

Knox Regional Communications Center Executive Board

Tuesday
July 12, 2016
9:00 a.m.

A meeting of the Executive Board of the Knox Regional Communications Center took place on **Tuesday, July 12, 2016 at 9:00 a.m.** in the Knox County Emergency Management Agency Office.

Executive Board members in attendance: Adam Miceli, Rockland Fire/EMS; Camden Fire Chief Chris Farley; Ruston Barnard, Rockland Fire/EMS; Jesse Thompson, Union EMS; and Knox County EMA Director Ray Sisk; and Rockland PD Deputy Chief Chris Young. **Members absent:** *Craig Cooley, Rockport Police Department.*

Others in attendance: Knox Regional Communications Director Linwood Lothrop, Knox County Administrator Andrew Hart, Administrative Assistant Candice Richards, and HR consultant Laurie Bouchard.

I. 9:00 Meeting Called To Order

II. 9:01 Discussion Items:

1. Discussion of Recruitment, Training & Retention of New Hires for the Knox Regional Communications Center (KRCC)

III. Other Business

IV. Adjourn

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Administrator Hart at 9:06 a.m.

II. Discussion Items

1. Discussion of Recruitment, Training & Retention of New Hires for the Knox Regional Communications Center (KRCC).

Administrator Hart explained that this meeting was to discuss the constant turnover rate that the KRCC has been experiencing and to brainstorm ways to prevent this from happening. A survey had been given to dispatchers, the two supervisors, and Director Lothrop to complete to help give the administration an idea of what their concerns are with the hiring process. Some dispatchers were concerned about confidentiality and one chose not to do the survey at all. Unfortunately, most of what the dispatchers shared was more about how current employees are treated and less about the hiring process. The survey results are not being shared with the dispatchers, in part because some of them used other people's names in their surveys, and also because some employees were trying to figure out what employee said what. An overview of the results has been shared with Director Lothrop but he has not seen the actual responses.

Ms. Bouchard handed out a chart that showed the turnover information from 2011 – present that showed how long people stayed before they were either terminated or quit on their own, and the reasons for why that person left or was not hired to begin with. Some of the issues that come up a lot are the working nights and weekends, and the fact that the KRCC is a negative working environment, both of which are pretty big deterrents to hiring and retaining quality personnel. Ms. Bouchard has tried to do exit interviews with employees who quit but most of them won't return her calls. She did note, however, that often the employees that quit prior to finishing the training will talk to her. She shared a few stories of employees that quit and why:

- One employee that had previously been in law enforcement just walked out, and none of us really know why. He just said he couldn't handle the stress of knowing the officers in the field were depending on him.
- Some have left because of how they are being made to feel during training. One female employee was made to feel stupid by the trainers, and she decided not to stick around because she didn't want to work in this climate.
- One male employee brought up a concern about words being used in the Center that he thought were inappropriate and added to the negative atmosphere. The supervisor he brought the issue up to just told him "that's just how we blow off steam here", and he decided he didn't want to work in that kind of environment and quit.
- The stress of the Center is discouraging people from wanting to work there, but the lack of new-hires is making the environment worse...which affects the next batch of new-hires and they leave so it's an endless cycle.

The Executive Board was asked for their top concerns:

- Work Climate
- Management
- Retaliatory nature of the supervisors
- Inconsistency between trainers – FTO program
- Lack of ownership among the employees
- Pay/benefits
- Execution/fairness of benefits
- Scheduling
- Distrust of dispatchers with each other and management

The Executive Board was asked for their top suggestions

- You can't treat all employees the same. Dispatch employees should be able to negotiate different benefits and pay than other departments.
- If people aren't paid well enough for the work that's expected and the stress level, there's no motivation for them to stay.
- Dispatch is lumped in with Corrections in the NCEU union and they get outvoted 3 to 1 by the Jail staff. Dispatch never gets what it wants because it gets outvoted.
- Don't take on people as a project.
- FTO program and FTO's need to be evaluated and changes made.
- Need a drastic change in management.
- There needs to be an assistant director that is there on a daily basis to quell a lot of this since Linwood is often having to travel and isn't in the Center all the time. The current supervisors are sometimes part of the problem.
- The County needs to start working on training Linwood's replacement since he's planning to retire in 5 years.
- The dispatchers need someone from the outside to recognize them for doing a good job and include them in solving the problems.
- The dispatchers think management is the problem and the management thinks the dispatchers are the problem. Everybody needs to take ownership.
- The Executive Board could try talking to the Union since they don't seem to trust the administration or Ms. Bouchard. Union members should be encouraged to work with the

administration on scheduling shifts and union representatives need to be encouraged to negotiate for the whole group, rather than personal agendas.

There was a discussion about the probability of having an assistant director:

- The KRCC Executive Board would need to support the creation of the position during the budget process at Budget Committee meetings so it's not just Administrator Hart and Director Lothrop saying the position is needed.
- Rather than hiring the additional dispatcher that was built into the 2016 budget as of July 1 (since obviously that isn't going to happen), hire an assistant director instead to clean up some of the issues creating a negative working environment so new hires will want to work there.
- The KRCC needs to change the culture of the Center now.
- The idea of whether the position would be union or not was tossed back and forth. There were pros and cons for both.
- The Board should sit down with the union and say that the County is going to bring in someone who will be the boss of the two supervisors, and is coming in as a clean slate, that can make changes, and will hold all employees accountable (both supervisors and dispatchers).

It was noted that currently the two union reps are: John Gamage for Dispatch and Bob Wood for the Jail. It's a lot easier to work with local reps (the stewards) than when the NCEU rep is here.

Recruiting Ideas

- Using social media – send the job opening to employees and ask them to post it on their own Facebook pages.
- Find ways to bridge generational gaps to attract new generations of employees.
- www.rollwithit.com or something similar. The state of Pennsylvania did a recruitment video. The video ran prior to movies starting and interest in the job skyrocketed.

Action Items

- KRCC Executive Board will meeting with all of the dispatchers in two sessions, including the supervisors but do the supervisors separately. Do one meeting during the day and the other during second shift. The Board will explain to them that the Board has no direct authority but that the members are trying to look for solutions to make things at the Center work better. The meetings will be held in the EMA office so it's neutral territory. It's just a discussion – nobody should think they're in trouble.
- Write job description for Assistant Director and seek Commission approval. Get buy-in from current dispatch employees. Ms. Bouchard will start drafting something and then will review with Board after they've met with employees.
- Pursue different recruitment options (social media, etc.)
- Temporary measures – approving carrying over more vacation time so they won't lose it or allow them to sell back more than 1 week's worth. A sidebar agreement where you spell out that this is an emergency situation and the County will allow this to happen this *once* was suggested.
- The two supervisors should also take leadership training to learn how to be good leaders, not just supervisors
- Reinforce positive motivators, like providing positive feedback for doing a good job
- Director Lothrop will come up with some dates as possible for the meetings with the employees and the Executive Board and get them to Chair Farley, who will then send the invitations. The meetings will be scheduled for after the Lobster Festival, during the second week of August.

Administrator Hart asked if the Board needed some information from him before those meetings. Adam Miceli asked for information about how the employees are paid.

III. Other Business

IV. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice Richards
Administrative Assistant