

REYNOLDSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT - CONFIDENTIAL

SWOT Analysis – November 8, 2022

Introduction

As police departments face increased challenges, they benefit from examining those attributes that lead to their success and those that limit their ultimate potential. To facilitate this examination for the City of Reynoldsburg Police Department, PRADCO interviewed multiple individuals from the community – police department leadership, police officers, dispatchers, and civilian employees. The interviews were conducted to gather insights from individuals who could offer their own perspective on what is working well and what could be done to make the police department even more effective. Examining the Reynoldsburg Police Department was a very worthwhile endeavor. There are many strengths to leverage but there is also a more well-defined set of challenges the department faces. We are confident that, with motivation, effort, and determination, the Reynoldsburg Police Department will be able to use this data to develop a plan of action to take performance and job satisfaction to a higher level.

Strengths of the Reynoldsburg Police Department

- Employees think the department could improve and be a better place to work; they want to see the City of Reynoldsburg Police Department be even more successful.
- Agency employees appreciate that their equipment is up-to-date, and people generally expect that the agency will provide them the necessary resources.
- Departmental personnel feel that the mayor has good intentions with this study and hope that the findings will be used to make positive changes at the agency.
- Officers believe that change could be implemented at the agency with support, involvement, and direction from the mayor, whom they respect a great deal.
- Staff members report that compensation and benefits are strong for the area and size of agency; many would expect to work at a larger agency to find a comparable salary.
- Employees are drawn to the City of Reynoldsburg because the area strikes a balance between what people would expect from a small town and from a larger agency.
- Police recruits are interested in the agency because they believe there are opportunities for advancement and the potential to join specialized teams.
- People believe that the public perception of the agency has improved in certain neighborhoods in the City of Reynoldsburg.
- Agency employees report a great working relationship with neighboring agencies and feel they can count on mutual aid when necessary.
- Staff appreciates the updates from administration that come through the Orders of the Day and regular email updates.
- Most officers at the City of Reynoldsburg Police Department will pull together to help one another on a call.

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DEVELOPING STRONGER ORGANIZATIONS

- Training opportunities for leadership development are made available to civilian personnel.
- Police Officers want to see the Chief succeed at the agency by working more collaboratively with them.
- The Advisory Boards are well-regarded and seen as a useful tool if the department could implement them more consistently.
- Police Officers want to do proactive police work and engage with the community.
- Agency employees encourage professionalism in their interactions with the public to promote a positive image of the agency and law enforcement in general.
- Departmental personnel acknowledge that strides have been made for the better with the exit of some less positive departmental employees.

Weaknesses of the Reynoldsburg Police Department

- People do not feel fully comfortable speaking candidly; this was noted in this process because people were concerned about the anonymity of their responses and have some concerns based on experiences with a previous survey.
- Departmental personnel fear retaliation in terms of lost opportunities for training and advancement if they offer ideas counter to agency leadership, or if they speak of potential opportunities for employment outside of the agency.
- Morale is generally reported as being low throughout the agency; people describe turnover being due partly to the morale issues.
- Agency employees perceive discipline as being handled inconsistently; some employees believe that certain people are less likely to receive discipline than others or incur minimal discipline for similar infractions made by other personnel.
- Officers think that recent changes to the promotional process reduce fairness and objectivity; people worry about potential favoritism.
- Employees indicate that some of their coworkers treat other employees with a lack of professionalism and respect, which can contribute to an unpleasant working experience.
- Police Officers are concerned that the agency will not support them adequately if something goes wrong during a critical incident or call when they acted appropriately.
- Departmental employees feel that their concerns are not always heard by leadership; people expect to be told to leave if they do not look favorably on certain aspects of the agency or if they disagree with command staff.
- Officers believe that new hires and lateral transfers are given preferential treatment regarding training and development opportunities as part of the recruitment process.
- Police officers have trouble completing all the follow-up and reporting required on calls, and wonder if there could be greater efficiency in this area.
- Officers in the department report a high-call volume and a sense that staffing has not kept up with growth in the area; forced overtime has been challenging for people.

- Officers report that supervisors override or undermine calls that officers make on scene, which leaves them feeling micromanaged, frustrates them, and leads to extra time being spent which could be devoted to other activities.
- Agency personnel believe that changes in the hiring process regarding background checks have resulted in offers that they believe should not have been extended; people are concerned about the liability this may create for the department.
- Police Officers acknowledge that there are inconsistencies in the FTO program and outcomes for trainees, irrespective of the decisions and recommendations made by FTOs.
- Employees encounter resistance to change through “that’s how it’s always been” attitudes, which can be discouraging and demotivating for them.
- There is a common perception that some individuals are in a favored group; people are unclear on how to get into the favored group, but they generally understand that disagreeing with leadership could hurt their position in the agency.
- Inconsistent communication and explanation behind decisions has contributed to hearsay and rumors that people believe to be true and accurate.
- Some agency employees believe that their complaints are minimized or not taken seriously when brought to the attention of supervision.
- It is widely believed that warnings are not documented within personnel files, which can lead to supervisors taking inconsistent disciplinary approaches with their subordinates.
- Staff perceive a division between sworn officers and civilian employees that hinders communication flow and makes it difficult to readily access important information.

Opportunities for the Reynoldsburg Police Department

- Officers want all employees to be held accountable for their actions through clear and consistent expectations and discipline when appropriate.
- New leadership positions and additional staffing should help alleviate some of the concerns people have regarding overtime and training.
- People would like to see the field training process overhauled with officers held to consistent standards so that they can feel safer on the road with new recruits.
- Officers note that General Orders could be improved and updated to modern standards for the agency.
- People believe the administration could improve communication by sharing more information about what is going on behind the scenes, as appropriate.
- The Deputy Chief’s responsibilities and authority could be made clearer so that people can work more effectively with the person in that role.
- The department would benefit from greater transparency and consistency in how training requests are handled for all employees.
- Officers believe that minimum staffing requirements or shift lengths could be adjusted to resolve staffing shortages and overtime issues.

- Police officers would like to see greater emphasis on enforcement activities that have historically helped reduce crime and address common citizen complaints.
- Officers in the department want a way for information to be shared across shifts so they can better prepare and respond appropriately to their calls.
- People feel that Police Officers and civilian staff could be better utilized, and the agency could do more to leverage their experience and expertise to benefit everyone in the department.

Threats to the Reynoldsburg Police Department

- Change will be difficult to implement so long as people continue to feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns with, and in front of, one another; similarly, fear of retaliation discourages people from sharing ideas they think could improve the department.
- Perceived inconsistencies with discipline make officers reluctant to make decisions independently, which places greater demands on supervisors and lengthens the time required to clear calls.
- The culture at the City of Reynoldsburg Police Department is described as divisive and could worsen morale if the agency is not unified by all command staff.
- Community presence is believed to have diminished in some areas, which risks undermining public trust and perception of the agency in those communities.
- People want leadership that is committed to the agency and its employees long-term and may become less committed and willing to go the extra mile if they do not see that commitment from the top.
- Officers explain that seniority is the primary reason to stay with the department, which can hurt motivation and limit the effort they put forth if they feel opportunities do not improve.
- If people are being hired who would not normally pass a background check, this can increase liability for the agency in case of a critical incident.
- Supervisors acknowledge difficulty in relating to, and dealing with, a newer generation of officers, which can lead to dissatisfaction and increased turnover for these officers.

Recommendations for the Reynoldsburg Police Department

While there are important issues to address, there are specific actions to implement which should positively impact the agency in terms of both performance and morale. Please note these recommendations are given in order of importance, with Number One being the highest priority.

1. Strengthen the Leadership Skills of Command Staff and Supervisors

- Have the command staff and supervisors work with the HR Director and Mayor on creating individual action plans for professional growth.
- Make leadership training available to everyone in leadership and supervisory positions; set minimum training requirements.

- Have all supervisors participate in individual coaching programs utilizing 360-degree feedback data to better leverage their strengths and address any developmental needs.

2. Promote a Culture of Safety and Transparency

- Give people a way to share feedback anonymously, so they feel that they can raise concerns without being identified or targeted.
- Take suggestions seriously and thank people for their continued efforts to make the agency a better place to work.
- Act on suggestions where possible and explain why some suggestions cannot be implemented to encourage faith in the process.
- Explain goals and plans for the agency, and highlight how decisions align with those goals; where feasible, provide the rationale behind those decisions to encourage transparency and discourage hearsay.
- Continue regular updates via Orders of the Day; focus on what leadership is doing to improve the agency and what the next steps are.
- Take ownership of the culture, where good and bad, and the role leadership plays in driving change that benefits the department.

3. Establish Consistency of Discipline

- Institute a way to document or record warnings given by supervisors so that other supervisors can recognize when an employee has already been given a warning for a policy violation.
- Review the disciplinary process with supervisory staff to align everyone with the same expectations. Hold people accountable if they do not adhere to standards when administering discipline.
- Provide clear and thorough explanations to employees who receive discipline that differs from the established guidelines.
- For employees who disagree with the outcomes of disciplinary proceedings, devote additional time to training to remedy the specific issue.

4. Implement Clear and Consistent Communication

- Hold regular command staff meetings to gain a better understanding of the issues affecting the department and encourage communication among all levels.
- Verbally communicate relevant information with supervisors to reinforce important announcements from the Police Chief.
- Meet with Lieutenants and Sergeants to ensure everyone understands mission-critical messages, and then hold them accountable for conveying the information.
- Implement positive corrective action for supervisors who do not relay information or meet expectations regarding communication.

- Make important information available via multiple channels; in addition to Orders of the Day and bulletin boards, all levels of leadership should attend roll call and share their vision for the agency.
- Develop a standard protocol for sharing information between shifts so that officers can be aware of what has happened on the previous shift and prepare accordingly.
- Strengthen the Advisory Board with regular meetings to promote continuity.

5. Make Training Opportunities Equally Available

- Establish guidelines and limits for how much training individuals can take and minimum expectations for annual training.
- If training opportunities are limited or otherwise on a first-come, first-served basis, ensure that those opportunities are made equally available to everyone.
- Be proactive in offering training opportunities to people to show investment in their personal development; encourage supervisors to recommend people for training.
- Establish clarity and consistency in who approves training requests; provide feedback and guidance when requests are denied so people feel comfortable applying for training opportunities in the future.
- Ensure that every departmental employee sent to training shares what he/she has learned with the rest of the department.

6. Hold All Staff More Accountable

- Clearly explain expectations for employees and verify that they understand their commitments to the agency.
- Enforce consistency with respect to the application of policies and procedures; ensure that supervisors have the authority and information to do so correctly.
- Determine consequences for inaction or lack of follow-through and make those consequences known.
- Follow-up with supervisory staff to ensure that they are holding people accountable.
- Train officers on current directives so that they feel empowered to make decisions on their own when the situation warrants it.
- Partner with the Training Coordinator, Administrative Sergeant, and Lieutenant positions once they are filled to cover any gaps in knowledge among personnel.

7. Modernize and Standardize Selection and Promotional Processes

- Ensure adequate staffing and time for the people who are responsible for doing background investigations on candidates.
- Update selection process for police officers to ensure assessments incorporate a thorough and more integrated approach. It is recommended that assessments look at the whole person, not only clinical abnormalities.

- Incorporate leadership assessments for promotional purposes that go beyond assessment centers and focus on the specific leadership needs of the agency.
- Establish minimum hiring standards that are applied consistently and fairly.

8. Clarify the Responsibilities and Authority of the Deputy Chief Position

- Set clear parameters for the decisions that the Deputy Chief can make, and when the person in that position should defer to the Chief.
- Hold staff training to explain how people can effectively partner with the Deputy Chief and leverage the skills of the position.
- Set expectations for the Deputy Chief to make consistent contact with people in the department.
- Have the Deputy Chief give a report at departmental meetings covering such topics as: hiring, training progress, major citizen issues, etc.
- Grant the Deputy Chief full decision-making authority in the Chief's absence to maintain continuity of leadership.

Conclusion

Changes in society, public expectations of law enforcement, and a new generation of officers to manage, provide significant challenges to any police department. The City of Reynoldsburg Police Department should be applauded for its commitment to the community's safety. Further, the City of Reynoldsburg Mayor's Office should be recognized for taking a deep dive into some organizational issues that warrant further analysis. As noted in this report, the department can benefit most from 1) consistent treatment of personnel, 2) elimination of favoritism, and 3) greater openness to ideas and suggestions offered by all personnel. With time and attention paid to the areas of potential improvement, even greater success can be achieved by the police department in its mission to meet the needs of the Reynoldsburg community.