

# SELECTION AND PRELIMINARY TRAINING OF CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

by

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All conservation enforcement administrators devote considerable time and effort to the development of their enforcement staffs. This effort is in two phases: selecting recruits and training recruits and officers already in service. To this end we all agree that we want the best possible employees entering our organization. The difficulty lies in identifying these employees. Selection cannot be made only on the omnibus description of "best possible" employee. To make a reasonable selection, the various characteristics and traits which comprise a good enforcement officer must be identified and tests devised for their measurement.

The first step, of course, is to establish minima and maxima of those criteria which can be accurately measured. These are such things as height, weight, age, education, health, physical condition, and criminal history. Other criteria, not so easily measured, are the applicant's mobility and his psychological make-up. In procedure which we use, the applicant, after having been determined to be within our minima and maxima on measurable characteristics, is required to complete aptitude testing by undergoing a series of tests which have been standardized against our existing staff. He is required to have a physical examination conducted in the light of our physical requirements and to have a criminal history check through his local enforcement agency.

All those who complete this screening satisfactorily attend competitive testing. At competitive testing, we first determine the applicant's IQ and we have determined that applicants with an IQ of less than 112 are unlikely to make satisfactory employees. They do not take formal instruction and training as well as is expected of good young men, and once on the job are difficult to supervise under our field conditions because of their inability to grasp and retain instructions which are given only once. We have determined empirically that our best employees are those having an IQ of between 120 and 135.

Because we do not have the time to teach the out-of-doors to our recruits, we have devised a test to determine that he has at least the average fisherman's knowledge of fishing, the average hunter's knowledge of hunting and the average boatman's knowledge of boating.

Because of the physical demands of any enforcement job, we administer a strength and agility test to each candidate to determine that he is sufficiently strong, sufficiently agile and sufficiently well coordinated to handle these strenuous duties. An added benefit of this type of test results from stripping applicants to their undershorts, allowing the test administrator to observe old scars from knee or shoulder operations which might not have been reported by the examining physician; the cleanliness (or lack thereof) of the applicants' underclothing; body odor after exercise; and obscene, offensive or unusual tattoos.

We have come now to the most difficult part of our selection program. This is psychological testing to determine that he is emotionally suitable for the demanding, sometimes frustrating, sometimes hazardous employment for which he has applied; that he is emotionally tough and stable enough to be entrusted with police authority.

It has been recognized for some years that two very unsatisfactory types of persons regularly apply for enforcement jobs. One of these for whom to screen is the coward. This young man was known as a coward in school and he has

been known as a coward since he left school, but he is certain that if he can put on a badge and a gun he will suddenly become brave or will acquire a reputation for courage. However, if this young man is employed in the enforcement field, he is a hazard to the public, for the first time that he is faced with danger he will either abandon his working partner or will kill an aggressive violator when there is no need.

The second type whom we wish to screen is the frustrated man who has a grudge against the world, who feels that the world has mistreated him and wants most of all to avenge himself on the public for their failure to recognize his talents and to accord him recognition. This is the type man who will be overbearing and overly aggressive in the performance of his duties, who will be tempted to lie under oath to convict an innocent defendant, and will, accordingly, be a supervisory and administrative problem for the whole time he is with the agency. His services will only be detrimental to the agency's reputation.

There are, of course, other types of undesirables, such as the social misfit, the insecure man, the chronic liar etc., who should be screened by this type of testing. We begin this phase of our testing with the administration of a test known as the California Psychological Inventory. We do not use this test to eliminate applicants but rather as a source of information and a source of leads to the officers who will conduct the subsequent background investigation. I will leave psychological testing for the moment and return to it later in the discussion.

The last phase of the competitive testing is the appearance of each candidate before an interview board consisting of either the Chief or Assistant Chief of the Division, a District Supervisor, and a personnel specialist of either the State Personnel Department or the Institute of Government of the University of North Carolina. The interviewers report their findings of his relative suitability for enforcement employment on our standard interview form. They are alert for and record specifically the following items, among others:

- (1) Does he have a manly appearance?
- (2) Does he stand erect and proud?
- (3) Does he show confidence in himself?
- (4) Does he have a frank, open countenance that will lead to trust by the public?
- (5) Does he walk firmly?
- (6) Does he establish and maintain positive eye contact with the interviewer?
- (7) Is his sitting posture erect and proud?
- (8) Does he have a manly handshake and is his hand dry?
- (9) Is his voice quality manly and pleasant?
- (10) Is his voice volume satisfactory?
- (11) Is his enunciation satisfactory?
- (12) Does he have a speech defect?
- (13) Does he have an unusual accent that would make it difficult to place him in some localities in the State?
- (14) Under intensive questioning, does he portray agitation by foot and hand movements?
- (15) Does he lack a poker face?
- (16) Is he motivated toward this particular type of enforcement work, as evidenced by possession of a current hunting and fishing license?

During this interview, a portion of our psychological testing takes place. This is by gentle exploration of his relationships with previous supervisors, by training which he might have obtained in unusual fighting techniques such as karate, and by determining if he possesses unusual firearms which were not designed for target or hunting use, and if he has any unusual edged weapons.

As a final part of the interview, the board records the candidate's attitude and appearance upon departure. They particularly note if he seems unusually relieved that the interview has ended, if he has a "wrung-out" appearance or if he still shows confidence, and, of course, whether there are wet hand prints on the table.

With our background investigation, we make all the usual contacts of everyone whom we can find who has had any significant dealings with the candidates.

Returning again to psychological testing, we have found that interview high school coaches is one of our very valuable methods of screening out the physical coward. If we can determine from a coach that our candidate engaged in competitive sports and comported himself satisfactorily, we need not fear that we have a physical coward.

In North Carolina, we have an unusual agency - the Institute of Government of the University of North Carolina, which conducts our formal centralized training. Our candidates for employment as a Wildlife Protector must attend a three week pre-service school there. They are not employees at the time of attendance and receive no remuneration for the time they spend in training. The Commission pays all school expenses including meals and lodging but does not assure them of immediate employment upon completing the school. Usually when we graduate a class of about 15 recruits, only the top 2 or 3 men in the class are given immediate employment. The others are placed on our eligible list and are assured only of one offer of employment in order of class standing as vacancies occur in our organization.

One of the major reasons for this type of school is that we use the school as the last part of our selection process, as we regularly eliminate about one-third of those who enter the school. This school also gives us what we consider the ultimate psychological test. We know that an applicant for employment has a fair idea of what we want in the way of an employee. He usually knows about what things the interview board is looking for. It is no trouble for him to conceal from the interview board his real emotions, his real personality, by means of a false front when he appears before the board; however, when he comes to a three week school and lives and works, etc., studies, and exercises only with other trainees in the school, he finds it impossible to maintain the false face which he showed to the interview board and to the background investigator. As a result, every trainee is constantly and subconsciously evaluating every other trainee, and he almost invariably sees the true self in each of the others. By isolating our trainees from other groups and requiring the close constant personal contact within the group, we make them into a micro-community. We do not let them know that we are aware of their subconscious evaluations of the other trainees, although we are constantly watching for the minute signs which indicate their feelings about one another. As an example, if our training officer sees a group of men on break who are participating in a bull session, and these men are approached by another trainee, he watches for signs of the new arrival's acceptance or rejection by the group. If a man is constantly accepted into these loose and temporary groups, the other trainees have accepted him as being one of themselves and as being the type of person with whom they expected to work in this employment. If, however, we observe a man whose arrival at one of these loose groups results in the group breaking up, or in a few men departing upon his arrival, then we know that the other trainees have subconsciously evaluated him as being unsatisfactory for this kind of work and an undesirable companion. Observations of the trainee groups also enables us to detect prior to employment those men who have the greatest promotion potential.

As an example of this, consider the situation on the athletic field during the daily sports period. The training officer will each day tell the entire group of trainees to pick sides for a ball game, without stating who will lead or be on either team. A half dozen men might start trying to organize a team but only those two men with the best leadership potential, i. e. those men whom other men will follow, will ultimately pick the two teams.

Although we are not trained in psychology and its particular language, we refer to this as "subconscious peer evaluation." We have discussed with personnel specialists "peer evaluation" as it is usually known and have rejected conscious peer evaluation as being unreliable because of the tendency of most persons to give an undeserved good evaluation to a person whom they know is not really satisfactory but is a nice fellow. We believe that by observing the signs which reveal the subconscious evaluations of each man by the group, we have a much more accurate indicator of the candidate's psychological fitness for this work.

The three week school is not designed to turn out a finished enforcement officer. It is simply sufficient schooling that the trainee who completes it can stay out of trouble for his first few months of work until he can come to a series of special schools during his first year of employment. Since many of you in this room were at the Convention at Tulsa in 1965, I will not bore you with a repetitious listing of these schools.

Again, dealing with the psychology of the enforcement officer, we have found that once we have screened out those psychologically unsuited for enforcement work, we have only one type officer about whom we need worry. This is the officer who thinks that his training has not prepared him adequately for the duties which he is expected to perform. I am certain that all of you have had occasion to deal with an officer who is overbearing, abusive and unnecessarily aggressive in his dealings with the public. Discounting the coward and the frustrated man, this is probably the officer who does not feel sure of himself and who assumes that the best defense is a good offense. Sure enough, he becomes offensive to the public because of his overbearing, overaggressive approach. We have learned that when this officer feels that he has received adequate training of the type which he thinks is needed, his entire approach to his work becomes more acceptable.

By giving officers a thorough background in the laws which he is to enforce, in law of arrest, law of search and seizure, rules of evidence, collection and preservation of evidence, court instruction, court procedure, public relations, first aid, finger printing, interview and interrogation techniques, crime scene searches, plaster impressions, internal and external ballistics, pursuit driving, police judo, and other knowledges and skills pertinent to the enforcement profession, he develops the self confidence that permits him to approach even hazardous situations with the poise, calmness, and charisma that is expected in the professional enforcement officer.

We have come to believe that the benefits derived from this type of training are not realized solely in their mechanical application. Indeed, we are beginning to think that what we once considered a perquisite of this type of training may be the more important benefit because of the psychological effect on the individual officer.

We have found that this psychological effect develops the officer who may approach even antagonistic groups with the calmness, dignity and presence which commands respect and sharply reduces the number of altercations between our officers and the violators whom they apprehend. This, of course, is the ultimate goal of all this selection and training—to place in the field a competent, effective, efficient, professional enforcement officer.

I regret that I do not have cold, factual, objective details on how to conduct psychological testing; however, the North Carolina State Personnel Department is now interested in comparing CPI profiles of all candidates tested by us in the last ten years against our evaluation of the relative merit of these officers now at work. If the Personnel Department finds a correlation between CPI profiles and success on the job, I may be able to return to this conference in a few years with what could be considered empirically determined excellent, satisfactory, unsatisfactory CPI profiles for conservation officers. I certainly hope that this correlation can be found and more objective psychological testing procedure can be developed by all our agencies, to our mutual benefit and ultimately to the good of the public who support us.