

# Overcoming Recruiting Shortages by Applying Industrial and Organizational Psychology Practices

## Voiceover:

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

## Gilbert Moore

00:16

Hello, and welcome to another episode of *The Beat*. I'm Gil Moore, and today's episode delves into police recruitment, the challenges that departments are having attracting recruits, the innovative ways to potentially respond to those challenges as well. Our guests today are Dr. Jenn Rineer and Dr. Rick Jacobs. Both Jenn and Rick, in addition to wearing other hats, are industrial psychologists and fellows with the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, or SIOP for short. SIOP is a professional organization that promotes the science, practice, and teaching of industrial and organizational psychology. There's an arm within SIOP that focuses exclusively on law enforcement issues, and the COPS Office recently entered into a partnership with SIOP for the purpose of increasing the level of support that both organizations offer to law enforcement. Dr. Rineer and Dr. Jacobs, welcome to *The Beat*.

## Dr. Jenn Rineer

01:10

Thank you so much. It's great to be here.

## Dr. Rick Jacobs

01:12

Thanks, Gil. We're very happy to be here.

## Moore

01:15

So, before we get started, please, please just help me understand the relationship between industrial psychology and law enforcement because I can imagine a lot of our listeners are going to have that thought. And better yet, what is industrial psychology and how is it relevant to law enforcement?

## Rineer

01:31

Great question. So, I'm used to having to explain to everyone in my life who's not in the field what industrial and organizational psychology is. I know it's not necessarily obvious, but it pertains to the science of people in the workplace, so it's really the evidence and the science behind everything that has

to do with how employees engage in a work environment and perform their work. And this encompasses everything from recruitment and hiring, to testing and performance management, to aspects of the work environment like organizational culture, leadership, supervision. It's basically using rigorous scientific research to understand how to improve the work environment and work experience and help people perform better work.

So, in the policing context, this has to do with understanding how we select the right people for the job of policing, which we know is increasingly complex in addressing, you know, more complicated issues: how we get the right people into those jobs, and then how we support them and train them and help them develop in their careers to really be able to do the best work that they can in terms of serving their communities. But also helping them to be able to have a long-lasting career where they're supported in their mental health and wellness and career advancements and can really have a successful trajectory in their jobs.

### **Moore**

*02:53*

Thank you for that. I feel like I learned something and that's always a positive. And, Rick, could you tell us or talk a little bit about SIOP as an entity? What is it, and what does it mean to be a fellow at SIOP?

### **Jacobs**

*03:05*

SIOP is a collection of industrial and organizational psychologists. Some of us working in universities and colleges. Others working in big organizations. Still others working in the federal sector. Across the board, anybody who studies people at work would probably be part of our constituent. I don't know the exact number of members—might be pushing 10,000 by now, so there are a lot of us, not compared to other professions like policing. But what SIOP tries to do is organize all the different efforts under one umbrella and share information across all the different members and all the different subfields within industrial and organizational psychology.

Jenn did a great job summarizing the approaches we use. One of the things that might add to the discussion is you can find industrial psychologists studying people at work in virtually any context. So, over the years that I've been a practicing industrial psychologist, I've worked with nuclear power plants and the people who work there. I've worked with police organizations. I've worked with bus companies to help hire bus drivers. I've worked with insurance sales groups. So, it really is a collection of methodologies for understanding what goes on in the workplace and who would best occupy the jobs, and then applying it to whatever workplace you might find yourself asked to provide services.

## **Moore**

*04:24*

So, Rick, in the work that you've done with law enforcement or how things typically go, what happens? Do they present you guys with a problem, statement, or an issue they'd like to be informed and then, kind of, you go in and you apply your skillset and your understanding of industrial and organizational psychology, and then issue a report or help them develop policies, restructure their processes or operations? What does it typically look like?

## **Jacobs**

*04:48*

Well, it could be almost anything. Most of my work over the past 40 years has been in the area of selection and promotion. How do we pick the right people for the job, entry-level officers? And then organizations have to come up with a system for promoting the right people through the ranks, sergeant, lieutenant, captain. That's usually where the competitive promotions stop and appointments are made by the jurisdiction, the mayor, or in some other way. So, competitive testing for getting into a police department and then getting promoted at least through the first three levels of promotion, that's where most of my work has focused, and it comes from a city reaching out to lots of different people who provide selection services and we put together a proposal, and that proposal is either accepted or they accept the proposal of someone else.

## **Moore**

*05:37*

Jenn, are your experiences generally the same?

## **Rineer**

*05:40*

In some ways, yes. I've also focused on some different aspects of police organizations, so I know Rick focuses on kind of the selection and promotion piece. I've done some work in that space, but also some of the work that I do focuses on understanding experiences of work-related stress among police officers and identifying solutions to address those issues. So, as everyone knows, policing is a very stressful occupation and agencies want to do things to alleviate that situation and to improve the work experience of officers and staff, but often they don't know exactly how to invest their efforts in that space and they don't know what'll make the most difference. And so, we have one project, for example, through the COPS Office that is helping agencies to assess the top sources of stress in their particular context, and then develop stress reduction interventions to address those specific things.

So, for example, we've looked at a wide variety of stressors and have found that in a couple of agencies where we piloted this internal issues, such as perceived unfairness or unsupportive leadership, were among the top stressors that officers were facing, so we helped them to implement some solutions to address that specific thing. But in terms of how the work emerges, sometimes cities or police departments will issue an RFP, and like Rick said, we'll respond to that. But other times, it's through applied research, so my organization will apply for funding to do a research project, you know, from the

NIJ or from the COPS Office, and then we'll partner with different agencies in order for them to be partners in our fieldwork. And we meet those agencies through different conferences, different events, from previous work that we've done with them, and so we have these established working relationships, and then sometimes those entities will partner with us on the research.

## **Moore**

*07:24*

Both of your answers are in fact great segues, because we've got a lot to unpack today regarding recruitment, and obviously, there are connections between recruitment and all elements of law enforcement. And so, I'm going to start just by setting the stage. Departments throughout the country right now, we know that they're challenged with recruiting and they're having problems filling up academy classes. In fact, in I believe a 2019 IACP survey, there were findings that suggested or indicated that 78 percent of agencies reported difficulty recruiting qualified candidates. 75 percent reported that recruiting was more difficult at the time of the survey, which again, I believe was 2019, than in the five years prior. 50 percent of agencies reported having to change policies in order to increase the chances of gaining qualified applicants, and I take that to mean that they either lowered the standards or somehow made it easier for applicants to qualify. And also, 25 percent of agencies reported having to reduce or eliminate certain services, certain units, or positions because of staffing difficulties.

Moreover, we know that anecdotally when there are not enough officers working it just increases the burden and the impact on those officers who are on the job and could possibly make the job less safe. So, my starting question—and I'll direct this to Rick—is officer recruitment in a state of crisis? And if so, why is that?

## **Jacobs**

*08:53*

Well, let me back up just a minute, Gil. Two points. One is recruitment for a number of jobs, not just policing, is in a state of crisis. We hear every day that there are positions in all sorts of workplaces that go unfilled, and maybe policing has an even bigger problem because policing is in the news so often and it's oftentimes not positive. So, they start with a difficult situation and the publicity makes it a little bit worse.

The other thing that the listeners should know is that there is a direct relationship between recruitment and selection quality. If you don't have enough people applying for the job you can't possibly hire the kind of people you would like, so in IO psychology, industrial psychology, we talk about something called the selection ratio. And it's simply the number of vacancies you have over the number of candidates who apply for those vacancies. And as that number gets smaller and smaller, one over 10, one over 20, one over 30, so you have one position open and you've got 30 candidates, you're much better off than if you have one position open and you have 10 candidates or five candidates. So, the recruitment piece really drives a quality of selection, and I can't stress that enough that if we can't get enough applicants, we will never be successful in getting the people we need for the job.

## **Moore**

10:12

And so, I think the reasons why that is the case is where I want to spend some time. According to that IACP report in which the survey results were featured, they cited three things that I made note of. Number one, generational differences. The expectations of Millennials and members of Generation Z that are coming into the profession or potentially coming into the profession are different in their expectations for a work environment, for a career. May not necessarily align with law enforcement, or at least the presentation of law enforcement and how they perceive it.

Public image of law enforcement. We'll talk about that in greater detail a little bit later, but as one of you said, there's a lot of discussion about law enforcement that we find in the public domain and it goes in all directions, potentially impacting hiring.

And the third thing that the IACP report actually highlighted was hiring process challenges. Both challenges in terms of maybe the way recruiters and law enforcement agencies are looking for and identifying potential candidates, but also challenges inherent to their onboarding process, their selection processes, their testing, and qualification requirements.

So, Jenn, I would want to ask you, are any of those things ringing true? Are they consistent with what you have seen when you have looked at some of the challenges that law enforcement is facing regarding recruitment?

## **Rineer**

11:37

I would say those are great points. Yes, they do resonate, and I would say there are some caveats. So, there's a lot to potentially talk about with those three different points, so I'm just going to start with the first one in terms of generational differences. So, when I was in grad school a lot of my IO psychology research focused on age in the workplace and how different needs and experiences change over the course of a person's trajectory in the workplaces. And one of the things that was consistently true in that research is that generational differences tend to be overstated and that people... You know, there are some differences over time when you're early in career versus later in career. There are a lot of things that go along with that, but by and large, there are not as drastic of generational differences in terms of what people want and need as sometimes is portrayed, is sort of popularized in the media. And I think that that holds true here, right?

I think that it's true that younger people entering the workforce may want different things than people entering the workforce 30 years ago, but I think it's more a product of the times. And I think that older people who are in the workforce are also wanting different things, right? So, we're hearing from younger people that they want a job that fits in with the rest of their life. They want a job that allows them to spend adequate time with their family and in their communities, but we're hearing that from people across the lifespan, right? We have older individuals who are looking at work differently since the emergence of COVID and other changes that have occurred. We're hearing that older people want more

opportunities for family leave in terms of being able to take care of not only children but also aging parents and other situations like that. So, I think it's somewhat true, right, that younger people are looking for something different. I think it's more that all people are looking for something different.

And that's one of the things that I love about talking about the recruitment conversation is because I think when we tailor the conversation and we kind of help agencies to change their policies and practices to be more supportive of younger people, of more diverse people that they view as those who are going to be kind of the new faces of their workforce, we're actually talking about things that are going to be helpful to everyone and helpful to retention as well, including people who have been in the force for a long time.

## **Moore**

*13:49*

I want to stay with you for a second, Jenn, just on that topic of generational differences and your take on it, which I think is one that is not often heard. But in fact that is where we are, that everybody has different expectations for the workplace and for the amount of work-life balance, if you will, that they are able to be granted from the workplace, what are some of the potential solutions? I mean, at the end of the day, police departments have to police 24 hours a day. They have to deal with things that maybe traditionally would be viewed as interrupting a personal life, or detracting from work-life balance. How does a law enforcement agency get past that, whether or not it's to attract young people or to be mindful of the interest of the officers who they do have on staff currently that might be a little bit older but have the same interests and the same desires for work-life balance?

## **Rineer**

*14:39*

It's a great question, and you're absolutely right. There are real constraints that police agencies have, right, in terms of needing to be staffed around the clock and, you know, some of the other constraints that come with that sort of structure and the community needs that need to be met. I think though that, you know, especially in certain conferences that I've attended and peer learning groups there are examples of creative ways that more flexibility is being granted. I think there can be more flexibility in terms of allowing people to shift between roles over time. Sometimes a person's life needs change, and it works for them to be out on patrol or working night shift, and then at other stages it doesn't. I think there can be a little bit more fluidity there, so agencies are getting really creative in terms of applying for foundation funding or other sources of income to be able to subsidize child care and provide more flexible child care for people in terms of not just having a daycare or something like that that's open from the traditional hours of 9:00 to 5:00, but being able to stay open from, I think... You know, some places are doing from like 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Having more flexibility like that.

I think giving flexibility where flexibility can be granted is also important. I've heard in some agencies that there's a real concern, right, that for some roles and for some tasks people can work from home. In other roles, people can't. Obviously, you can't patrol from your house, and so I think there's this real concern that being fair means doing the same thing for everybody, right? So, if only some people can get flexibility then we're not going to do it because we want to do the same thing for everybody; I think

that's hurtful in the end, right? Because then these opportunities are being passed up for giving more leeway. And again, I think if people can be given the flexibility to shift between roles and positions throughout kind of their lifespan to help meet their needs and if flexibility can be granted where it works, I think that benefits the agency overall, right?

Because one of the things too that I've heard is, you know, there are some civilian positions where people were allowed to work from home during COVID and now cities are saying, "Nope. You have to go back. You know, the situation with COVID is less severe. We're going to return to the way things always were and now the folks in civilian positions need to come into the office every day." And that's creating more turnover in those positions, and as everyone in policing knows, right, those positions are essential for the functioning of the people who are out in the field, who are out on patrol, right? So, it's not helping anybody when agencies are kind of causing more turnover by taking everyone's flexibility away. So I would say, take advantage of opportunities for peer learning in terms of listening to podcasts like this, hearing about how people are doing things creatively, and then just being more flexible and kind of trying to let go of that notion of, one, everything should be the same for everybody and two, we should do things a certain way because that's how they've been done before.

## **Moore**

*17:30*

Just a few months ago, in June of 2022, was the application deadline for the COPS Office's Innovations in Recruitment grants. And when scanning the applications several common themes surfaced. Generally, identifying enough of the best qualified potential applicants, finding enough qualified applicants to get into the process so the yield of the applicant pool after selection and qualification results in full academy classes. Kind of what you referred to earlier, Rick, about, you know, the more you have going in the better the additional number of best-qualified candidates you'll have that are actually filing the positions. And the third dynamic was agencies seem to appear to be seeking support for recruiting women and minorities.

When reduced to the lowest common denominator, all of these dynamics each boil down to attracting the number and caliber of applicants that departments are looking for rather than whomever they can get. These dynamics were also consistent with the IACP survey, so let's talk a little bit about what can be done in response. Dr. Jacobs, Rick, we had a previous conversation before our recording today and you emphasized the benefit of recruitment efforts being cognizant of first determining the audience and making certain that the recruitment initiatives match the audience or that people who are trying to be recruited are the people on the target end of the recruitment efforts. Could you talk a little bit about that?

## **Jacobs**

*18:58*

I'd be happy to. The idea here is very basic and it's actually one of the core activities of an industrial psychologist: What's your theory of the job? And when I say that, the theory of the job, it sounds like an egghead kind of approach, but it's not. What makes somebody good at doing this job? And understanding what that is. And I said... I've been working with police officers for decades, and I said,

“It’s one of the hardest jobs I’ve ever seen because you have to be empathetic and authoritative. You have to be compassionate and commanding.” There are things that are actually at odds with each other, but you have to do both, and that makes for a very focused view on who would be good at this, and then you can add in, in your jurisdiction, are there any unique characteristics that your jurisdiction has that others don’t, other jobs don’t? So, you’re sort of narrowing the scope of your investigation into who would be a good police officer by really focusing in on the demands of the job, and we know a lot of those demands.

Any police officer can tell you a lot about the demands of their particular department. Then the important step forward is to say, “Where do people like this... Where do they spend time? How are they educated? Where might they work now?” And focusing your recruiting efforts on, first, identifying what the core requirements are of the job and then trying to figure out, where do these people exist? How can I go talk to people who are ready? And while we’re seeing fewer and fewer people interested in the police officer job, enrollment in criminal justice programs at community colleges and universities is not taking as big a dip as some of the other areas of education. So, we know we have people who are interested in criminal justice, whether they’re interested in being a police officer or not, we can explore that.

I think when we talked last time, Gil, I gave you the example of Buffalo, New York, when they were trying to recruit more females into their fire department, and they had a very tough time getting women to pass the physical ability test. So, the recruiters started going out to gyms and women’s softball leagues and finding physically fit women who might be interested in becoming firefighters. That’s an example of what I’ll call targeted recruiting, and that’s where it has to start. We shouldn’t throw our hands up and say, “There aren’t people out there.” There are people out there. It’s our job to find them.

## **Moore**

21:12

Dr. Rineer, you were doing some work with DOJ on bringing more women and minorities into the profession. Can you tell us a little about that work and the lessons that are stemming from it?

## **Rineer**

21:23

Absolutely. So, we have a study right now, RTI International, that we’re conducting with the National Policing Institute that’s looking at how to bring more women into policing. So, there’s an initiative called the 30x30 Initiative that aims to have 30 percent of police recruits be women by the year 2030, which is a bit of a jump. It’s ambitious, but I think doable given that the percentage of police who’ve been women has been stagnant at 12 percent for decades, and the number of women in police leadership positions is even more dismal and has remained steady at about 3 percent.

So, our study on this topic has aimed to identify not only what are the barriers to getting more women into policing, but what can agencies actually do about it? So, we have a three-phase study. We’re currently wrapping up phase two and heading into phase three. So the first stage of this work was to do some foundational research, and we did a really comprehensive analysis of agencies’ online recruiting



materials in terms of what they have out there on their websites, their main pages, and their recruiting pages, their social media pages. Anywhere where they have digital content, understanding how they're messaging the job, policing, their agency specifically.

Then we talked to over 70 women in law enforcement at different stages of their career to get their input, and we used all of that information to inform an online experiment where we're actually testing out a comprehensive suite of recruiting materials in terms of different kinds of videos, social media ads, job descriptions, website content to identify what is resonating with people. Not just women, but everyone, in terms of what is motivating to them in terms of drawing them into the field. What would make them want to seek more information about the job? What would make them want to get engaged or contact a recruiter? And how do these different messages affect their perceptions of the police in general, as well as this particular agency?

And so, we're asking things like, you know, after seeing this recruiting video, how likely would you be to apply? What's your perception of work-life conflict at this agency? To what extent do you think that someone like you would belong here? And we're testing out these materials with hundreds of students, both criminal justice majors and folks in other majors, as well as hundreds of folks from just the general population to identify, you know, which of these materials seems to be working best.

And you'll have to stop me because I love this project. I think it's so important and compelling, and I could talk about it all day. But just some high-level findings that I want to share with listeners today is that, one, we really know what the major barriers are to recruiting more women and these are barriers that tend to be barriers to other diverse candidates and just qualified applicants in general. And I'll tell you right now what those main categories are, right?

So, the main barriers are a lack of relatable role models in the profession, so a lack of women or other minority role models to look up to. Challenges of managing work and non-work demands or work-life conflict, as we were discussing earlier. A difficult or confusing application process, negative perceptions of policing held by either one's self or by others, limited career advancement opportunities, risk of sexual harassment, and then health and safety concerns. And so, even though this is just the initial finding of the first phase of our study, what I would encourage agencies to do is be proactive about providing information that addresses those concerns.

Sometimes we talk to agencies, right? Just to use one of those barriers as an example around health and safety concerns, and we'll talk to agencies and they'll say, "We have amazing wellness programs and benefits and offerings to support the health and safety of our officers and staff throughout their whole careers. We have these amazing peer support programs. We have different wellness benefits. Free access to gyms and, you know, other wellness professionals." We have all of these things and you can't find that information anywhere on their recruitment materials or on their website, and so for all of these categories we encourage agencies to put information out there, right?

In the recruiting process for any job, people only know about your organization what information they have access to, and so I encourage people to make it easy for folks, right? Don't make people wonder what kind of policy you have related to sexual harassment. Don't make people wonder what the career

advancement opportunities are. There are tons of opportunities in law enforcement, right? Policing isn't just one thing. Highlight the diversity of jobs, that you know that are available over the course of somebody's career. So that's one thing.

And then in terms of our online experiment, we're looking at how different ways of messaging policing resonates with both women and men, and what we're finding, somewhat unsurprisingly, is that diversity-specific messaging or women-specific messaging is resonating well with women. So, to Rick's earlier point, like, you can't just kind of sit there and wait for people to come to you. You need to do targeted recruiting, so if you're trying to get more women in, develop messages and content that's really for them. But then for both women and men alike, the messages of service to community are really a lot more compelling than messages that focus on kind of the traditional crime fighting and challenge aspects of the job.

So, playing up this community service aspect will really benefit agencies, and in some ways that may sound obvious. You know, obviously, there's been a huge movement to focus on community-oriented policing. We know that's what brings a lot of people into the field, but at the same time, when you look at what agencies are putting out there, and this is part of what we did in the first phase of our study, you see a lot of that traditional kind of masculine crime fighting imagery and messaging, so agencies haven't necessarily been able to keep up with changing that messaging and that view of policing to match what policing really is today and what draws people into the field.

And I will just say in another quick two seconds that we are about to start our field study component of this work where we're taking some of this information that we've learned from previous studies and our own results that we have so far and we're going to be testing out some of these strategies in two agencies to hopefully see the increased number of not only women applicants but qualified applicants overall. And one final thing I will say is that we know from the research across occupations that when you update policies and practices to benefit women you are updating policies and practices in a way that better supports all potential applicants. So, we're really excited to share these results with agencies, and hopefully, provide some really concrete and actionable ways to improve recruiting practices.

## **Moore**

27:57

Thank you. Some of the things that you mentioned, Jenn, sound great. As a matter of fact, really what they sound is intuitive. Low-hanging fruit. Why have the law enforcement community been slow to address some of these issues? As a matter of fact, I had a conversation a year or so back with Val Cunningham. I believe she was, at the time, with the Indianapolis Police Department as the deputy chief or assistant chief, a member of NAWLEE, and she jokingly made reference to the fact that her dress uniform includes a tie. Why can't low-hanging fruit and some of these issues that are relatively simple be addressed without hesitation?

## **Rineer**

28:36

They can be addressed without hesitation, and I think in many cases they are. I think so much of it is just there hasn't been easy access to this information in terms of what the low-hanging fruit is and why to prioritize it. And we talked earlier about just the staffing crisis. Agencies are doing everything they can just to keep a sufficient number of people on the street on every shift, right? It's not like people are sitting around with lots of time to ponder this. And I think, Rick and I have discussed, like, this is what we need to do as IO psychologists is to package this information in a way that we can easily share it with agencies and create a checklist of, "Okay, here are the 10 things that you can do today or this week or this month to start improving your recruiting practices." I think people just haven't had easy access to the information in a way that it's been clear and simple and straightforward, which is what is needed given all the competing priorities that agencies are dealing with today.

But I mentioned the 30x30 Initiative earlier. Those agencies, when they've signed on and taken the 30x30 pledge, 30x30 is providing them with things like this and they're connecting with researchers like me and like others to disseminate that information and provide all of those agencies with concrete action steps. And many of those agencies have, in some cases overnight just changed outdated policies and practices, and that's what I love about this work is that some of it is complicated and will take potentially years to fully change, but a lot of it isn't. And with this information too about kind of addressing the barriers and putting more information on agencies' websites, I mean, I think that's something that agencies can do relatively easily, right?

It's collect the information that you have around these seven categories, make sure that it's clear and communicated on your website and in other materials. And, I mean, you have to actually, you know, uphold those policies and practices. Obviously, you can't just say that you're doing them, so if you kind of don't have those things in place that's another story. But I think that's exactly right, you know, take what you can do today and do that today, and then develop a plan for what else you can do down the line. But I'm excited that more IO psychologists and police practitioners and folks like you, Gil, are bringing everybody into this conversation together so that we can more easily share this information.

## **Moore**

30:57

So, typically, when people use the phrase 'elephant in the room' they're referring to something that everybody sees but nobody wants to talk about or to deal with forthrightly. But going back to 2015 or so, around the time of Ferguson through the murder of George Floyd and still present today, the narrative surrounding policing has not been universally positive. You hear as much from officers. You see it in the news and on social media. In some circles, it's even an openly discussed topic. NAPO, the National Association of Police Organizations, an umbrella union organization, stepped into the leadership void on it with an initiative to change the narrative on policing, and the IACP survey that I mentioned before even refers to it. So, Rick, how impactful is the current narrative as it relates to recruiting, and do you have any thoughts on how to potentially reframe perceptions of recruits or would-be recruits?

## Jacobs

31:53

Well, one of the things that bothers me is the overweighting of negative information. It's been in our discipline for 70 years. Early research on the employment interview said that employment interviewers put far more weight on negative information than positive information, so translate that into what I see as going in the public with respect to policing. One bad incident washes out 100 good ones, so one strategy would be to try and get more press over what policing is doing to make life better for people in each city rather than focusing on the one oops or the one terrible event which seems to dominate the narrative. But I don't know that this is an easy solution.

I like Jenn's solutions about recruiting because there is some low-hanging fruit there. I don't know that there's a lot of low-hanging fruit when it comes to the perception of policing in today's environment. And my first step would be let's get some more good news out there, although news agencies don't want to carry good news, so maybe that's something that police departments have to start doing. They have to start publicizing when things go well and things that are positive about being a police officer. And as Jenn said, we shouldn't just focus on the stereotype of what a police officer does. Police officers do a lot of different things, and some of those things need to be made more salient, more in front of the public.

But I want to go back to... And I guess it's consistent with what Jenn was saying about recruiting. She said that there are things that we could do now that we're not doing. The same thing is true, back to your question earlier, Gil, you said three things. One was the generation issue. The second one was what we're just talking about now, the perception of policing. And the third one was the hiring process being bogged down and turning people off. That's another example of something that can be done immediately in any department.

If you think there is a problem in terms of the process being too slow, or it's turning off good candidates, you can take action. There's no reason to just keep doing things the way you used to do them. Now I understand having worked with, I'm going to guess conservatively, 50 or 60 different police agencies across the country and some foreign countries. I know it's complicated because in most of the jurisdictions where I've worked you have the police department who want to hire officers, and then you have a civil service organization or a city human resources department that actually runs the process. And sometimes there is a mile between the two approaches or what one approach wants to do versus another. That's not that hard to fix. That's the kind of thing that industrial psychology is good at. What is going on in that process of moving from candidate to police officer, and how can we streamline the process? How can we identify the glitches in the process and get rid of them, make it more streamlined? We can do that.

And I have to say the more traditional an organization is the less likely they are to change, and police organizations tend to be pretty traditional. So why are we doing hiring the way we're doing it? Because we've been doing it this way for a long time. That's not a good answer.

## Moore

34:55

When you say, “Why are we doing hiring the way we’re doing it?” I’m thinking about the young person, maybe excellent candidate for a job as a law enforcement officer or a civilian employee of the department, but when the recruiting and the testing begins then they go through all kinds of background investigations, potentially psychological batteries, and so on and so forth, and it could be months to a year-plus before the academy starts. Can you give me an example of how to address that kind of challenge? Which I think, again, some of this stuff is imposed by municipal processes or just what has to be or what traditionally has been done. How can you condense some of this so that by the time after you identify candidates who would be well-qualified and that you would want on your department they haven’t all gone and gotten other jobs or have had to address other personal needs that preclude them from taking advantage of becoming officers or starting in the academy?

## Jacobs

35:50

Well, one of the things that we saw in many police departments was a wave of police departments moving away from the once a year or once every other year hiring cycle. In other words, we announce that we have a job, there’ll be a test, people will take the test, and then we’ll start filling class after class from that list that we generated from that one test. And departments moved into what we would call a rolling enrollment, so they just recruit and recruit and test on an ongoing basis, and when they have enough people, they start the class, so that waiting period gets smaller. And that’s very important.

I have to say, and think about this from a logical perspective, if I have a candidate who is attractive to me and I’m making them wait six months to join the academy, chances are pretty good that candidate was attractive to someone else. Whether it be another policing organization or another job title. Some other kind of job. The most qualified person is likely to be the most likely to jump to a different opportunity, so we do have to shrink that time, and we have to get rid of things that aren’t necessary in the process if there are any.

I’m not saying the psychological evaluation is unnecessary, but it can be made quicker. Many departments have one person who does that. That takes a long time. Why don’t they have five? You can hire people to do the psychological screening. There are clinical psychologists in most cities. They can be trained to look for the kinds of problems that police psychologists look for, so you could bring more people to the problem.

## Moore

37:13

Good answer. As a matter of fact, things that wouldn’t readily be thought about by many people who were responsible for the recruitment and the hiring process. Jenn, I want to go back to you. Earlier on, you talked about changes that can be made in terms of how you represent a career in law enforcement so it’s more appealing to specific audiences. You talked about advertising, and I think of all the recruitment advertisements that I see when you have officers rappelling out of a helicopter with a bazooka versus maybe doing some things that wouldn’t appeal to people who are coming to the

profession potentially in the spirit of service rather than the spirit of adventure. Is there a benefit to looking at those things carefully and critically? Is there benefit to maybe emphasizing the nobility of the profession or even the perks? Not to say that this is likely to be done, but take-home vehicles, 20-year retirement, healthcare benefits, opportunities for overtime. And does it make a difference who within a department engages in the recruitment process?

## Rineer

38:12

These are all great questions and great points, and the overarching answer to all of those questions, I think, is yes. So, I think in terms of how the job is messaged, I think the important thing, and we heard this in our focus groups with women officers, but also from other folks in the field, right? What's important is that the job is advertised truthfully, right? And incorporates a lot of different facets. So, in our experiment we're kind of trying to tease things apart and look at service to the community compared to challenge, compared to diversity-specific messaging. But really, these things aren't mutually exclusive, and policing taps into different aspects of all of that, right? And so, it's not necessarily that there's something wrong with having somebody jump out of a helicopter in a recruitment video, but there's something wrong with having that be the entire focus of a recruitment video, right?

And we know from industrial and organizational psychology that one of the greatest predictors of people's job satisfaction and success on the job in any field is a realistic job preview. Do people have a sense of what the job really is when they're applying? Are they surprised when they get there, and in a negative way, right? So, I think it's that agencies should consider, what are the different aspects of policing, and are those different elements represented in what we're putting out there?

And then I think, yes, it absolutely matters who's doing the recruiting. You want diverse candidates in terms of race, gender, et cetera, to be able to see themselves in the department, but another point that I wanted to make is that I've had some of the best police recruiters that I've met talk to me about how every single officer is a recruiter, right? That's who the community sees and interacts with, so every interaction, every time somebody sees you on their street in their community, that's an advertisement of what the job is, right? So it's not just the job of the recruiter, but it's the job of every single person who's out there to be mindful of those interactions and to start to slowly rebuild that trust that's broken in so many places. And recruiters have said, "Our best officers are our best recruiters," and so I think that agencies need to think about that in terms of how people are trained to interact with community members, but also, it's another reason why addressing these staffing issues is so important.

Because as you mentioned earlier, Gil, if there aren't enough people on the force the ones who are working are exhausted, and burned out, and having a really tough time. And when you're exhausted and burned out, you can't be your best self in those interactions, right? So I think it's utilizing the signs and the evidence-based to address these staffing issues to kind of get things back up to a level where things aren't so crazy making all the time, and then that in some ways will naturally start to resolve some of these issues because people are in a better place to do better police work, and that in and of itself is a recruiting tool.

## **Moore**

41:01

We've covered some interesting ground today, and as we're getting towards the end, I want to ask a question of you both so that we can just make it plain. You've both done a lot of good work on the topic of recruitment, and one of the things that lands on me is that you've done it with a broad gaze across many different types of departments. So, you're able to see things and understand things not from the viewpoint maybe a single recruiter or a single chief, but you're seeing the big picture. If you were giving advice to officers, to recruiters, maybe even to public safety directors about things that they can do quickly, short-term, to make improvements in a practical sense in how they identify and potentially onboard candidates, what would it be? And I would start with you, Rick.

## **Jacobs**

41:51

Well, we've talked about this a couple of different ways, and Jenn's last comment speaks to this as well. It's focusing on the positive. If you have an officer who is setting a good example in the community, you need to make sure that other officers are behaving similarly. That person is the exemplar and isn't the only one. That they set the role model for the rest on how to behave in public, how to put a positive spin on being a police officer.

When I was at the university, we had a faculty member who interviewed job candidates, people who wanted to be a professor. They were coming to join our faculty. And we stopped having those candidates meet with that professor because he didn't like being here. He didn't like his job. That's not what you want to convey to people who are potential police officers, whether they're high school kids, or they're members of the community who have just moved here, or started their first job but are thinking about changing jobs. You want to have that positive presence, and that's, to me, the most important thing.

There's also the idea, and this goes back to what we know about recruiting, that some of your best employees know other people who would be like them. So, are we taking advantage of knowing people out there that are known to the people who are our best employees? How are we empowering that great officer to find future officers? It may not seem like part of his or her job, but it is because they want good colleagues. They want good partners in the future, so the whole idea, Jenn said, "Everybody's a recruiter." It's true, and it could be active or passive. I think it should be both.

## **Moore**

43:22

So, Jenn, what do you have to add about this?

## **Rineer**

43:25

I loved Rick's response to this, and I agree with everything that he said. I would say in addition to that, I would encourage agencies to look at what you have on your website and your social media pages. Give that a thoughtful review and see if there are changes that you can make to better address the barriers

that I mentioned earlier in terms of lack of relatable role models, limited career advancement opportunities, health and safety concerns, et cetera. See if you have sufficient information about what your agency is doing on your digital recruiting materials. I mean, obviously, that's only one component of the recruiting puzzle is what you have online, but because agencies are looking to expand that pool of potential applicants I think the online presence is really important, especially given how people look for jobs today.

And you can hire a consultant or organizational psychologist or someone like that to do it, but you can also do it internally as well in terms of understanding what those best practices are and assessing where improvements might be made. I would say along those lines, portray diversity truthfully and your recruiting metrics and all aspects of policing really truthfully on your website. I know that some agencies are putting metrics on their site of the demographics of their workforce, and they're saying, "Look, we are not yet as diverse as we want to be, but we're really working on it. Here's what we are doing and here's the progress that we have made between last year and this year, or between five years ago and today. Here's what it looks like." I would say be honest and be transparent. That's what people are looking for today, and that applies to recruiting as well as everything else that you're doing. And I think that people really appreciate, you know, just agencies being real with where they are and where they're trying to go.

One other thing I would say is, I think in terms of bringing people into agencies that may not fit the traditional perception of a police officer, I think it's really important to communicate that you value that diverse perspective and what diverse folks will bring into the field. And I mean diversity of all types, right? Whether it's diversity of your career path, you know, what you've done before policing. Diversity in terms of race, gender, et cetera, what neighborhood you're from. I think an issue that agencies have faced in the past is that they'll say, "We want to bring new and different people into policing," but then at the end of the day, they're expected to fit into that same traditional mold, right? Like, that's not going to work for people. It needs to be that you want new and diverse people brought in and you want that because you want them to help shape what policing looks like and because you value their different perspective. So, I would just kind of do a self-assessment in terms of kind of your values, where you're looking to go, and then communicate that out through your interactions with community members and through the digital materials that you have on your website and elsewhere to really get that perspective out into the world and to draw in the people that you want to bring in.

## **Moore**

*46:20*

So, as we wrap up, I want to say thank you to both of you for joining us, but I want to make sure that people have a way of contacting you. If someone is interested in getting in touch with you or learning more about the work that SIOB does to support law enforcement, how do they do that? Is there a way that they can reach you?



## Rineer

46:37

This is Jenn. Please feel free to email me at [jrineer@rti.org](mailto:jrineer@rti.org). That's J-R-I-N-E-E-R -at-R-T-I-dot-O-R-G. I'm happy to answer any questions that folks have about IO psychology or our work in policing or ways that we can work together to make a difference.

## Jacobs

46:56

And this is Rick. I can tell you the same thing that reach out to me if you have any questions or want to talk. I can be reached at [rjacobs@psionline.com](mailto:rjacobs@psionline.com). That's R-J-A-C-O-B-S-at-P as in Paul, S as in Sam, I as in international, O-N-L-I-N-E-dot-C-O-M. I'll also add that Jenn and I started a conversation a couple of weeks about doing a symposium at our annual conference this coming April, and we got such a reaction that we're going to submit two different symposia. So, there are eight papers about research being done in policing organizations and we identified 20 different people who are interested in this topic in just a couple of weeks. So, if I can't answer the question and Jenn can't answer the question, I'm sure we can farm it out to somebody who's working the area and get an answer for you.

## Rineer

47:52

Rick, I can always answer the question. [Laughs]

## Jacobs

47:54

That's what I thought, but I—

## Rineer

47:54

Kidding.

## Moore

47:57

Well, I'm sure that you'll both find that people who are interested are going to be using your email addresses, and for those who would like to learn more about SIOP, I invite you to visit W-W-W-dot-S-I-O-P-dot-O-R-G. That's [www.siop.org](http://www.siop.org). Dr. Rineer, Dr. Jacobs, Jenn and Rick, thank you very much for joining us today on *The Beat*.

## Jacobs

48:21

Thank you, Gil. It was a pleasure.

## Rineer

48:22

Thank you so much.

### **Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit**

48:25

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### **Voiceover: Disclaimer**

49:22

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