

staff are trained to answer 9-1-1 calls (most are previous telecommunicators here). We have an internal alerting system that can be activated when calls go into queue. When that occurs our admin staff who are qualified grab their headsets and head out onto the floor to help clear out the call queue.

PSC: Describe your hiring process.

TH: Our process for hiring is pretty unique. I've looked at multiple tests over the years, but we have come up with our own test. We generally open our application process for two weeks and have about 200 applicants. We then bring in about 25 at a time to meet with some of our senior staff. We ask them to tell us a little bit about themselves. During this conversation, we are gauging communication skills. Do they speak well, are they good communicators, will they be easily understood over the phone and radio. We don't care about tattoos/piercings/hair styles; only things that will matter for job performance. We are also looking for transferable skills – something they do now that will help them in 9-1-1.

We then ask them why they want to be a dispatcher, and what they are currently doing. This gives you a lot of insight and lets you screen out a larger number of people than you would think. At this point we can usually screen out about half the candidates.

We then spend about 6-8 minutes informing them what telecommunicators do. We have a floor employee speak to them as well and show them what telecommunicators do. We only accept a 40 WPM or better typing test, and then we give an approved test that we administer from Professional Pride. All of this occurs on the same day.

For our second interview we bring them back for a more formalized interview. By that point our criminal histories are completed, but we haven't done a background check yet. For two open positions we bring in 4-6 candidates. We ask them about their capabilities and long term plans, then check references and make our decision for them to start employment.

One thing to note here is that this is our typical hiring process, but you have to remember to be flexible as circumstances are not always the same. For example, we had a telecommunicator from Texas come into town with her fiancée who wanted a tour. She had already applied at this point. Due to the circumstances, I interviewed her that day and hired her on the spot. You must be flexible, because your people are your biggest asset and are the most important thing you handle as the

director. Your people will either make you or break you. Your hiring decisions are the biggest decision you can make. If you don't hire good people you will suffer for it every day.

Next you need to look at APCO RETAINS, to make sure you have proper staffing levels to handle your current workload. An imbalanced workload puts undue stress on your employees. Lack of proper tools and recognition are also factors you need to consider. You have to get people you can train well, and then cut loose and trust them to do it on their own.

My team is amazing and that is a big part of why we are able to hire and retain so well. I've sent my people to both New Kent County and to Virginia Beach to help with large events, including to assist after the mass shooting in Virginia Beach in May 2019. Most of my employees are A team people and those that aren't are on their way to becoming one. Hampton 9-1-1 went down a few weeks ago and we got their overflow calls. We called employees that were off to see if they could come in to assist. We had three people respond within 17 minutes. It's important to identify those who have a passion for what we do, because those people will have the longevity you need.

PSC: What are your current starting pay and benefits?

TH: Benefits are very comparable to other businesses nearby. Our starting pay is \$34,669, then when you complete training in 6-12 months the pay increases to \$38,221. Our training program is kind of self-paced. We recognize that adult learners learn at different speeds and in different ways. Those with a public safety background tend to complete the training more quickly.

PSC: Do you all run an academy or on-the-job training only? What is your OJT process like?

TH: Like I mentioned before, we kind of have a self-paced learning environment, so we don't do a one size fits all. That doesn't work with shoes, and it doesn't work here either. We don't like hiring one at a time, so we generally just jump straight into OJT. Everyone that we hire will spend at least a week on the floor in observation mode before starting classroom training. We do use the Hampton Roads Regional Academy to get all of our required certifications and DCJS requirements.

We have one full time person in admin who is in charge of our training and about half my floor employees are CTOs.

Like I said, we really like to tailor that OJT process to the candidate. We care about the end product, so we can start with an academy,

OJT, ride along, whatever we feel would benefit the recruit most. We want to help people be themselves, and use their strengths to train them. We use DORs (daily observation reports) and really involve the whole team in the training process. The CTO, supervisor, senior telecommunicator, operations supervisor, deputy director and director all work together to get each trainee what they need to have the best chance at success.

If a trainee doesn't pass, I have failed at some point along the route. We have done all this testing, training and work to get them functioning on their own. We will even switch them to a different shift to see if that helps. If they are not making it at the end of all these things, I sit down with them personally and ask them directly what we can do. If a trainee is having personal problems at home or really clicked with a certain trainer or needs to move to days or nights for some reason we work with them as much as possible to help minimize the issues. It is almost a blank check at that point. Our DORs have 23 graded sections, and every negative section must be signed by the supervisor, trainer, and training coordinator. I will say those that don't work well in a team don't make it with us.

PSC: What sort of employee growth and promotional opportunities do you have at your center?

TH: Well first, I never promote from the outside. I always promote from within. This is why we are selective about who we bring in, because we need to grow that person to take a future leadership role should they have that desire. Telecommunicator, shift leader, NCIC/VCIN coordinator, deputy director, operations supervisor, CAD administrator, training coordinator and management analyst all started here on the floor. Investing in your people like that creates a more positive environment, and again, if I have to hire from the outside, I've failed somewhere.

PSC: What is the environment like on your 9-1-1 floor?

TH: We are like most other centers in that we can at times eat our young. However, people are treated fairly and with respect. Any tiff you have with another employee needs to remain outside the center. You don't have to go out drinking or partying with people, but you do need to work with them in a professional environment. We run 10 employees per shift. We rated the supervisors 1-4 and then put seniors with them. We put a stronger senior