

# Dispatcher Recruiting: Asset or Liability?

GEOFF RODGERS

Take some time to review your advertisement and make sure the message you are communicating is the message you intend to communicate.

**Y**ou may not be experiencing a shortage of applicants in our recent economic down turn, but what about the quality of applicants? Are you overwhelmed with the daunting task of going through hundreds of applications only to find a few who may be qualified? People are the lifeblood of the communications industry. It doesn't matter what type of equipment you have, people still need to use, learn and operate the equipment. People are the greatest asset in any organization. Some of you may be thinking: maybe they are an asset for another agency but in my agency they are a liability. Finding good people is definitely a two way street; they need to prove they can do the job and you need to prove that the job is worth doing.

The most important opportunity management has to impact the organizational mission is the selection of people.

## Review Your Advertisements

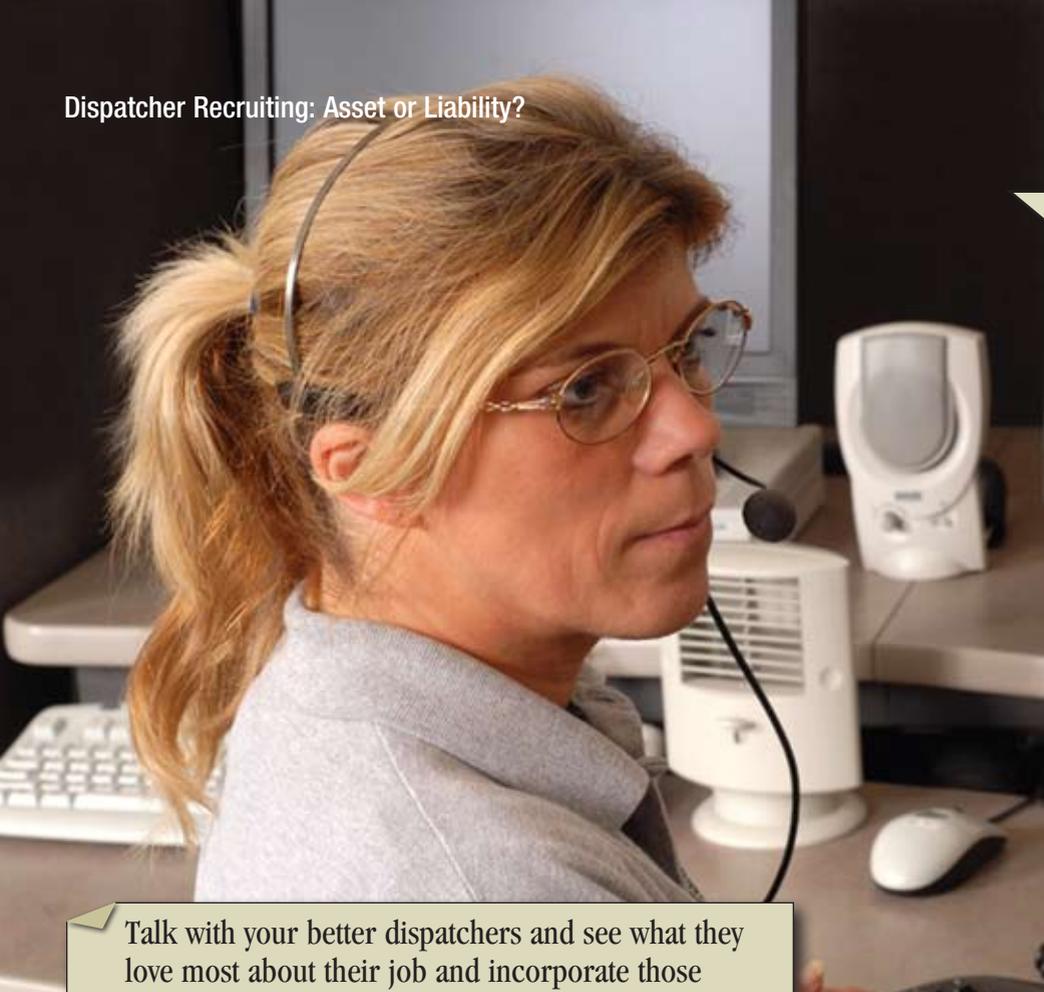
There is a lot that goes into the hiring process. Let's look at the first part of the process—communicating the job requirements to job seekers, specifically

the advertisement. When is the last time you reviewed your recruitment ad? If you saw your own ad, would you respond to it? I am absolutely stunned at the number of agencies who have not reviewed their recruitment ad, or carefully considered the message they are communicating to job candidates. In a recent survey of 9-1-1 directors, 73 percent said they would not respond to their own advertisement. Unbelievable! No wonder there is so much frustration when it comes to hiring the right person. What message are you sending to potential applicants? What does your ad tell others about your agency?

## “Selling” the Job

I have heard the comment that there is only 3 percent of the population with the skill set required to be an emergency dispatcher. I would like to challenge this thought process for a moment and attempt to stretch your paradigm. Stop and think about this for a minute—why do the people who work for you now show up for work each day? A paycheck is certainly a motivator, but once you get past the obvious benefits of

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exceptional pay, and convenient work hours, you start to uncover what really motivates these people.

When I ask dispatchers what they love most about their job, in other words, what motivates them, I hear the following themes:

- It is very rewarding to make a difference in someone else's life
- I enjoy the camaraderie and the team environment
- We live on the cutting edge of technology
- It is very satisfying to know that I helped someone today

Try it! Ask some of your better employees what they like most about their job and you may be surprised by their answers. These are the components that should be included and highlighted when you are selling your job. What do you think would happen if you modified your advertisement to include some of the above mentioned motivators? In other words, why not sell the job! I guarantee that more than 3 percent of the population seeks these and many other motivators that the dispatching position provides.

### Skills Are Not Enough

Have you ever hired someone who may have the skills for dispatching but are still clearly

not the best employee? Some may consider this missing link to be personality, but I think it is more than that. For example, one of the key elements for success in the dispatcher position is the ability to own responsibility for one's decisions and/or actions. I believe you will agree that this behavior can be found in any of the four personality styles (Choleric – Lion, Sanguine – Otter, Phlegmatic – Golden Retriever, Melancholy – Beaver). If you think about your best dispatchers, you will probably see this behavioral thread in their day-to-day decisions as well, despite what personality trait they have (**See Personality vs. Behavior Testing sidebar**). I'm not suggesting you throw your common sense out the window, like abandoning your minimum job requirements, and resetting your typing rates to 5 wpm. Obviously, the dispatching position requires some skills; however, I am simply suggesting that you seriously consider the message you are communicating to potential candidates.

### Screening Process

There is no reason to be overwhelmed with the idea of increasing your applicant flow, as long as you have an effective screening process. The more applicants you have, the better

## Personality vs. Behavior Testing

There are many perceptions out there regarding personality and behavior-based testing. While it may be very important to know what type of personality an individual can bring to an organization, it will not lead towards any consistency in performance. For example, if you take a group of top-performing people in any job—editors, doctors, lawyers, teachers or 9-1-1 dispatchers—the common denominator amongst them is not a personality. But what do they have in common? Consider your best employees. Do they have the same personalities? Of course not. Think back to your school days, why do some teachers stand out in your mind over others? They were all trained and certified and met all of the minimal qualifications (and skill sets for that matter) but what a difference they had on your ability to learn.

A behaviorally-based assessment will identify the common threads which make these top performers successful. For example, one of the key elements for success in the dispatcher position is the ability to own responsibility for one's decisions and/or actions. I believe you will agree that this behavior can be found in any of the four personality styles (Choleric – Lion, Sanguine – Otter, Phlegmatic – Golden Retriever, Melancholy – Beaver). If you think about your best dispatchers, you will probably see this behavioral thread in their day-to-day decisions as well, despite what personality trait they have. Another key difference between personality testing and behavior-based testing is that personality testing is one dimensional whereas behavioral testing can be multidimensional. Every job has what seem to be contradictory behaviors. For instance, a policeman must be aggressive and yet still hold themselves in check. A personality test cannot measure both of these behaviors at the same time. A good behavior-based assessment will not only measure both traits but to the degree that they are required to complement each other.

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Ever wonder if you are getting the right information?

your odds of finding the right person ... especially if you have an attractive job advertisement.

The screening process is sometimes referred to as a “necessary evil”. Something every agency needs to have but very few actually enjoy going through the process. If you are not sure if your screening process is effective, find a well respected human resources consultant who has expertise in evaluating the entire screening process. A thorough screening process can include any or all of the following steps: selling the job, application, resume, written assessments, skills tests, interview, oral board, background check and polygraph. Even the most thorough screening process costs less than hiring one wrong person.

There is no reason to shy away from as many applicants as you can find. To hire the best people you need to have a selection ratio that is in your favor. Agencies that are fully staffed and have a fantastic work environment know exactly what I’m talking about. They have a minimum of 15 to 20 applicants per open position. This gives them a significant advantage when it comes to finding the right person for the job.

In summary, take some time to review your advertisement and make sure the message you are communicating is the message you intend to communicate. Talk with your better dispatchers and see what they love most about their job and incorporate those motivators into your ability to sell the job. Do not settle for skills only; think outside the box, there is more to the job than just skills. Now is the time to be thorough and uncover possible job mismatches before you add the wrong person to your payroll.

You will be shocked at the power of hiring the right people. **ENPM Geoff Rodgers** is President of Select Advantage (Vancouver, WA) and has been helping companies improve their hiring process for more than 20 years. Select Advantage specializes in behavior-based pre-employment assessments for the public safety industry. For more information, call (800) 377-0554 or visit [www.selectadv.net](http://www.selectadv.net).