

# Designing a Promotional Process for First Line Supervisors for the Pinellas Park Police Department

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the many facets which are involved in the promotional process for first line supervisor (Sergeant). I have researched what the basic characteristics, skills, educational, tenure, and qualities a candidate should possess to participate in the process. This will discuss the changes an organization may need to make from selecting a vendor to design and administer a process, to changing internal policies and practices, and to include changing how the best candidate is identified for the promotion. An internal and external survey was conducted in order to examine what other agencies are establishing as minimum qualifications for allowing those to participate in the process, to include what is examined or tested during the process, and what basic skills and characteristics our current sergeants believe are necessary to be successful.*

## **Introduction**

Across the nation each year law enforcement agencies, large and small, hold promotional processes for first line supervisors. It is an exciting time for the organization as a fresh look, new ideas, and the future of the organization is recognized. For staff it is also an exciting time as those who meet the eligibility criteria will have an opportunity to stand up and prove themselves and realize the efforts of their hard work from years past.

In my own organization we are examining different methods of selecting and testing candidates so we may identify a new generation of supervisor, who will shape and guide our organization into the future. We need to choose a candidate who can not only fit the role of a first line supervisor, but someone who can supervise people in a number of different units, and later be a good candidate for promoting and leading the organization in a command staff position.

In this paper I will discuss and examine the educational options which an organization may consider when designing the basic criteria. I will discuss the testing process itself. From subject matter experts, completing a task analysis, to identifying and choosing methods of testing, and finally will discuss a couple of options on how an organization may rank or group passing candidates so the best person for the organization is promoted. What modifications my own organization may need to make, if any.

## Literature Review

The ultimate goal of a promotional process is to identify the best candidates for promotion. There is a great need today for agencies to promote those who are not necessarily managers, but leaders. Those being promoted today should be part of a department's succession plan. (Hughes, 2010)

When it comes to participating in the promotional process there are a number of different reasons as to why a person may not participate. They distrust the system, the people administering the process, or the person making the final decision. (Kurz, 2006) People who chose to enter the race will spend countless hours away from their family studying. For those who want to get promoted there is prestige, money, and a better retirement. (Jetmore, 2009)

There are a number of things an organization can do to improve and change these perceptions. The organization needs to be aware that there will be those who have opinions which develop in to personal bias, cliques, and even destructive competition. (Kurz, 2006)

There are many critical steps which lead to a successful examination process. The first step is up dating your organizational policy. Crafting a policy will inform everyone how the process will start and finish. This will assure the test is administered fairly and without bias. (Kurz, 2006)

An agency should identify eligibility requirements such as education, tenure with the organization, tenure as a practicing law enforcement officer will service as the first way of separating candidates. (Kurz, 2006)

Education requirement is very inconsistent among organizations. In a research paper written by Andrew Hawkes, he believes there is a direct connection between education and being promoted. He believes that one must possess a certain level of education to be effective in a specific rank. Simply put his opinion is, an un-educated department heads in a small agency can not effectively communicate with an educated department head in a large department. The two communicate on two different levels.

Further he cites is the very reason why the United States Army set standards for all their personnel to promote. He points out there are certain educational requirements set for one to promote. (Hawkes, 2009)

As discussed by Hughes when designing the process it must "bring fairness and equality to all that takes it" (pg3). It must be based on a job task analysis and job specific. (Hughes, 2010)

Law Enforcement Services, Inc., (LESI) conducts promotional testing designs. They state a test should be "designed with familiarity with the fundamentals of the job in question". (LESI, pg1, n.d.)

Further the tests should be set to measure the candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities. (LESI, pg2, n.d.)

In a recent telephone interview with Dr. James Humphries, Police testing consultant who lives and works in the Tampa Bay area and consults with Pinellas Park Police Department, he explains completing a job task analysis during the design phase will identify what a supervisor does in their role (job description), establishing the most and less frequency and level of importance which tasks are completed. This will aid in determining what information will be used in the each test.

Humphries further explained a process must be validated so it is fair and defensible in court. It should be based on a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities which mirror those of the supervisor which the candidate is testing for. (Humphries, personal communication, April 11, 2013)

Smaller agencies may use their own in house staff to conduct "Contemporary" evaluating. Contemporary methods usually consisting of a couple testing steps, such as a written test and an oral board. This services a much smaller group of candidates. Assessment centers are much more involved and require more resources and service more candidates. Although they can be lengthy in time, they can serve a large number of candidates. (Kurz, 2006)

Although these are two different methods of administering the process of testing, they are very similar.

There are a number of different types of tests which measure attributes such as a written knowledge test, an in basket exercise, a presentation, role play, and/or an oral board (Kurz,2006).

Humphries states each test has a minimal requirement to move on to the next phase of testing, this represents the minimal competency of the candidate towards that specific job.

Kurz offers the suggestion that additional information must be considered when looking at promoting a person. He suggestions that a candidate 's previous job performance, level of education, additional job responsibilities, job assignments, training, leadership role in the community, self initiated patrol activity and how they contributed to the welfare of the organization be examined. (Kurz,2006)

When the testing process is finished the ranking or pooling of candidates will need to be completed. Those who have successfully passed each phase of the testing process will be eligible according to Kurz. There are several ways to rank or group candidates for final selection. Kurz believes it is important for each candidate to know ahead of time the scoring system and the results of their scores. (Kurz, 2006)

Ranking candidates can give the wrong impression to the entire field; for example: the candidate, who is ranked number-one, may believe he/she is the best candidate for promotion. As Humphries explains that is not true. All the ranking number does is set an order which candidates may be considered or in some cases an order where everyone who passes the process is placed in a "pool". Some organizations establish "pools" of (5) five, by ranking order, which they consider while other organizations establish (1) one single "pool" where all who are eligible are considered at once.(Humphries, personal communication, April 11, 2013)

As we discussed there are many other factors that need to be factored in to making the final decision.

There can be limitations of a ranking system as some Chief or Sheriffs feel influenced by a list. An agencies promotion policy or manual should clearly explain what the list of test score represent, and describe that scores are "part" of the process and do not represent the entire process. Chief's and Sheriff need the latitude when choosing a candidate. (Lowry, 1997)

Before the final selection is chosen one final step should be made. The Chief or Sheriff should interview the candidate. Humphries believes this meeting will allow an

opportunity for the agency head to informally discuss the views of the candidate and determine what role he/she will play in the succession plan. It allows both parties an opportunity to ask questions which are specific to the job, the direction of the organization, and openly discuss opinions or views.(Humphries, personal communication, April 11, 2013)

During this interview Kurz recommends feedback and expectations be discussed as well. (Kurz, 2006)

Scheduled feedback sessions with candidates would help in the design process for the future. (Murphy 2006)

This process is one which most organizations host once a year. Kurz also reminds us to assure your policy has language which defines a time period which the list will expire. (Kurz, 2006)

It is my intention to use these sources as a foundation and path to explore other options for testing. I want to use this information to design a promotional process for the Pinellas Park Police Department. I will conduct a survey and seek additional ideas as to how to select the best candidate.

## **Method**

The purpose of this research is to examine the construction of a successful promotional process from design to promotion. There are a number of steps an agency must make such as:

- Adopting a clear promotional policy,
- Identifying minimum eligibility requirements for candidates
- Identify who will may design and administer the process , (will a third party be used to validate the test)
- Will candidates be “ranked” or “Pooled” after the process
- Who will make the final selection
- What other information should be considered when making a selection
- Will an interview be conducted with the Chief

Two surveys were conducted; the first went to local law enforcement agencies which surround the Pinellas Park Police Department. They were asked about:

- Candidate eligibility
- Who administers their process
- What processes do they use
- Do they list or “rank” or “pool” their candidates after the process

A second survey was given to current Sergeants at the Pinellas Park. I wanted to know what characteristics and skills they felt new sergeant(s) should possess to be successful.

I am seeking to identify what methods or processes should be adopted to identify the best candidate(s) for the rank of Sergeant.

## Results

The strength of my first survey is the information received was gathered by a telephone interview. I experienced a 100 percent return rate, (7) seven out of (7) seven, on the data requested. I did not get any indications of any weaknesses in this process.

In the first survey, local law enforcement agencies near the Pinellas Park Police Department, who hold promotional processes regularly, for first line supervisors where asked the following:

### What education level does a candidate need to have completed to participate in the promotional process?

- (2) two agencies replied with no college course work nor any college degree is required.
- (4) four agencies replied 60 or more college credits or a A.A. or A.S. degree.
- (1) one replied a B.A degree is required

### How is your promotional process administered?

- (6) six agencies stated the exam is designed by a third party vendor
- (1) one said, they employ an in house person to design, write, and administer their exams

### Do you have a written knowledge exam that covers specific areas?

- (7) seven agencies replied they use an exam which covers their policies, standard operating procedures, Florida state statutes, and/or local ordinances

### Do you issue a leadership book and include questions from it on the exam?

- (4) four agencies replied that they do
- (3) three said they do not

### Do you have an oral board?

- (4) four agencies replied they do
- (3) three said they do not

Do you have an in basket exercise?

- (4) four agencies replied they do
- (3) three said they do not

Do you have a role play exercise?

- (1) one agency replied that they do
- (5) five said they do not
- (1) one said sometimes

Do you administer a personality test such as a Myers Briggs or DISC?

- (7) seven agencies replied they do not

Do the candidates have to prepare or present a presentation?

- (1) one said they do
- (1) one said sometimes
- (5) five said they do not

Do you have a writing exercise?

- (3) three agencies replied they do
- (4) four said they do not

Are the candidates ranked at the end of the process?

- (3) three replied they place candidates on a list, however
  - (2) two of those said the Chief must pick within the top 3 candidates
- (4) four agencies said the candidates who pass the process go into a “pool” and the Chief or Sheriff can go anywhere within that “pool”.

On my second survey to the current sergeants at the Pinellas Park Police Department, I had a 75 percent return rate, (9) nine out of (12) twelve returned. The strength of the survey is the information gained will assist in the development and implementation of the promotional process. The weakness may have been the surveys were placed in supervisor’s mail boxes and remained anonymous. I am more interested in the information, so with no names I have no idea who did or did not returned a survey. The second survey contained a total of 9 questions. The question and results are as follows:

What is the minimum amount of years in service an officer should have completed in law enforcement, to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

- (6) six said 5 years
- (3) three said 7 years.

What is the minimum amount of years in service an officer should have completed, at this agency, to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

- (7) seven said 5 years
- (2) two said 7 years

What education level should a person have completed to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

- (6) six said at least an A.A or A.S. degree
- (1) one said 60 credit hours
- (2) two said a B.A degree

I asked the supervisors to list what they believe is the best skill a new supervisor can possess to be successful. They listed

- (2) two said verbal communications skills
- (7) seven said leadership, decision making, organization, good trainer, good listener, and honesty

I asked what is the worst skill a supervisor could have.

- They identified micromanager, bad personality, vindictive, (2) lack attention to detail, unorganized, not responsible, and indecisive.

I asked what is the most important characteristic trait do you believe a person must poses to succeed in the role of a sergeant?

- They listed, patient, flexible, open, objective, ability to lead, integrity, leadership, good listener, and professional.(some listed more than (1) one)

I asked what characteristic trait do you believe a person would have to possess to fail in the role of a sergeant?

- Pessimism, lack respect, egotistical, selfish, lack interest, self serving, arrogant, looking out for yourself not the organization. (some listed more than (1) one)

*I asked them using a scale 1 to 5, (1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest) how important is it for a sergeant to possess these qualities to be successful:*

- The list of choices I provided to them were: leadership, judgment, decision making, verbal communication, written communication, direct with people, organized, innovative and popular with people.

The choices with the highest marks were:

- Leadership
- Judgment
- Decision making
- Organized
- Verbal communications
- Written communications

Surprising, direct with people and innovative were at the bottom and marked at the least important. Not surprising “popular with people” was identified as the least important quality.

## **Discussion**

In this research I have examined the varying methods of testing, to include what processes to use to evaluate a candidate, to what the basic foundation in term of time in an organization, minimum education achieved, personal characteristics and qualities which will lend to a successful new supervisor.

As a result of this information my organization will redevelop a promotional process for first line supervisors (sergeants) from testing to selection.

We historically worked with the same vendor in designing and administering our promotional process. This time we will change vendors and selected a company with a new perspective, who posses a more divers method of testing. Our vendor should have experience in developing examinations for varying levels within organizations, from Corporal to Chief of Police.

We want a vendor who believes in several things: designing a process and test which is validated, defendable, and confidential. Our agency believes this is wise money spent; the thought behind this is our agency wants the vendor to bear most of the burden defending any court challenges that could come. Selecting a vendor who you trust to design a process, but who allow some input is important. Our agency needs a vendor who can keep an organization from viewing the specifics of the process prior to administering away. This is important as this eliminates any chance of information leaking out and removes the accusation that someone close to the process helped someone participating in the process.



We will need to update our department policy to mirror the process which will be held.

Our staff then examined the minimal requirements needed by a candidate to participate in the process: We made the change from solely a A.A/A.S degree to now include 60 credit hours completed at an accredited college, proven by a certified college transcript or the completion of a A.A/A.S or higher degree.

We then determined a candidate should have 5 years experience as a law enforcement officer, with the most current 3 years at our organization.

We changed our final selection from a traditional "list" to a "pool" system. The "pool" is simply a list of eligibility. This eligibility list identifies those persons who have met or exceeded the minimum standards set, and is now eligible to be selected for the position of sergeant.

Our agency will institute a self reporting "survey" which is given to each candidate prior to any testing. This is an opportunity for each candidate to self report their personal and professional achievements. This survey would be similar to a resume. This will highlight:

- years in service
- education
- job assignment held
- leadership roles
- management and leadership courses
- any prior leadership, management positions

Our agency views this as an opportunity to learn more about our candidates.

During the design phase our agency will ask our vendor to implement two basic phases of examination.

The first will be a basic knowledge test. The basic knowledge test will cover the department's directive, standard operating procedures, rules and regulations, union contract and Florida State Statutes and guidelines.

The test questions, although written, will be scenario based so a candidate's knowledge as to how to apply the information is examined, and not just their ability to recall information.

Our staff feels the questions should mirror our community and our daily calls for service. Our staff believes questions which are geared towards topics outside of our community make up are not relative, for example: Our city does not have a citrus, fishing, or farming community, so we do not need to examine our candidates knowledge level on "how many pieces of fruit does it need to be to make a felony crime", nor "what is the minimum length of a specific species of fish during a specific season".

The second phase will consist of a presentation phase. This will simulate a topic which a sergeant will deal with and in an environment which he/she would have to conduct themselves. For example: a read off environment where a sergeant would have to educate/brief his/her officers on a policy.

Raters and role players will be part of the scenario and represent the group of officers who are being briefed. To assure there are no conflicts we will be forwarding a

list of candidates to the raters and role players. If there are two people who know each other then a replacement will be found.

They will score each candidate on the qualities and skills which we identified in survey # 2, (Appendix B).

They will focus on selecting those who will demonstrate a high level of leadership, judgment, decision making, verbal communication, and organization.

It should be noted in our specific process our agency will add one additional module not mentioned thus far. Our vendor will be asked to collect a written sample from each candidate. This will not be scored, its purpose is to provide the Chief and staff with a true sample as to how the candidate collects and conveys their thoughts in a limited time period on a specific topic.

At the end, the organization will have a “pool” of candidates, an eligibility list, which the Chief of Police will interview from. The eligibility list provides the Chief a defined, but wide area to move with in to examine and choose the best candidate for the organization.

During the research the topic most debated was changing from a ranking list to and eligibility list. To me the point is simple. Why should a Chief of Police and organization be saddled or pigeon holed in to selecting a candidate just because this candidate is either a good test taker or had a good test day.

The argument has been made that if gave the same test to the same candidate weeks apart from another that the score will differ each time, maybe better, maybe worse. A candidate who demonstrates they possess the minimum skills and knowledge to do the job should be separated from those who do not. However a score along should not be the sole factor for selecting a new sergeant.

In addition I believe it would be a loss to the organization if a candidate was promoted solely based on a score. For example if the best score was an 89, with the closes scores being 88, 87, 86. And that candidate who has the 86 possesses more time in grade, more education, more leadership qualities, and has held more leadership roles in the organization, but purely based on the ranking or a listing policy, can not be promoted. Is this really the how the organization develops forward?

## **Recommendations**

My research indicates a few recommendations:

- Seek an outside vendor who will design, administer, and defend your promotional process.
- Survey your current sergeants and other law enforcement agencies surrounding yours and determine what minimal educational level, time in the organization is needed to participate in the process.
- Identify what skills and characteristics you want to examine and deem necessary for a candidate to be successful in your organization.

- Be open to changing how you test and select your candidates; give your organization the option of selecting the best candidate.
- Change your policy or directive to reflect all aspects of the process.
- Evaluate those key fundamentals in your candidates to assure they are equipped and use them to build on. See their past experiences and jobs as opportunities to build on and a foundation to work from. I believe we will look at these closer when making selections for other assignments such as Corporals, (FTO) Field training officers, and more.

I am proud to say my organization has learned from the research and the past and will use this information to grow into the future. During our journey we will continue to identify and promote those who are working hard and who will lead our next generation of officers with leadership, good communication skills, sound judgment, and good decision making skills. They will be organized and innovative.

By making these adjustments our agency will make better informed decisions when it comes to promoting. And our sergeants will have the tools to be successful.

Captain Kevin Riley began his career in 1989 with the Pinellas Park Police Department. Prior to this he worked as a Detention Deputy for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office for 18 months. He has worked in many different assignments and ranks to include Patrol, Narcotics Detective, lead firearms instructor, communications center, special operations, S.W.A.T., police motor unit and the community redevelopment policing unit. He attended the Southern Police Institute 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Command Officers Development Course (C.O.D.C.) and was recently appointed Captain over the Investigations Division. Captain Riley has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminology with a minor in Business from St. Leo University.

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## Appendix A

### Survey

This survey was directed to those law enforcement agencies who are located in the Tampa Bay area, neighboring the Pinellas Park police Department.

1. How is your promotional process administered?
2. Do you have a basic written knowledge exam which covers Florida State Statutes, department policies and procedures, Ordinances?
3. Do you issue a leadership book and include questions from it on the basic written knowledge exam?
4. Do you have an oral board?
5. Do you have an in basket exercise?
6. Do you have a role play exercise?
7. Do you administer a personality test such as the Myers Briggs or D.I.S.C.?
8. Do the candidates have to prepare and present a presentation?
9. Do you have a writing exercise?
10. Are the candidates ranked at the end of the process by score?
11. Is there a minimum college degree or amount of credit hours a candidate must possess to be eligible to test?

## Appendix B

### Survey

This survey was directed to those who currently hold the rank of Sergeant with the Pinellas Park Police Department.

1. What is the minimum amount of years in service an officer should have completed in law enforcement, to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

3 years      5 years      7 years      10 years      other \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the minimum amount of years in service an officer should have completed, at this agency, to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

3 years      5 years      7 years      10 years      other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What education level should a person have completed to be able to successfully fulfill the role of a sergeant?

High School      A.A./A.S.      B.A.      60 credits      other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the best skill a person can poses to succeed in the role of a sergeant?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the worst skill a person can poses to fail in the role of a sergeant?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the most important characteristic trait do you believe a person must poses to succeed in the role of a sergeant?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What characteristic trait do you believe a person would have to possess to fail in the role of a sergeant?

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8. Indicate using the scale below, (1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest) how important is it for a sergeant to possess these qualities to be successful?

Leadership	1	2	3	4	5
Judgment	1	2	3	4	5
Decision making	1	2	3	4	5
Verbal Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Written Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Direct with people	1	2	3	4	5
Organized	1	2	3	4	5
Innovative	1	2	3	4	5
Popular with people	1	2	3	4	5