

Episode 1

Mission is Possible: Recruiting for National Security Success

[00:00:05:00] Hello, I'm Sasha O'Connell and I am thrilled to welcome you to **Mission IS Possible** — a series of audio episodes where we will break down and dig in to management issues of particular relevance to the national security community. This is a joint project between Guidehouse where I am a Director in the National Security practice, and the School of Public Affairs at American University. We are pleased to have you join us.

[00:00:37:00] In this episode we are going to talk about a key success factor in the national security sector — recruiting. Specifically, the challenges federal law enforcement agencies face as it relates to marketing and branding for recruiting purposes. As you will hear, we hosted a live discussion at the National Law Enforcement Museum on this topic recently where leaders from Customs and Border Patrol, FBI, Secret Service and Homeland Security Investigations engaged with the audience on these topics to discuss challenges, best practices and ongoing gaps. The discussion was robust and covered a lot of interesting subtopics and I am excited to share some of that discussion with you here along with some of the additional feedback each of those executives offered as part of this podcast production.

[00:01:21:00] To start we will jump right in and bring you into the room at the museum where Ashley Mattison, a human capital practice leader at Guidehouse, is kicking off the discussion.

[00:09:19:00] Federal law enforcement agencies are experiencing acute challenges with recruitment and hiring.

[00:09:35:00] Some of the challenges that agencies represented here today are experiencing have a lot to do with a strong economy and historically low unemployment. Therefore, the labor market is very tight. Additionally, changing societal views on law enforcement careers, particularly amongst millennials, means that there's a shrinking talent pool of those that are looking for law enforcement jobs. Finally, arduous

background requirements and physical requirements of the hiring processes of these agencies-- against the backdrop of changing societal views and state laws on recreational drug use and other things that make it more challenging for candidates to successfully move through the process-- make this a very complex and challenging issue.

[00:10:15:00] My panelists know that all too well. And what we hope to do here today is highlight best practices and lessons learned from across their organizations, as well as the organizations represented here in our audience, and start to talk about ways we can address this challenge. And I think, first and foremost, competing in this type of environment, it becomes even more essential to have a clear and compelling recruitment and marketing brand.

[00:02:33:00 to 00:02:43:00] During the event we heard from four panelists...

[00:03:22:00 to 00:03:25:00] Here is Rob Smith...

[00:13:49:20] SMITH: The challenges being-- particularly for law enforcement roles, it's a long hiring process. There are numerous steps you have to get through. Some folks, again, find themselves wearied by the timeline it takes to get onboard. Again, we believe that applicant care is a solution to that challenge. And we're working heavily to get to where we can get-- to where we can provide that applicant care throughout...

[00:14:12:29]

[00:14:45:19] SMITH: That's why branding is critically important. It's also to combat challenges that you may not necessarily have a whole lot of control over."

[00:03:42:00 to 00:03:47:00] Here's Brian Lambert...

[00:14:55:16] LAMBERT: What's unique to us right now is, we're in an unprecedented growth stage. So what's been a little bit uncomfortable for much of our organization is, we've had to break some of our old molds.

We've never really put much into recruiting before the past two to three years. And we recognized-- you mentioned briefly-- some generational differences. And I'm a Gen X'er. Some of that, myself, I have to break. When our recruiting staff says, we'd like to do this. We have to force ourselves into some uncomfortable places. That's been one of our unique challenges. [00:15:43:24]

[00:03:11:00 to 00:03:16:00] Here's Dave Schlendorf...

[00:17:15:13] SCHLENDORF: One of our challenges, interestingly, is, Hollywood recently recruited for us. The media recruited for us. And so, we didn't spend a lot of time as an organization thinking about recruiting. And that came back to bite us when application volume for us went down pretty precipitously, probably starting three or four years ago. So I got to, fortunately, be the head of HR about three years ago. Same time as we're having this challenge. So bad timing on my part.

[00:17:39:06] And we had no LinkedIn profile at all. Didn't exist. We weren't on Facebook. We weren't on Twitter. And just convincing the internal organization, we need to get on some of these things. Teams of lawyers who thought we shouldn't be on LinkedIn.

[00:17:57:12] Well, what are you going to do? You're going to target people on LinkedIn? Yes, we're going to target people who put their resume there, because they wanted to be found and find a job. So the bureaucracy has fought against us a little bit, I'd say. [00:18:09:00]

[00:18:25:17] Our workforce right now, today, on especially this side, is 80% male and 82% white. Nation, 40% racial ethnic minority. Obviously, 50% female. So we spend a lot of time on the marketing, branding side, and just think about our recruiting process, trying to attract a more diverse applicant pool. Trying to market to folks maybe that didn't grow up thinking about the FBI as a potential path. [00:18:45:14]

[00:19:20:07] Which is true, in some respects. But in other respects, we have to explain the breadth of the FBI, the mission the FBI. Attract people that maybe didn't grow up, didn't think about joining law enforcement. We're not just looking for folks that are

lawyers or accountants or law enforcement. That's great. We want a lot of those folks to come. But we're looking for doctors and nurses and psychologists and schoolteachers and all sorts of things. And people that make amazing special agents or amazing intelligence analysts or amazing all the other things we need. But because they didn't grow up thinking about the FBI, we got to go make the pitch to them in a different way than we've done traditionally. [00:19:46:10]

[00:20:15:00] "We-- believe it or not, we see tons of applications, thousands of applications. We're really good as far as being able to attract the law enforcement types. But we're also trying to expand beyond that to reflect the communities that we serve across the US...

[00:20:53:00] We enforce more than 400 laws, so there's a lot of different opportunities for agriculture, animal science, accounting, attorneys. There's just a huge breath of backgrounds that would really help us with the work we do, especially overseas, too, where we work with international partners."

[00:03:48:00 to 00:03:50:00] Again, here's Brian Lambert.

[00:24:07:00] LAMBERT: So with the Secret Service, we are 153 years old. So legacy customs would have been around longer. But one of the things we capitalize on and that helps us is, we're known. We've been around for a long time. And folks generally and immediately recognize what it is you do. That is both a blessing and a curse. So people, if you ask them, what does the Secret Service do, they say, you protect the president. OK. That's about 50% of what we do.

And folks generally don't understand that we investigate financial crimes. So one of our challenges is, we're competing for the same people who are often law enforcement and want to be a Special Agent. And you need to let folks know that we do criminal investigations. Much like the Bureau has a very unique crime of counterintelligence, it's not something anybody else does, we do protective intelligence. It's an odd investigation

that often doesn't result in any type of arrest. Where you're assessing risk. But we don't often get that word out, because everyone is so focused on the protection. [00:25:19:23]

[00:03:25:00 to 00:03:27:00] Again, here's Rob Smith.

[00:44:26:00] SMITH: One of the bigger challenges I think you find in recruiting-- because quite often, it is very difficult to measure the return on investment with recruiting-- you have to keep going with the marketing and advertising. If you keep changing every year, then you don't really get to see what happens as that builds over time. [00:44:56:00]

[00:46:48:15] We're very, as an organization-- I imagine all law enforcement are-- very averse to social media. I do not have but one social media account. And I just got it recently, and it's LinkedIn. So on the one hand... [00:46:59:11]

[00:47:02:26] ...we're going after folks who are heavy social media users. But we're not necessarily great and skilled at it. So that's been new for us. [00:47:15:00]

[01:13:47:05]-We're going to try to measure it and try to figure it out. Because still we have a long way to go to reach that, especially with our senior executives, as well. And of course, you're talking about 20, 30 years down the road, right, you need those women in leadership. Frankly, it's a better organization with women in leadership. [01:14:05:04]

[00:16:10:12] "We're in our infancy with some of these items. I want to be as transparent and clear about what we've learned in probably the last three years, what's been successful, what hasn't been successful. And we're constantly learning. I would say return on the recruitment investment is one of the more challenging pieces for me, personally, right now.

I see a fair amount of money being spent. I can see some markers or some indicators. But it's not necessarily easy for me to see a one for one correlation. And that's a challenge. We put that on our recruiting staff, and they feel, often, very frustrated trying

to articulate for me how this money that was spent translated into something positive.
[00:16:55:21]

[Music Transition]

[00:01:52:00 to 00:02:10:00] Please stay tuned after this episode...

[Music Transition]

[00:02:43:00 to 00:02:47:00] After the event, I sat down with the speakers to further elaborate on what was said.

[00:19:29:00] Mr. Smith, thank you so much for joining us.

[00:21:38:21] SMITH: One thing that you highlighted a bit in the panel, that I wanted to follow up on, is this idea of using your employees as brand ambassadors, right? And using them to create referrals. Can you talk a little bit more about how you encourage that? Do you train employees? Do you put out messaging? Are there incentives for referrals? How do you kind of build that within the existing CBP family to focus on that kind of recruiting?

[00:22:03:04] When we discovered last year in our data poll that, I believe, at the time it was 22% of the folks who were applying for jobs in CBP were as a result of an employee referring them. We also learned from the data that a good number of those individuals also moved through the process quicker and even had a higher success rate in the process.

So what that tells us is, on one hand, what we're looking at doing as it relates to applicant care, it validates that. Because those individuals have the benefit of a recruiter-- whether trained and official or not. Someone to kind of hold their hand through the process and encourage them to stay in the process. I think that's what a lot of folks don't realize is so critically important. Because we are competing with other organizations, and most people don't apply for a job today that they're going to get next

year. That's not normally how that works. So we realize that there's a great benefit to that. [00:23:01:12]

[00:27:03:29] Thank you. Mr. Schlendorf great to have you here.

[00:27:27:24] I wanted to follow up, for our listeners, on a couple of things that came up, I know, that are of particular relevance to you in your role at the FBI. One is, the issue came up around when branding and messaging is being created in the departments and agencies particularly in law enforcement, this issue of having balance between people involved in that who are agents and non-agents. I'm curious just to hear a little bit more from you about how that plays out at the FBI.

[00:28:12:08] SCHLENDORF: That's a great question. It's been evolving, I'd say, at the Bureau. For most of our history, we were a very agent-centric, agent-dominated, organization. And the agent is still, I think, the most important job in the FBI. But the agent can't be successful without a whole team behind them making them successful. In the human resources division, as we've thought about our branding and marketing efforts, we've got a minority of agents-- a small number of agents-- but they play a critical role HR, helping us make sure non-agents like myself, that we understand the perspective of an agent. The perspective of a field agent and the challenge that they're faced with.

[00:28:47:11] On the recruiting side, we've got a good mix of agents and non-agents. Most of our field recruiters traditionally have been agents. We're actually looking at more non-agents and professionalizing that role. I think the role of the recruiter isn't to be always the face of the FBI. Their job is to have kind of a stable of agents, I say. And they bring them out to different events. If you need a cyber agent, you bring a cyber agent. You need a female agent, you bring a female agent. I think it's not always the best use of a really highly trained, really expensive, Special Agent in the FBI to be a Special Agent Recruiter.

[00:29:15:23] So that's a transformation we've been going through today. In our 56 field offices, I think there are approximately five offices today with a non-agent recruiter. And

so we been trying to professionalize that position, that role. In the human resources division itself, as we've thought about how to better take advantage of social media, better spend more on advertising, we need professionals that are good at thinking about, hey, how do you brand a social media campaign? And that isn't necessary an agent.

[00:29:40:08] It's important to have the perspective an agent on that team. But more and more, I think we've looked to kind of professionalize the human resources side of the FBI. And that means non-agents with a smattering of kind of Special Agents to provide important key perspective on decisions.

[00:30:13:22] You talked a bit about building capacity at the FBI in HR to collect some data. To try and approximate some correlations there, and to bring some folks in who are able to do that. Can you talk a little bit more? Was that a culture change in HR for the FBI? And are you getting there, on the marketing side, in terms of ROI? What are you trying in that area?

[00:30:33:14] Yeah. I don't know if it was a culture change. It was definitely a skill-set change. It's a realization that we need to measure everything that we do in HR to be able to prove that it's working. And to be able to predict what's going on.

[00:30:53:28] But to do it, actually, you actually have to set the systems up on the front end to be able to capture the information you want. Have data cut in a way that's meaningful and have people that are good and comfortable with doing that.

[00:31:16:11] We really didn't have that in the FBI in HR several years ago. So we had to build a team of specialists. They're not Special Agents, their data works. They love Excel. They love crazier, even more analytical tools, than Excel. They get excited by the ability to take a piece of data, break it down, and help the decision maker understand a problem in a better way. We've tried very hard not to manage by anecdote, but to really manage based on hard data.

[00:31:39:29] And so as we try to run advertising campaigns, as we try new website displays or images, what seems to be working? And we've realized over time, even the way we initially built our website several years ago didn't cut the pages in such a way that was easy to tell how someone flowed through the site, where they lost interest, what parts of site were kind of more motivating to the candidates.

[00:35:08:08] Thanks for joining us.

[00:35:09:02] Thanks Sasha.

[00:02:54:00 to 00:03:04:00] And now the bonus track I promised...

[00:24:33:16] So what are the characteristics that you look for in applicants? I know there's a broad range of job series, but are there things that cut across? Or kind of any other advice you would have for applicants. I'm sure our listeners would be interested to hear.

[00:03:25:00 to 00:03:27:00] Again, here's Rob Smith.

[00:24:56:02] SMITH: Well I'll tell you, what I don't want to do is tell folks, you're not eligible. Because quite often, when we start building profiles, people hear it and they walk the other direction. You can be a teacher today and an agent tomorrow. You can be a cook in a kitchen and an officer tomorrow. The reality is, we're looking for people that want to serve. People that want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Folks who, when they look back at their life, they can say, OK, I've left a legacy. And I've participated in protecting the freedoms that we get to experience as a nation.

[00:25:32:25] As far as places we're going, again, the military has been a big target for us. We're hitting the college campuses hard. We're even looking at, how do we compete even with the military, to get some of the talent that they're able to pick up on? Because we realize that if we can get them young-- even if it's for the purpose of planting the seed, because again, a lot of us make choices about what we want to do when we grow

up long before we grow up. So how do we make ourselves an option for the generations that are to come?

[00:26:05:10] Thank you so much for your participation today. It's been wonderful to hear from you.

[00:26:09:11] Thank you. This was great. Thank you for the opportunity.

[MUSIC Outro]