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**Autor:** Wice Paul B.

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Eighty to ninety percent of the nation's urban criminal defendants are defended in court by public defenders. Thus, understanding how these defender programs operate, their effectiveness and the quality of professional life for these beleaguered and often underpaid attorneys, is a critical factor in improving local criminal justice systems. What is it like to practice law in such an inhospitable environment, where clients often revile their counsel and prosecutors hold defenders in contempt? How does a public defender maintain self-esteem and dignity? What are the particular problems and obstacles of public defender offices? And how might such departments overcome these obstacles so that defendants and defenders, as well as the public, benefit? In vivid prose, and with vignettes and quotes from the lawyers themselves, Wice answers these questions and paints a truer picture of the state of public defenders offices than most of us have from television and the media. Through a colorful profile of a reform-minded public defender's office Newark, N.J., one of the nation's most crime-ridden smaller cities, Wice examines the public defender system and shows how even the smallest reforms, especially those that address quality of life and work for public defenders, can make a big difference. Comparing the smaller defender's office to larger ones in such cities as New York and Chicago, which have not instituted significant reforms, the author illustrates the successes that can be found when change is implemented. Flaws remain, but with improved services and work environments, this important component of the overburdened criminal justice system can function more effectively, creating a system that benefits lawyers, defendants, and the community alike.