

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
IMPROVING OFFICER RETENTION

PURPOSE

This paper proposes an approach for Air Force Personnel Command (AFPC) to reduce the number of officers electing for 7-day-option (separation) during the assignment selection process using a greater variety of incentives, improved pairing of incentive offers with hard-to-fill assignments, additional member feedback mechanisms, and a second round of matching. This recommendation represents the perspective of ten mid-level Captains from multiple Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) and intends to boost morale and feeling of control over one's career.

BACKGROUND

- Officers facing reassignment without an Active Duty Service Commitment utilizing the 7-day option is detrimental to the Air Force
 - Hinder filling critical and valid manpower requirements
 - Represents a significant loss of talent and investment
- The current system does not account for evolving generational differences
- Airman Development Plan (ADP) is useful but incomplete tool
 - Offers career vectoring according to "Up or Out" paradigm
 - No direct feedback mechanism for assignments in a particular cycle

COURSE OF ACTION

- Phase Zero (~6 weeks in duration)
 - Information Gathering Stage - Collecting data on incentives and assignment preferences
 - Initiates after Vulnerable to Move List (VML) and assignment requirements posting
 - A simplified solicitation for candidates to rank all assignments in order of preference
 - For each assignment listed, officers will also provide the following information via an Assignment Preference List (APL):
 - Which assignments they would accept without an incentive (must select one)

- Which assignments they would accept only if offered an incentive
- Which kind of incentive is most appealing (later specified in this paper)
- A brief explanation (~300 characters) of personal/career considerations
- Volunteering Stage - Volunteer-based process to match officers to incentivized unfavorable assignments
 - AFPC will use historic data and APL inputs to identify hard-to-fill assignments
 - AFPC will pair one incentive to each hard-to-fill assignment based on budget and information provided
 - AFPC will solicit for volunteers to take incentivized, hard-to-fill assignments
 - Once matched, assignments and members are removed from further rounds
 - Proposed incentives will be allocated by AFPC to Functionals and include:
 - Cash bonus (approx. \$10-50K)
 - Time-in-service multiplier (approx. \$100K)
 - Base of Preference (\$0)
 - Specialized training (less than \$10K)
 - Incentive leave (approx. \$10K for 10 days)
 - Temporarily increased cap/matching on Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions (approx. 3K per year for 3% boost)
 - Assignments not accepted (with incentives) will retain incentives throughout process
 - AFPC could use comments to guide trades as necessary
 - Unmatched hard-to-fill jobs could be offered to previously matched officers for a voluntary swap
- Phase One (~9 weeks in duration) - Mirrors current process, using APL and ADP inputs to match officers to assignments
 - Officers declining Phase One assignments have the option to provide comments to AFPC

- Phase Two (~4 weeks in duration) - After expiration of Phase One 7-day-option, AFPC will conduct a second pairing of remaining officers and assignments
 - Phase One and Two offers could be accompanied by brief written rationale from AFPC
- Transition from 3 annual VML cycles to 2 to combat impact of increased timeline
 - Would result in additional down time between cycles for AFPC
 - Increases number of vacancies available for matching

POTENTIAL CONSTRAINTS AND DRAWBACKS

- Adds complexity to the assignment process, requiring more time and effort from AFPC
 - We assess at least one additional AFSC officer billet per AFSC will be required
- Cash bonuses require appropriate funding (albeit cheaper than new accessions/training)
- Extra credit for time in service toward retirement will require a change to current law

SECOND AND THIRD ORDER EFFECTS

- Dramatic increase in financial footprint for hard-to-fill bases/locations
- Over time, retention data could become skewed, reducing effectiveness
- Increased retention could lead to falling promotion rates
- Could encourage earlier retirements, causing difficulty filling Lieutenant Colonel positions
- Adding large numbers of members to Base of Preference list will dilute its potency
- Incentive leave could lead to manning challenges if all members at a base have extra time off

SUMMARY

In this paper we have proposed multiple changes to the antiquated assignment offer system from a CGO perspective which we assess will dramatically improve retention. These sanctions can be implemented either partially or in full depending on uncontrollable budget, legal, or AFSC-specific considerations. The recommendations are intended to tackle what we assess to be one major root cause of the problem, which is officers feeling a lack of control in navigating the career assignment system and a generation gap in career motivations, personal considerations, and morale drivers. We assess that even if these proposed sanctions only marginally improve CGO retention, the aggregate savings would be exponential in addition to the expected immeasurable morale improvement throughout the mid-to-senior level CGO community.