increase.

The second area that is discussed by the survey concentrates on the specifics of promotional considerations. This was viewed more from the personal and professional side of the individual. Table 3 explores the personal reasons why the sworn member would not choose to participate.

**TABLE 3\***

**Personal Factors that would affect participating in the Promotional Process**

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	<b>Personal Factors</b>
<b>Salary decrease</b>	<b>27.9%</b>
<b>Family Obligation</b>	<b>26.2%</b>
<b>Not ready for Promotional Process</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
<b>Moving concerns (selling house, Child care, education)</b>	<b>55.7%</b>
<b>None, chose not to participate</b>	<b>14.8%</b>

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\*The question referenced in Table 3 was a “mark all that apply”; therefore, the percentages show the overall thoughts in making a decision

The leading personal reason for not taking part in the promotional process is the anticipated move that could occur from being promoted. The particular concerns were selling a house in a tough economy, child care and education for children. The selling of the house would be the highest as moving into another area would require renting or buying a second home.

The last portion of the second area is the professional reasons why the sworn member would not choose to participate. Table 4 captures the information provided to the question.

**TABLE 4\***

**Professional Factors that would affect participating in the Promotional Process**

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	<b>Professional Factors</b>
<b>Prefer Current Assignment</b>	<b>41.0%</b>
<b>Possible Loss of Other Compensation</b>	<b>34.4%</b>
<b>Not Interested</b>	<b>14.8%</b>
<b>Leaving the Department Soon</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
<b>Fear of Poor Performance</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>None, I Chose to Participate in the Process</b>	<b>34.4%</b>

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\* The question referenced in Table 4, was a “mark all that apply”; therefore, the percentages show the overall thoughts in making a decision.

With respect to the professional reasons, the chances of moving up are offset by a preference for the present assignment and the possible loss of other compensation. The other compensation is on-call, overtime, and additional duty allowances – EOD, K-9). This compensation is usually higher than the salary increase of a first line supervisor.

The final portion of the survey asked the sworn member to list the organizational factors emitting from the agency that kept them from promoting. The highest percentages of actual items that would keep them from promoting were favoritism and not enough vacancies. However, an interesting development within this portion of the survey was the lack of mentorship and no test/promotional preparation help.

## **Discussion**

This survey indicated two main points. The first point is related to those sworn members who do participate in the promotional process. They do so to fulfill a personal goal or to avail themselves of further career opportunities. This seems to be in line with the reason most people would want to promote.

The second point is related to sworn members who decline to participate in the promotional process. These sworn members invoke a variety of reasons within the personal, professional, and organizational domains. The most cited concerns were those involving personal reasons such as: selling of a house or breaking of a lease; child care; and education opportunities for their children. In other words, some sworn members decline to promote in order to remain in a relatively secure environment that they have established as a detective.

In addition, from the professional side, the sworn members indicated that they are established in their current positions and have a compensation package that rewards them for their availability to the agency. By choosing to become a supervisor within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations, the sworn member would make less than the detective position (overtime, on-call) they currently occupy and take on more responsibility as a supervisor. In essence, the sworn member as a detective, is only responsible for themselves.

Furthermore, if the sworn member's promotional opportunity allows them to maintain their current residential status, keep the additional sources of income (EOD, K-9 incentives) and receive mentoring/promotional help, then the sworn member would be more likely to participate in the promotional process.

In interpreting the results, it appears that the current slate of sworn personal within the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations feel that the needs of the organization are not quite as important as the needs of the individuals. This seems to be in line with the research of Bonner and the explanation of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

## **Recommendations**

The Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations should consider the need to better prepare the sworn members for promotional opportunities. The first consideration should be the measuring of the needs of the agency and that of the sworn members. If the sworn members feel that they are better served by staying in their current positions due to established personal reasons, then the Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations should consider preparing those who want to promote for those supervisory positions that are within the immediate area of the sworn member. This reduces the opportunities for promotion for the sworn member, but it encourages them to consider promoting.

The agency could also survey the sworn members and identify those who aspire to a higher goal or the furtherance of career opportunities. Once this has been established, the agency should place those who have been identified into a “fast track system” of promotional assistance, career developing/planning and supervisor training. This would help the agency by preparing those who would be in line to become a supervisor. It would also provide the sworn member with the opportunities to not only do their jobs, but to align themselves with what the agency requires of a first line supervisor. This does not mean that if someone changes their mind about promoting they could not step into the same opportunities.

In addition, the agency should look to reward the first line supervisor position by allowing on-call incentives or a higher percentage of salary increase at promotion.

No matter what occurs, the agency and the sworn members need to be more attentive to the future consideration for promotions. For the agency it is to prepare those members for promotion. For the sworn member to it is to prepare themselves for the future.

Lieutenant Karl Morgan has been with the Florida State Fire Marshal's Office, Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations for 13 years. He has worked as a detective and canine handler. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 2009 and serves in the Special Operations Section as the District One Training Lieutenant.

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