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## Help Wanted: The Not-Too-High-Q Standard

By MIKE ALLEN

NEW LONDON, Conn. -- Wanted: a few not-so-bright cops.

That is the official hiring policy in this former whaling village, where Police Department officials refused to grant Robert J. Jordan a job interview because they considered him to be too smart, then waged a three-year court fight to protect their right to favor mediocre applicants.

And won.

The City of New London contends that applicants who score too high on a pre-employment test are likely to become bored in patrol jobs, and leave the force soon after the city has paid to train them. Similar cutoffs, it turns out, are frequently used by employers when they are looking for workers who must follow rigid procedures, including bank tellers, customer service representatives and security guards.

In 1996 Mr. Jordan scored 33 out of 50 on the exam, which is used by 40,000 employers across the country, including National Football League teams for potential draft choices. That was 6 points too high to qualify for an interview with the New London police.

When Mr. Jordan heard about other people being hired even though he hadn't been called, he went to the Police Department to protest that he felt sure he must have passed. He says he was curtly informed that he did not "fit the profile," which litigation revealed was a score of 20 to 27.

"Bob Jordan is exactly the type of guy we would want to screen out," said William C. Gavitt, the deputy police chief, who interviews candidates.

"Police work is kind of mundane. We don't deal in gunfights every night. There's a personality that can take that."

This month, a Federal judge in New Haven has ruled that the practice was constitutional since the city treats all smart would-be officers the same, and thus did not discriminate against Mr. Jordan. "Plaintiff may have been disqualified unwisely but he was not denied equal protection," Judge Peter C. Dorsey of the United States District Court wrote.

Mr. Jordan, 48, is a life-insurance salesman who had dreamed of a second career protecting and serving, with an eye on the pension. He said he was astounded that he could be shut out on the basis of brain power, but not gender, sexual orientation or race.

"Being reasonably intelligent does not make you part of a protected class," he said, chuckling at his new command of legalese. For a certified wise man, Mr. Jordan is remarkably modest about his academic achievements, volunteering that it took him 26 years to get a bachelor's degree in literature from Charter Oak State College in New Britain, Conn. "I'm eminently trainable," he said. "I'm not up there with Mozart."

At first the decision was greeted as a great punch line in New London, a city of 27,000.

But as the news sunk in, many people said the rule was insulting to their police force, and nonsensical at a time when law-enforcement officers must deal with complicated social problems.

"Your average dunderhead is not the person you want to try to solve a fight between a man and his wife at 2 A.M.," said Nick Checker, 35, a local playwright. "I'd rather have them hire the right man or woman for the job and keep replacing them than have the same moron for 20 years."

Millie McLaughlin, 82, the lunch lady at Harbor Elementary School, worries that pupils will think that "if they study too hard, they won't get a job."

And Gilbert G. Gallegos, the national president of the Fraternal Order of Police, said that besides reinforcing keystone kop stereotypes, the city's stance was self-defeating. "The better the caliber of the police officer, the fewer problems you have in the community."

Mr. Jordan had run afoul of turnover rates, which have been the subject of decades of study by management theorists. The publisher of the test, Wonderlic Inc. of Libertyville, Ill., has a section in its "User's Manual" warning clients about the cost of replacing workers who quit because they become dissatisfied with repetitive work. "Simply hiring the highest scoring employee can be self-defeating," the manual says.

Wonderlic's president, Charles F. Wonderlic Jr., said variations of the 12-minute test used in New London have been given to 125 million people since his grandfather founded the company in 1937. Mr. Wonderlic said hundreds of employers have used his suggested maximum scores to exclude overly qualified applicants for positions where creativity could be a detriment.

"You can't decide not to read someone their Miranda rights because you felt it would be more efficient, or you thought they knew them already," Mr. Wonderlic said.

On the other hand, an expert witness for Mr. Jordan was paid \$350 an hour for his conclusion that patrol work is "cognitively complex and intellectually demanding." The expert, Frank J. Landy, a psychologist in Walnut Creek, Calif., pointed to the demands of such modern practices as community-oriented policing as an indication of "the range and challenge of tasks performed by a typical patrol officer."

Mr. Jordan said he would appeal the ruling if his lawyers are willing to continue the case now that he has used up his savings. In the meantime, he is supplementing his insurance business by working for \$26,000 a year -- \$15,000 less than he would make as a New London patrolman -- as a state prison guard.

"In those dormitories, there's 110 inmates and one of you," he said. "Your mouth better be connected to your brain."

While those with badges and guns are called New York's finest, they will continue to be New London's fair to middling: New London officials say they plan to keep using the test to fend off

smarty-pants.