Running Head: DEVELOPING A RETENTION PROGRAM

Executive Leadership

Developing a Retention Program for the White River Township Fire Department

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

The White River Township Fire Department (WRTFD) appears to have a high turnover rate of career personnel. This is currently affecting daily staffing and leading to increased costs to the department. The purpose of this research is to examine why employees have left the organization and establish an employee retention program. Research question to be answered are:

1. What are the reasons employees are leaving our agency for other fire departments?
2. What is the financial impact of employee turnover and additional hiring processes?
3. What are the key elements for a retention program?
4. How have other fire departments managed employee turnover?

An action research methodology was used with data collection via literature review, a survey of past career employees, and a personal interview. Results revealed employees leave for due to decreased pay and call volume, uncomfortable working environment, and no advancement opportunities. Financial impact of turnover is poorly recorded, but fixed costs are $13,365.51. Key elements of a retention program include workplace culture, involvement, orientation, learning, and rewards. Other fire department has addressed employee turnover by understanding and addressing needs of employees, realistic job expectations, and education. Recommendations include: create retention program, formal exit interviews, turnover cost documentation, refine recruit school curriculum, increased WRTFD information provided in hiring process, and evaluate turnover regularly.

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Introduction

The most important resource for any fire organization is the personnel of the organization (International Fire Service Training Association, 2004). As the cost of maintaining personnel continue to increase, retention of fire service personnel for an organization is crucial to manage budget funds. The first career firefighter was hired at WRTFD in 1997. Since this time nearly one quarter of the career employees have left the organization. The WRTFD appears to have a high turnover rate for career personnel negatively affection both daily staffing and increased cost of additional personnel hiring. The purpose of this research is to examine why employees have left the organization and establish an employee retention program. An action research methodology was utilized to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons employees are leaving our organization for other fire departments?
2. What is the financial impact of employee turnover and additional hiring processes?
3. What are the key elements for retention program?
4. How have other fire departments managed employee turnover?

Background and Significance

The loss of career employees has occurred since 1996, when the first career employee was hired and the transition to a combination fire department began. With the loss of these employees, no action has been taken to investigate why the employees have left the organization. These employee losses not only affect daily staffing, but impact the budget

negatively. To avoid reoccurrence, a retention program should be investigated for implementation.

The WRTFD is located in northwest Johnson County and is considered s southern suburb of the city of Indianapolis. The response area is largely unincorporated, with a small section in the city of Greenwood. It is generally considered a bedroom community, with most residents working in Greenwood or Indianapolis. The population of the emergency response area is 40,000, consisting of multiple residential housing additions, multi-family housing, and strip mall and big-box retail business. There is virtually no industry. The township has seen explosive growth during the past ten years and is one of the fastest growing communities in Indiana.

WRTFD operates as a fire protection district. A five member board of directors is appointed to terms of service by the Johnson County Commissioners and oversees the fire department. This board manages fiscal responsibilities for the department and the appointed Fire Chief manages daily operations. The fire district receives funds a special taxing district. The majority of these funds are property taxes and a smaller amount is County Adjusted Gross Income Tax. WRTFD currently does not bill fir services other than hazardous materials response.

The WRTFD is a combination fire department, with 20 career officers, 15 career engineers, 65 part time employees, and 2 civilian staff. All personnel have a minimum training level of Firefighter I/II and State of Indiana Certified Emergency Medical Technician. There are five administrative staff officers, Chief of Fire Department, Battalion Chiefs of Administration, Training, and Fire Prevention and a Captain of Public Fire Education. All other career personnel are assigned to a 24/48 hour shift. Currently,

there are 19 positions assigned to each shift. Besides normal fire suppression and non-transport advanced life support duties, WRTFD performs the following services: extrication, trench and collapse rescue, high and low angle ropes, and gross medical decon attached to a county hazardous materials team. WRTFD responded to 1758 emergency incidents in 2007.

With the increasing growth of the fire district and an increasing emergency response call load, WRTFD recognized the need to begin to hire career personnel and formed a committee to hire the first career Fire Chief in 1995. The primary responsibility for the Fire Chief would be to establish a strategic plan for additional hiring of career personnel and meeting the needs and service requirements of the community. In 1999, five additional officers were hired. Between 2000 and 2003, hiring was conducted usually consisting of one or two personnel at a time. In 2004, the State of Indiana Department of Local Government and Finance allowed WRTFD a special one time increased tax levy that allowed the department to hire 20 career officers and engineers to meet the increasing growth of the community. Since 2004, a few other career personnel have been hired as new positions have been created in the office.

Since 1996, a total of 47 career firefighters and two office staff positions have been hired. During this same time period, 11 career personnel have left WRTFD for varying reasons. The administration hasn’t consistently investigated or inquired the reasons these employees have chosen to leave (J. Pell, personal communication, November 22, 2007). Exit interviews were not always completed and if they were, the results were not shared with the management of the organization.

Since WRTFD is a small combination department, even the loss of one career person can affect minimum staffing levels and necessitate the need for increased overtime. This along with the cost of conducting a career hiring process, providing a new hire with clothing and personnel protective equipment, and out-processing the resigning employee significantly affect the operating budget. The most significant issue, however, is why personnel are leaving the organization for other positions. Until these issues are identified, employee retention problems will continue to hamper the organization.

This research problem relates to the United States Fire Administration operational objectives because it meets the expectation of responding appropriately to emerging issues. Employee retention and dedication to an employer isn't as prevalent in today's world as it has been in the past. Businesses, including the fire service, are finding employee retention a very competitive issue. This research problem also relates to the Executive Leadership course by identifying different leadership issues currently faced by fire service leaders and developing programs to correct these problems.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to establish a base of information for this applied research project. The review began at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center in August 2007. Other literature review searches were conducted on the Internet and the Johnson County Public Library. Fire department records, meeting minutes, and budget reports were also utilized for pertinent information.

Retention is defined as the act of retaining or the power to retain. Often times, turnover will be used synonymous with retention and is defined as the number of

employees hired within to replace those that have left (Webster's New American Dictionary, 1995). Attrition is defined as the reduction of numbers through resignation, retirement or death (Webster's new American Dictionary, 1995). While conducting research, it was found that all three terms were used to address the same problem.

While conducting research, there was little information found addressing the issue of retention of career firefighters. Most information was relevant to the volunteer fire service. There was a large amount of information concerning large and small businesses. Much of this information is relevant to the fire service since the past several years many fire service leaders have taken the approach that fire departments should be considered and managed like a businesses and tax payers should be considered customers. So, the problems currently facing large Fortune 500 companies are being experienced by municipal fire service leaders. Herman (1999) describes keeping good employees with your organization as the most important problem facing businesses today. If an organization is going to run successfully, there are several human elements needed to make this happen. These include good leadership, good management, and a team of workers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes performing at a high level of production (Herman, 1999).

There are multiple reasons that employees leave an organization. Solie (2003) suggests that the first step in investigating employee turnover is to separate the issue into two categories: avoidable and unavoidable. Unavoidable turnover occurs due to personnel and family reasons or when employees are unable to perform some aspects of the job. Avoidable turnover occurs when the organization doesn't meet the needs of the employee. Some reasons for avoidable turnover include substandard equipment or

facilities, lack of training and education, poor leadership and substandard wages and benefits (Handelsman, Jackson, Magos,1998).

Similar to the private sector, the fire service has specific retention and turnover problems. Unavoidable turnover occurs as a result of retirement, sickness and injury, or layoffs (IFSTA, 2004). Reasons for avoidable turnover include:

-Join a similar fire service organization

-Unhappy with management or lack of leadership

-Change of profession

-Wages and benefits

-Increased emergency response call volume (Griffin, 2006, pp. 23-24).

It is these avoidable turnover areas that the fire service can improve in order to retain employees.

Turnover will always be a issue of an organization. Zero percent turnover is neither realistic nor desirable (Branham, 2001). Employees will move on to other opportunities and many times an employer can do nothing about it. Some of these reasons include better salary and benefits, partner relocation, becoming a full time parent, or returning to school. A healthy job market will always be the enemy of an organization when attempting to retain personnel. All energies should not be spent trying to keep all employees of the organization, but effort must be focused on keeping those that your organization can least afford to lose (Branham, 2001).

Employee turnover isn’t always a negative concern for an organization. Some turnover is actually desirable and healthy (Branham, 2001). If all employees stay with an organization, most employees will be at the top of the pay ranges and benefit cost will be

high. Also, new employees bring in new ideas and attitudes and prevents the organization from stagnation (Branham, 2001). Sometimes the wrong people do stay with an organization and lead to problems. An organization doesn't want the problem of "some quit and leave …others quit and stay" (Branham, 2001, p. 5).

Companies and organizations have always been challenged to find top level employees, but keeping them is one of the greatest challenges facing businesses in the 21st century (Ashby and Pell, 2001). With the loss and turnover of key employees continue, businesses have been forced to take steps to keep these employees from leaving. Some strategies put in place in include salary and bonus increases and other financial incentives along with attempting to make the workplace more desirable. Sometimes these strategies work, but many companies and organizations continue to lose key employees (Ashby and Pell, 2001).

A key component to address employee retention and turnover is creating a positive organizational culture. Companies with high turnover rates have organization cultures that include corporate domination, autocracy, and inflexibility (Ashby and Pell, 2001). In these organizations, turnover will always be a concern, no matter what incentives or perks are given to employees. Companies must foster a culture of participation, participation, and cooperation, which will lead to decreased turnover (Ashby and Pell, 2001).

One of the most common complaints heard by employees who leave organizations is a lack of management and direction. Ashby and Pell (2001) conducted a survey and identified nine complaints employees had about their managers: gross compensation inequities, fear based management, lack of a clear career path, tolerance of

poor performance, broken promises, putting personal interests ahead of what's best for the company, treating employees as second class citizens, lack of a reward for superior work, and feeling unappreciated, pp. 3-12. The keys to a positive relationship are trust and respect. When employees feel they are respected, they will respect their supervisor and the business in return. The following are strategies for gaining respect and building trust with employees: listen to employee concerns, treat employees with courtesy and respect, reward good work, treat employees fair, keep employees informed, lead instead of control and consider employee personal needs (Handelsman, Jacksack, Magos, 1998, p. 145).

Silva (2001) found that individuals join the fire service as volunteer and career firefighters to fulfill a need of helping the community, fellow man, and meeting their personal needs. These needs are described in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow arranged in an ascending order with basic needs first, and then progressing through self-fulfillment for the individual. These needs start with basics, such as food, to that of the need for safety, to a need for social acceptance, followed by a need for respect and recognition from others, to the final need of performing at a peak level. Fire service organizations should consider these needs when investigating causes for turnover and developing retention ideas (Silva, 2001).

Even though many organizations continue to face problems with employee retention, not all senior executives are correctly addressing the problem. Branham (2001 found that 75 percent of senior executives say employee retention is a major problem with their organization, only 15 percent have chosen to make it a strategic priority. In fact, many companies have instead adopted a replacement mentality and continue to

increase spending on recruitment as these turnover rates continue to climb. This path requires an increased demand on managers, which takes away from areas such as proper employee orientation programs, setting performance goals, and meeting employee expectations. The lack of attention in these areas is what leads to employee turnover problems (Branham, 2001).

Employee retention has become an essential business strategy for companies that want to remain productive now and in the future. Retention strategies are critical for success and can become an important aspect of an organization's hiring strategy. Some companies find that they don't have to recruit new employees because they receive many qualified unsolicited resumes due to their excellent employee retention program (Mason, 2001).

Mason has identified ten strategies for successful employee retention:

1. Treat employees like you treat your most valuable clients.
2. Get your employees to "fall in love" with your organization.
3. Strong retention strategies become strong recruiting advantages.
4. Retention is more effective when you put the right person in the right job.
5. Money is important, not the only reason people stay with an organization.
6. Committees to help develop retention strategies are effective.
7. Leadership must be deeply invested in retention.
8. Recognition is a powerful retention strategy.
9. The "fun factor" is very important to many employees.
10. Know the trends in benefit packages (Mason, 2001, pp. 1-3).

Paul (1996) found that retaining good employees has always been and will continue to be a challenge for businesses. Some of the reasons for this problem include suspicion and cynicism of management and leadership and the fear of corporate downsizing. Shale identified ten strategies to retain good employees:

1. Share the results of good work, tangibly.
2. Let your employees know they are part of a team.
3. Follow the CFH rule; be candid, frank, and honest.
4. Don't spare the bad news.
5. Little things mean a lot.
6. Recognize that suspicion is normal.
7. Distribute choice perks.
8. Set your boundaries and make them clear.
9. Make it clear that continued growth is a condition of continued employment.
10. Be genuine and be a model (Paul, 1996, pp. 1-3).

Keeping the right people in your organization involves doing many small things that serve to improve performance, motivation, and job satisfaction. The focus should be on the employees you most want to retain. Branham (2001) studied retention practices and found they fell into four areas: Be a company people want to work for, select the right people in the first place, get them off to a great start, and coach and reward to sustain commitment. It is important to remember to focus on the employees you want to retain and will help you achieve your business objectives.

Employee retention programs can help you retain your most valuable employees and remain successful. Even basic programs will make your organization a great place

for employees rather than a stepping stone to another company. One idea for retention program is establishing a workplace culture. Employers should make coming to work a good experience. This includes concepts such as relaxed dress codes, brownbag presentations, and open door policies. Companies must involve employees so they feel they belong. Give them opportunities to provide input. Use cross-department committees to maximize talents. Employee orientation should welcome new employees and generate excitement. Employees should be given opportunities for on-going training and education, including tuition reimbursement. Develop coaching and mentoring programs. Lastly, reward and celebrate employee achievement. Don't forget about the smaller, day to day accomplishments (BC Jobs, 2007). If you understand the interest and values of your employees, retention is more likely to occur.

Along with the private sector, fire service organizations continue to develop programs and solutions to combat employee retention. Chief Officers must make retention part of the department's organizational culture (ISFTA, 2004). Needs assessments must be completed and then providing for these employee needs must be implemented. Creating a retention culture in any fire service organization begins with understanding why people want to join the fire service, what motivates them, and then satisfying their needs (IFSTA, 2004).

When developing specific retention programs for the fire service, an important area to consider is the initial hiring phase. Realistic job expectations should be noted during the application phase. Potential employees should be informed about advancement opportunities, salary and benefits, and emergency call response volume (Romero, 2004). This issue can be addressed by clearly identifying these areas in the

application packet for all potential employees and clearly restating and emphasizing during the interview stage of the application process.

Communications is the single most important factor that can make a difference in a department's recruiting and retention of employees (Savia, 2001). Expectations or the organization should be clearly communicated to insure that the employees have the opportunity to grow and progress in the department. This should start with leadership of the organization, with a clear mission statement that accurately defines the entire organization. Communications must remain open and flow to all members, including feedback for management (Savia, 2001).

Another area to consider is formal training and educational opportunities. Training should be provided to managers and employees in an effort to understand and identify the causes of turnover and develop programs to prevent future employee losses (Diehl, 2006). The establishment of a formal recruit school for new employees was found effective in providing the employee with a realistic view of the job requirements. Romero (2004) found that many recruit school programs addressed several issues identified as reasons firefighters left Key Biscayne Fire Department. Lastly, employers who focus on continuing education programs for employees and management were found to have lower turnover rates. Some of these programs included career advancement opportunities, work/life balance, and work environment flexibilities (Griffin, 2006).

Although most managers are concerned with the cost of employee turnover, few have no idea what this cost is to their organization. Hiring cost may range from just a few thousand dollars for hourly employees up to $100,000 for top executives (Branham, 2001).

Employee turnover has a major financial impact to WRTFD in the area of outfitting a new recruit with uniforms and issuing personal protective equipment. It is the policy to issue new personal protective equipment and uniforms to all recruits during orientation. The cost of new uniforms is $740.58 and the cost for personal protective equipment is $2298.50 for each new employee (R. Cox, personal communications, December 15, 2007).

An instructor cost for recruit orientation has not been recorded by WRTFD. Currently, WRTFD recruit orientation normally occurs during a two week period. All recruits must be certified as National Fire Protection Association Firefighter I/II and State of Indiana Certified Emergency Medical Technician at the time of application (J Thacker, personal communication, December 7, 2007). Most of this training is completed by Training Chief and his staff. The cost of overtime incurred by off duty instructors has never been tracked.

The literature review reinforced the need to investigate the reasons employees of WRTFD chose to leave the organization and what steps WRTFD can take to retain employees, including the implementation of an employee retention program. Without addressing this issue, WRTFD will continue to lose valuable employees to other agencies. The findings of other agencies that have experienced the problem of retention are similar to WRTFD. In order to remain competitive with other agencies for quality employees and avoid wasting time and resources, the issue of retention must be addressed.

Interview Results

The following are result of an interview conducted with Staff Battalion Joel Thacker of WRTFD on December 15, 2007:

1. What department information is contained in the application packet distributed to potential employees?

   Job description-salary and benefits- phases of hiring process-department description-letter from Fire Chief

2. What is the cost of utilizing an outside testing agency per employee?

   See Appendix A

3. What are the areas of emphasis discussed during recruit training?

   Pride and tradition in fire service-teamwork-aggressive training and education-solid fundamental and basic skills-loyalty-public service

4. Do you seek recruit feedback after completion of recruit orientation?

   All recruits fill out summative evaluation forms after completion of recruit class-all information is studied by Training Chief for implementation in next recruit class-results are shared with fire department Command Staff and instructors

Procedures

Information was collected through personal interviews and communications, surveys distributed to formal career employees, former employee records, and past applied research projects from the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center. An

online search was also conducted with the World Wide Web. All literature review was conducted at the National Fire Academy and Johnson County Public Library.

A personal interview was conducted with Division Chief Joel Thacker, Training Officer with WRTFD, who is responsible for conducting all hiring processes. This interview was conducted December 15, 2007. Chief Thacker was asked the following questions:

1. What department information is contained in the application packet distributed to potential employees?
2. What is the cost of utilizing an outside testing agency per employee?
3. What is the cost of recruit training per employee?
4. What are the areas of emphasis discussed during recruit training?
5. Do you seek recruit feedback after completion of recruit orientation?

Surveys were mailed to all former career employees of WRTFD. Eleven surveys were mailed, but only seven were returned. It should be noted that one of the four not returned is currently in the military deployed in Iraq. The following survey questions are asked to all former employees:

1. What was your length of service time at WRTFD?
2. Did you complete an employee orientation program? What was the length of the program?
3. What factor (s) affected your decision to leave the department?
    a. Pay and benefits
    b. Opportunity for advancement
    c. Station and equipment conditions

d. Increased call volume elsewhere

e. Issues with management/leadership

f. Any other factors that affected your decision to leave

4. Were the issues identified above corrected at your new place of employment?
5. What could WRTFD have done in order for you to remain with our organization?
6. Did you feel like a member of a team at WRTFD (See Appendix A)?

A request for employee retention programs was electronically mailed to former classmates from the Executive Fire Officer Program and 37 career fire departments in the Indianapolis Metropolitan Area. There was very little response, but those that did respond did not have an employee retention program in place currently.

Results

1. What are the reasons employees are leaving our agency for other fire departments?

After reviewing the interview results from past employees, the following reasons were identified: call volume, increased pay of other agencies, feeling a part of a team, advancement opportunities, and retirement (Appendix A). Increased call volume of other agencies was noted by five of the interview respondents. Three former employees noted that they chose to leave due to increased pay and benefits of their new agencies. Two former employees noted they didn't feel like they were part of the WRTFD team and had trouble adjusting to WRTFD policy and procedures. One employee noted he felt like he would not have the opportunity to advance at WRTFD since it is a young department and didn't think the organization structure would grow much larger. Lastly, one individual

stated retirement was the only reason he left WRTFD (Appendix A). Four individuals noted multiple reasons for leaving WRTFD for other agencies. Also, one individual noted a reason they left was to go back to the combination department they started their firefighting as a volunteer.

2. What is the financial impact of employee turnover and additional hiring processes?

The financial impact can be broken down into two different areas: the cost of the hiring process and the cost of the orientation recruit school. The last hiring process was conducted during 2007, and all cost listed below are based on this latest process. The cost of the application packet was covered by a $20.00 application payable at the time applications were distributed. The cost for employees to hand out application packets during five days was $727.52. The cost of the advertisements in two newspapers was $3207.64 (J Thacker, personal interview, December 15, 2007).

Since WRTFD doesn't have a room large enough to seat all applicants for testing, a room at a local school is rented at a cost of $175.00. WRTFD utilizes a private company for testing of all applicants. The cost is $1200.00 for 30 individuals and then $20.00 for each additional individual. There were 38 applicants who tested at a cost of $1360.00 (J. Thacker, personal interview, December 15, 2007).

After testing, 30 applicants were allowed to continue to the interview phase of the hiring process. Interviews were conducted on two days with fire department personal scoring the interviews. The personnel cost for the interview phase was $2267.27. The cost of the testing company was $1200.00 for the first 20 applicants and $20.00 for each additional employee. Also, the testing company provided a proctor for each day costing

$250.00. Total cost of the interview phase was $3897.27 (J. Thacker, personal interview, December 15, 2007).

If the applicant continues in the process, they must complete a State of Indiana Public Employee Retirement Fund physical and psychological evaluation at Public Safety Medical Company. The cost of both evaluations is $959.00. The total cost for the completed hiring process is $10,326.43 (J. Thacker, personal interview, December 15, 2007.

Once in recruit school, all personnel are issued department uniforms and personal protective equipment. These items are provided entirely by the fire department. The cost of uniforms for new recruits is $740.58. The cost of personal protective equipment is $2298.50, for a total of $3039.08 (R. Cox, personal communications, December 15, 2007). Total cost for a new employee to complete the hiring process and recruit school is $13,365.51.

3. What are the key elements for a retention program?

Key elements recommended to an employee retention program include workplace culture, employee involvement, employee orientation, education and training, and employee reward and recognition (BC Jobs, 2007). The workplace culture of the organization should be presented as a positive experience. Employees should feel comfortable and non-threatened while at work. Some possible ideas include relaxed dress codes, lunch time presentations, and an open door policy maintained by management (BC Jobs, 2007).

Employers should involve employees in the organization and the decision making processes. Employees should be allowed to provide input for decisions. Employers can help achieve involvement by creating work groups and committees from different departments to ensure that the employee talents aren't overlooked. These groups will also foster relationship building in the organization that normally would not be accomplished (BC Jobs, 2007).

A new employee should begin their orientation with a great welcome from the organization (BC Jobs, 2007). Orientation should build excitement in the new employee. A needs assessment should be completed in order to better understand new employees. The organization should discover why the employee joined the fire service and what motivates them to perform (IFSTA, 2001).

Mason (2001) cautioned that money and benefits should be considered, but is not the only reason that employees remain with an organization. But, employers should also at the same time remain aware of current trends of benefit packages. In order for any retention program to be effective, the organization's leadership must be deeply invested and supportive. Shale (1996) also noted the employee perks are successful strategies to retain good employees.

4. How have other fire departments managed employee turnover?

Other fire departments have managed employee turnover by fulfilling the needs of their employees, understanding the needs of employees, explaining realistic job expectations, and providing training and educational opportunities to employees. Silva (2001) found that individuals join the fire service to fulfill a need of helping the community and meeting their personnel needs. These needs were identified by Maslow,

starting with the basics such as food and safety, and progressing to self-fulfillment for the individual. Silva (2001) suggests that by identifying and considering these needs are important components to understanding employee turnover.

Realistic job expectations should be presented and explained during the application phase of hiring (Romero, 2004). This is the time that potential employees should be presented with information concerning advancement opportunities within the organization, salary and benefit packages, and call response volume. A good place to present this information to potential employees is in the distributed application packets. This information should also be clearly restated and emphasized during the interview phase of the hiring process (Romero, 2004).

Formal training and educational opportunities have showed successful in addressing employee retention problems. Key Biscayne, Florida Fire Department found that establishing a formal recruit school for new firefighters, especially for providing a realistic view of the department was noted as beneficial by recruits. Many of the reasons that caused former Key Biscayne firefighters to leave the organization were corrected with the establishment of the department recruit school curriculum (Romero, 2004). Fire departments that focused on continuing education programs for both employees and management were found to have lower turnover rates. Griffin (2006) found that career advancement opportunities for employees lowered turnover at Greenville, North Carolina Fire Department.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine why employees have left our organization and establish an employee retention program. The WRTFD must collect

information and formulate a strategy to retain current employees who are valuable to the organization. Information was gathered from applied research projects, literature review, interviews from subject matter experts, and conducting a survey from former WRTFD career employees. Much of the information acquired during the literature review was reiterated from collected data from the personal interview and survey. After completing the research, the following discoveries are worth noting: lack of employee retention programs in the fire service, new WRTFD employees didn't feel part of a team, and the cost of new employees to the department.

There are few fire departments that actually have an employee retention program in existence. The intent of this research was to contact many other fire departments and request copies of current employee retention programs or policies. A request for information was sent out to 25 current Executive Fire Officer Students. There were 18 returns that stated their departments had no formal employee retention program. There was also a request for information posted on the Indiana Fire Instructors Association website requesting retention information and there was not one return reply. There was also an attempt to contact selected fire departments that currently participate in an Indianapolis Metropolitan Area Salary Survey. Many departments commented that they felt retention was an issue, but they had no formal steps or programs in place. Also, while conducting research at the National Fire Academy, there were no applied research projects on file that had a copy of an employee retention program.

New career employees of WRTFD responded that they did not feel a part of a team during their employment. Surveys were sent to the eleven former career employees of WRTFD. Of these, seven were returned. Two of the seven individuals stated they

never felt like they were part of a team at WRTFD. It was further discovered that these two employees were completely new to the organization. The other five that responded were all part time employees with WRTFD prior to being hired as career firefighters (Appendix B). More attention should be made to make new employees feel more welcome and comfortable with the organization. This should be considered during both orientation and the probationary year of employment.

The cost of employee turnover experienced by WRTFD was much higher that anticipated and yet will be much higher since costs aren't tracked thoroughly and accurately. The fixed costs, such as employee equipment and hiring process expenses were easily tracked. But, there are several areas of employee turnover that are not currently considered. Some of these costs include the overtime to fill specific shifts when employees left the organization, the overtime cost for instructors to assist with recruit school training, and employee out processing. When an employee leaves the organization, they may cash out unused vacation and sick time and banked comp time. This obviously is different with each employee. These costs are not currently investigated or considered during budget preparation. The department does gain the salary that is unused when the employee leaves, but this gain is reallocated back into the budget general fund.

Recommendations

The information gathered in this report supports the following recommendations:

1. Propose the adoption of an Employee Retention Program to the Fire Protection District Board. This program should address workplace culture,

employee involvement, employee orientation, continuing education and training, and employee rewards.

2. Establish a formal exit interview policy to better identify reasons employees leave the organization.
3. Institute documentation policies that record employee turnover cost to the organization. Areas to consider should include instructor overtime costs during recruit schools, employee out processing costs, and overtime used to fill open shift positions due to employee turnover.
4. Refine current recruit school curriculum to include making new employees feel valuable and part of a team.
5. Fully document department history and operations in the application packet. This should also be reinforced during the interview phase of the hiring process. It should include salary, benefits and department emergency response call volume.
6. Evaluate employee turnover on a regular basis for current information and data.

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Appendix A

Price break down for outfitting a firefighter

			Price Each	Total
S/S T-Shirts	6	$	7.00	$ 42.00
Uniform Pants	4	$	33.51	$ 134.04
Sweatshirts	2	$	12.50	$ 25.00
Gym Shorts	1	$	11.50	$ 11.50
Duty Belt	1	$	15.04	$ 15.04
Duty Boots	1	$	70.00	$ 70.00
S/S Navy Class B	1	$	16.00	$ 16.00
Breast Badges	2	$	40.00	$ 80.00
Hat Badge	1	$	35.00	$ 35.00
Name tag	1	$	10.00	$ 10.00
Class A Uniform	1	$	302.00	$ 302.00

Turnout coat and pants	$1,900.00
Bunker boots	$ 100.00
Nomex hood	$ 19.00
Gloves	$ 50.00
Helmet	$ 189.00
Helmet front	$ 40.50

Total	**$3,039.08**

The above information is based on 2007 pricing and varies up or down depending on size.
The above is based on the average sized firefirefighter
On average 3% increase every year

Appendix B

Former Employee Questionnaire

1. What was your length of service time at WRTFD?

   4 months-2.5 years-6 years-2 years-5 years-2 years-1.5 years

2. Did you complete an employee orientation program?

   four completed an eight week recruit school

   three did not participate in a recruit school, started immediately on shift

3. What factor (s) affected your decision to leave the department?

a. Pay and benefits	2
b. Opportunity for advancement	1
c. Station and equipment conditions	0
d. Increased call volume elsewhere	5
e. Issues with management and leadership	0
f. Any other factors	
Not fitting in with WRTFD	2
Retirement	1
Return to school	1
Former department now hiring career personnel	1

4. Were the issues identified above corrected at your new place of employment?

   Four answered yes and three answered no

5. What could WRTFD have done in order for you to remain with our organization?

   Two answered that they would have left no matter what

   Three answered an increase in run response

   Two answered increase in pay and benefits

6. Did you feel like a member of a team at WRTFD?

   Five answered yes and two answered no-it was noted that these two employees were not WRTFD part-time employees prior to being hired

Appendix C

White River Township Fire Protection District

Employee Retention Program Proposal

As a result of research conducted for the completion of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, this program proposal is being presented to the Fire Chief and Fire Protection District Board Members of the White River Township Fire Department. The intent of this program is to retain valuable career employees of this organization. Potential cost savings and other benefits are listed in the research project. This Employee Retention Program will focus on five specific areas: workplace culture, employee involvement, orientation, learning, and rewards. Policies and procedures currently practiced are listed along with new suggestions for each area.

Workplace Culture

The workplace culture of an organization should make coming to work a good experience for all employees. The workplace culture should be a positive and non-threatening environment. Employees should feel safe and secure while at work. Current policies and procedures in practice:

1. Well maintained and modern apparatus and fire equipment
2. High quality and well maintained personal protective equipment
3. Liberal uniform allowance for each employee
4. Relaxed dress code for office staff
5. Family picnic each year
6. Open door policy of Chief Officers

7. Station patches and clothing
8. Chief's Grapevine and department newsletter

Proposed additions:

1. Family and social events for employees outside the department
2. Provide occasional staff lunches and networking opportunities
3. Set up social networks for new career employees. New employees at this organization have mentioned they have trouble fitting in and feeling welcome. Our goal is to develop and continue a family atmosphere.

Employee Involvement

Involving employees in the organization will make them feel they truly belong and are valuable for department success. Employees should be given opportunities to provide input in decision making when appropriate. A current trend in the corporate business is the use of groups and committees. Current policies and procedures in practice:

1. Formation of committees for specific projects. These include health and safety, accreditation, personal protective equipment, and new apparatus.
2. Non-micromanagement style of leadership. The Fire Chief relies on the division heads for assistance in decision making. There is an attempt for division heads to stay within their own areas of responsibility until help is requested.
3. Monthly line officer meeting, which allows direct input to the Fire Chief.

Proposed additions:

1. Expand committee and group work for additional projects. These may include purchases of equipment items, such as SCBAs and powered equipment.

2. Establish a formal training committee, represented by all levels and ranks to work with training staff.
3. Create a formal process for part time employee representation. This would be set up similar to the career firefighter union.
4. Increased involvement of the Fire Protection District Board members during the budget and strategic planning processes.

Employee Orientation

The orientation process may be the most important area of employee retention. This is the time when the applicant is introduced to the fire department. This area should be considered during the application phase and continue during the probationary year of employment. The orientation program is where workplace culture begins. This is the area in which excitement is generated with the applicant and help the new employee fit in well with the organization. Current polices and procedures in place:

1. Department history is included in application packet.
2. Applicants are given opportunities to ask questions during application packet pick up by current career firefighters and officers.
3. Recruit class length is two weeks. Areas covered include department history, human resource paperwork, union presentation, introduction to Chief Officers, personal welcome and meeting with Fire Chief, visits to all fire stations for introduction to crews and equipment, EMS hospital affiliation, and riding out with multiple crews.
4. Employee evaluations every three months for probationary firefighters.

Proposed additions:

1. Provide additional department information in the application packet. This information should include emergency incident response numbers, employee tuition and insurance benefits, and advancement opportunities.
2. Provide applicants with DVD containing department resources, apparatus, programs, and incident responses.
3. Review current recruit curriculum after each offering. This should include a summary evaluation by all instructors.
4. Introduce company officer to recruit early in the process to start to build a relationship.
5. Assign a mentor to new employee during entire probationary period.

Education and Training

Education and training should be supported during the entire employment period. This should include both required training and outside educational opportunities. Providing employees with tuition stipends and reimbursements, education leave, and access to quality and prepared training sessions will show employees that the organization recognized development as an important resource. Education and training is the strongest area of employee retention in our organization. Current polices and procedures include:

1. Career employees receive $1500 per year for education and training opportunities.
2. Career employees receive 48 hours of educational leave per year.
3. Maintain a list of detailed (no loss of benefit time to employee) classes for employees. These include EMS and NFPA fire certification classes.

4. Education partner with Columbia Southern University.
5. Fire personnel and apparatus are allowed mark out of service for training opportunities outside of the fire district. These include Fire Department Training Network in Shelbyville and Wayne Township Training Facility.
6. Hospital audit and reviews conducted at White River Township Headquarters.
7. College degrees required for Chief Officers.
8. Well stocked library for employees use.

Proposed Additions:

1. Require all company officers to attend National Fire Academy yearly.
2. Require Associates Degree for merit Captain position.
3. Initiate study group opportunities for employees.
4. Investigate establishing an educational foundation or booster club to secure private funds for additional education opportunities.

Rewarding

Organizations should reward and celebrate employee achievements. These rewards should go beyond length of service or employee of the year honors. Rewards should be considered for day to day accomplishments. Typical rewards range from letters of commendation, public recognition, and employee dinners. Current policies and procedures include:

1. Annual department's award banquet for all employees
2. Recognition for outstanding performance in newsletter and Chief's Grapevine
3. Annual Chief's awards, Employee and Officer of the Year, and Unit Commendations are awarded at the annual awards banquet.

4. "That a boys" placed in employee file for appropriate performance. These are used during yearly employee evaluations.
5. Public praise during Post Incident Analysis
6. Awards and commendations noted in the department new section on the website.
7. Issuing commendation bars to employees for their Class A uniforms.

Proposed Additions:

1. Reinstitute Employee of the Quarter program.
2. Officers need to improve their recognizing outstanding employee performance. This includes publicly and written form.
3. Solicit gift cards or other items from area businesses that can be given to employees for outstanding performance.
4. Reinstitute department providing lunch during the December officer training/meeting.
5. Entire staff needs to do a better job at saying thank you.