



ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING SUPERVISORY CREDIBILITY

KEITH D. BUSHEY

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Introduction

I wish that I had the information contained in this booklet during my early tenure as a supervisor! If so, I believe I would have been much more effective and successful. Based on my past, I should have been the best supervisor in the division; bachelor's degree, extensive military service both as an enlisted and as an officer, strong experience on the department, and having placed high on the promotional exam. I worked hard and had the very best of intentions. At the time I felt that I was doing a good job, and all my evaluations were superb, but in hindsight there were several areas where I struggled.

What I, and many others lacked, was good solid mentoring by a well-tenured and effective leader! The purpose of this booklet is to hopefully be useful to new supervisors, and those who mentor them, in areas that are seldom discussed in other materials and forums, to include: mannerisms, behaviors, thought processes, and actions. This booklet is intended to supplement, not replace, the vast volumes of other materials that we digest in our path towards leadership. The focus of this booklet is not what to do or say, but rather how to do it and how to say it! It is intended to be valuable both personally and as a mentoring tool.

In developing this booklet, I started by asking myself some hard questions to identify those areas where I was weak as a new sergeant, and to some extent as a new lieutenant as well; that candid introspection created the framework. I then solicited the input of a number of fine leaders for whom I have great respect; to the last person, they were enthusiastic about assisting and were equally as candid with respect to their early missteps.

In both the introduction and throughout the booklet, I frequently use the word leadership. I do not use this term lightly, and think it important to provide my personal definition of this term. In my judgment, a supervisor/manager/executive arrives at the leadership plateau when his or her people, in conversations with one another, indicate that they *respect* and have *confidence* in that individual. A person is not a leader in the absence of either of these dimensions. Unfortunately, our profession has an abundance of folks who call themselves leaders, but who have not yet reached that plateau.

While this booklet focuses on the development of leadership skills, the harsh reality of intentional inappropriate and criminal behavior -- even though the percentage of those involved in such activities is very small -- must always be a consideration. In examining police misconduct and corruption in the United States, it was found that in most cases first line supervisors were aware, involved in, or had orchestrated the misconduct. It cannot be over-emphasized the need for astute and professional first line supervision to maintain a healthy and viable organization that the community respects and can depend on.

It is important for all of us to remember that there is often a big gap between what we know and what we practice. This is not necessarily intentional, but it often occurs. As I look back on my career, I can now see a number of issues where my performance was contrary to my knowledge; while demonstrating mastery of an issue during the promotional testing process, there were times when I did not practice what I preached. It is my opinion that this stems from the reality that academics alone are inadequate to achieve proficiency; it is also necessary to get into the trenches, gain experience, and endure some pain.

While I have endeavored to cover a great many issues where new supervisors falter, I know there are other issues as well. Use the additional space in the rear of this booklet to document those additional areas that occur to you, and continue to build on the body of knowledge contained in this booklet.

I hope the reader finds this booklet to be helpful, whether personally and/or in the mentoring of other supervisors.

Keith D. Bushey

COVER: The cover depicts a variety of supervisory law enforcement badges from throughout the nation. These are shown for decorative purposes only. The presence of a badge does not indicate endorsement of the contents of this booklet by that agency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Critical Things To Consider	Page 5
2. Interactions With All Other Persons	Page 10
3. Interactions With Your Subordinates	Page 13
4. Interactions With Your Peers	Page 26
5. Interactions With Your Superiors	Page 28
6. Critical Realities To Keep In Mind	Page 30
7. Your Input & Lessons Learned	Page 35
8. Additional Notes	Page 36

1. Critical Things To Consider

Do Not Take Yourself Too Seriously. Avoid officious behavior and any other actions which may be seen as authoritative or a sign of self-importance. Think not in terms of authority, but rather in terms of responsibility. As a supervisor, you have the final say and everyone knows it.

It Is An Honor To Lead Others. Every man and woman who works for you is the most important person in the world to someone else. Your people are moms and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, etc. You are now in a position where what you do, good or bad, is going to have a significant impact on other human beings, which is truly an awesome responsibility. You have been entrusted with our greatest resources and assets, our personnel. Take this responsibility seriously, and work hard to be the leader that your people deserve.

Poor Supervision Often Has Implications Beyond The Workplace. All of us can recall situations where we were treated unfairly by a weak supervisor, and the resulting anguish affected us at home as well as at work. Leaving our work problems at work is easier said than done for conscience people, and the reality is that we sometimes sweat and fret at home, which is certainly unfair to our families. There are enough legitimate issues for our people to be concerned about without manufacturing those that are unnecessary. Work hard to develop solid skills and practice solid leadership so that you are not among those supervisors who specialize in making others miserable.

There Is Nothing More Important Than Knowing What Is Going On. You cannot prevent or solve something unless you know of its existence. Be inquisitive and seek to know all that is occurring, and challenge anything that appears unusual. Most of our serious problems started out small and could have been either prevented or minimized if detected by a supervisor. Have the courage to confront and inquire; strong supervisors have that courage. Problems are like snowballs; they just get bigger, go faster, and cover more ground as they roll downhill.

Do Some Research on Your New Colleagues and Superiors.

In private conversations with close associates, gain some perspectives on the people you will be working with. However, do not accept as gospel what you are told – just take it as background information. Remember, everyone has an opinion about everyone else, and it is not unusual for different people to look at the same screen and see a different picture. Separate valid information from gossip and innuendo. This is just part of a continuing process in *your* evaluation of people. At the end of your career you will look back and see that some of those individuals for whom you had the greatest respect were not always well thought well of by others.

Do Not Hesitate to Make Decisions. Making decisions is a big part of your job, and you must not shy away from this duty. They will not all be perfect, and some may be bad; join the club, we've all been there! All you can do is apply your best judgment based on the knowledge and insight that you possess. Remember also that there will be instances where decisions must be made and that you will not have all of the information you would prefer. If you make a decision in order to be popular with subordinates, you are guaranteed to fail as a leader; your decisions must be based on what is right. Mistakes are a critical part of the learning process, and should be treated as such. Besides, we learn more from our mistakes than from the things that go well. Failure to make a decision when one is needed is in itself a decision, one that will be a very poor reflection on you.

Do Not Be Too Critical Of Things You Might Not Completely Understand. It is not unusual for a new supervisor to be somewhat critical of policies, procedures, practices, strategies and related factors in the new command. Except for exigent circumstances, keep your critical thoughts to yourself until you have been around for a while and understand all of the variables involved. There may well be solid reasons why those things for which you are critical are actually the most appropriate courses of action. Keep in mind that policies and procedures are the result of lengthy review, and often based on factors that you may not be completely aware of; do not hesitate to contact the originator to understand the rationale involved.

Walk the Walk. People will always give more attention to what you do as opposed to what you say. The consistency, or lack thereof, between your actions and words will dictate your credibility. Your organization made you a supervisor to enforce its policies and procedures, and you are morally and ethically required to do so. Your people are smart and will immediately detect any deviation between the two. Always remember that talk is cheap and that the road to failure is paved with good intentions!

Stay Out Of Internal Politics. It is not unusual for a new supervisor to find himself or herself in the middle of an internal squabble among supervisors and managers. Step out of the line of fire, do the best you are able, be responsive to all, and do not take sides. Among the keys to the success of any leader is to be politically awake, not politically active.

Go That Extra Mile With The Media. Do not be one of those individuals who withhold information for no good reason. In just about every situation, there are things which can be told to the media, which will satisfy their needs, without jeopardizing anything. Do not be influenced by the hard-nosed officer who says to keep them a couple of blocks away and to tell them nothing. Get together early on with the concerned investigator or other person in charge, determine what can be said, and then pass it on to the media. Never speculate to the media about the facts of an incident; if you don't know, say so and indicate you will get back to them (if that is your intention). Have you ever noticed that those who complain the loudest about inaccurate media coverage are also the ones who cooperate the least?

Strive To Be The Most Knowledgeable Supervisor. Of the many factors that contribute to a reputation of competence and credibility, professional knowledge is at the top. Give attention to this reality each and every day. Additionally, recognize that leadership skills are perishable and need to be nourished constantly. Seize every opportunity to learn new concepts and to reinforce those that you have already learned. Strive to constantly pass on the knowledge you acquire, and remember that one of the best ways to really learn something is to teach it to others.

Brain Storming For Significant Events. What would you do, as the field commander, if an airliner crashed downtown, if there was a fire in a multi-unit retirement center, or a derailment of railroad cars containing a toxic substance in a residential area? Think of command post locations, ingress and egress routes for emergency equipment, ways of communicating with outside agencies, evacuations, perimeters, application of the incident command system, etc. While these things may never occur, this self-brainstorming will serve you well in refining your emergency management and leadership skills. Roll calls are a golden and often overlooked opportunities to expand these topics into tabletop exercises for your people. Be familiar with any standing plans and proposed command post locations. The future will prove this to be time well spent!

Create And Carry A Generic Unusual Occurrence Checklist. Create and always carry a generic checklist of just about every unusual occurrence/command post issue that you can think of (log, ingress/egress for emergency vehicles, communications with other entities, inside and outside perimeters, evacuations, notifications, SEMS, NIMS, etc.). This will come in pretty handy when an incident occurs, as it will help determine what is and what is not appropriate to the circumstances. After several years, this type of information will be second nature; until then, the generic checklist will serve you well. Although there are virtually scores of potential types of events, the above issues are common to all of them. Recognize possible significant events and pre-plan for them before they occur.

Look Carefully At Organizational Deviations. Upon arrival at a new command, it is not unusual to encounter a situation where things, hopefully for good reasons, are done just a little bit differently than elsewhere in the Department. You may be a new supervisor, but you are not a new employee, and you know when people have embarked on an inappropriate or slippery slope. Do not tolerate anything that is wrong. You are the only person who can take away your ethics and integrity!

Always Look Sharp. A supervisor who becomes sloppy lowers the bar for others as well. From day one, set the standard by your personal appearance. Good grooming enhances your command presence and thereby increases the likelihood of respect for you.

Know Your Community And Become It's Cheerleader. Ensure that your actions, both in deed and in spirit, reflect the reality that it is an honor to serve your community. Do all that you can to become familiar with that community, its leaders, and those things that cause it to be unique. Do not tolerate criticism of that community by your people, and help them to understand that, even in our most challenging communities, the vast majority of the residents are decent and honest people. Seize every reasonable opportunity to create positive interaction between your officers and the citizens they serve.

2. Interactions With All Other Persons

Work To Develop Solid Relationships With Others. So much of what you achieve, or fail to achieve, is related to the degree of rapport that you are able to develop and maintain with others. Strive for solid relationships that are based on respect and credibility, and not just personalities. If you start out looking for either the good or bad in people, you will usually find what you are looking for. Avoid pre-conceived notions, and factor the absolute reality that we are all a little bit different into your relationships strategy. Those individuals who enjoy solid relationships are also seen as more approachable and are more often sought out for advice and critical notifications.

Target People For Improved Relationships. For the good of the organization and your effectiveness, there will always be some people with whom you truly need to have solid relationships. They may be subordinates, peers, superiors, or persons outside of your organization. Without being patronizing or compromising your position, seek to strengthen the relationship in those areas where there is room for improvement. In many instances this is not accomplished in a single stroke, but rather achieved over time by virtue of your performance and actions. Sometimes it may not happen, but it is a worthwhile goal and among the qualities that separate managers from leaders.

Do Not Be Too Quick To Judge. Especially if your assessment is likely to be influenced by the perceptions of another. There are *at least* two sides to most stories, and not everyone sees the world through the same set of lenses. Reserve your judgment until you have talked to all of the players and understand all the facts. Do not be one of those supervisors who have strong thoughts about something that is not completely understood.

Keep A Sense Of Humor – Especially If You Are The Target. Learn to laugh even harder at yourself than others. All supervisors are occasionally the brunt of jokes and humor, especially after a bonehead mistake. If you display obvious irritation, you are just inviting more jokes and pranks in the future.

Educate And Influence Others Through Reason And Solid Information, And Not By The Force Of Your Personality.

Forceful and extensive verbalization, as well as the extensive use of hand gestures, is most often a detractor in conversations. Well thought out and reasoned discussions, in a calm manner, are likely to be far more effective. Many seasoned managers and executives avoid those persons who attempt to influence others by virtue of their strong personalities.

Do Not Go Around Asking Others How You Are Performing.

To do so is to appear insecure and too anxious to please. Reserve these types of conversations for a true mentor or your superior. Besides, when you really screw up, you will know it! This is not to be confused with the supervisor's responsibility to practice inclusiveness by soliciting input on procedures, practices, strategies, and other non-personal issues.

Never Lie To Anyone. To do so is a horrible reflection on you, a sign of weak character, and a near-unforgivable sin. This is one of those issues that can undo all the good you have done, and ruin your credibility. Certainly there will be things you cannot discuss; just say you cannot discuss them, or remain silent. Always admit mistakes, accept responsibility, and do not rationalize.

Always Take Things Seriously, But Try Not To Take Things Personally.

First and foremost, never forget that new supervisors often place themselves under greater scrutiny than do others, and sometimes feel a sting that was not intended and perceive evil where it does not exist! While easier said than done, and impossible for some people, work at not taking things personally and not holding grudges. In most instances, actions and responses that have a personal and/or painful dimension are obvious to others and are a poor reflection on the individual involved. Besides, success is the best revenge!

Maintain Solid And Cordial Relationships With Support Personnel. Find the time and make the effort to develop and maintain friendly relationships with the clerks, mechanics, janitors, and other support personnel. Also seize every reasonable opportunity to emphasize the value and indispensability of support personnel. Those who reserve their goodwill for just their superiors are disgustingly obvious. This is very much a character issue.

3. Interactions With Your Subordinates

Introductory Chat With Your People. It is always a good idea to have a get-acquainted chat with your new subordinates. Recognize the location is not as important as the opportunity for quality dialog; sometimes the front seat of a patrol car may be the ideal location. However, do not feel the need to go into laborious detail on the various issues that are well-documented rules and expectations. A clear comment that they are expected to follow the rules and adhere to established procedures sets the appropriate tone, and reduces the likelihood that a subordinate will ask you to do something inappropriate.

Do Not Talk Any More Than Necessary. Be the first to listen and the last to talk. Work hard, real hard, at being an active listener (it ain't always easy!). Besides, when we talk too much, we shut our people down. When you say something, it should be meaningful. This is especially difficult for energetic new supervisors who are impressed with themselves!

Do Not Seek To Be Liked or Accepted. Efforts to be liked or accepted, even subtle, will usually result in obviously artificial behavior on your part. Just be yourself, do your job, praise truly commendable behavior, do what you are supposed to do when someone intentionally breaks the rules, provide solid training, and don't talk too much. The only type of goodwill that is worth a darn is that which is a derivative of respect, and that is a byproduct of solid leadership. Besides, you are not paid to be popular, but to be effective!

Do Not Make Promises You Cannot Keep. It is fine to promise that you will look into something and keep an open mind, but do not promise any outcome. This is particularly important for new supervisors who are sometimes asked to take actions which appear fairly simple, but which in reality are complex and not completely understood. Remember, the devil is in the details!

Do Not Feel That You Always Have To Do Something.

Sometimes the most appropriate course of action is to do nothing, and does not even require a comment. Do not be one of those supervisors who always has something to say, whether necessary or not.

Do Not Force Your Style On Your People.

In much of what we do, there are numerous appropriate ways to proceed. Do not be one of those supervisors who are constantly taking people aside and giving guidance on style rather than right and wrong. Certainly there are instances where mentoring and supervision means discussing alternate means of accomplishing things, but only provide that guidance when it is truly merited. Few things irritate a seasoned officer more than the young supervisor who is always telling the senior officer how to do his job, and the issue is merely style and preference.

Wear Your Fairness On Your Sleeve.

Always go that “extra mile” to be as fair to your people as you possibly can. Turn over every rock, flush out and talk to every possible witness, and do whatever else is necessary before concluding that performance was substandard or that misconduct had occurred. If an employee asks that another fact or witness be considered, do it. Let your final assessment be based on *every* conceivable fact. Always keep in mind that fairness is the process and not the result. A reputation for fairness is among the highest qualities a person can achieve, and is essential for a true leader.

Do Not Hesitate To Apologize.

To do so is strength, not a weakness. If you make a mistake and it inconveniences others, publicly accept responsibility. Whether to an individual or to an entire shift, show maturity, accept responsibility, and apologize.

Do Not Exaggerate Praise.

Avoid the often-common tendency of new supervisors to go overboard with their praise to gain acceptance. Keep praise in perspective and give only when and to the degree due. One place where exaggerated praise is frequently found is in performance evaluation reports, which only erode the system they are intended to serve; have the moral courage to avoid this pitfall. Also recognize that your praise will mean very little if indiscriminately given.

Do Not Engage In Excessive Verbalization When Addressing Behavior Which Is Clearly Inappropriate. New supervisors often talk too much! New or revised policies, procedures, strategies, or equipment are among those things that may well merit considerable explanation and instruction. Behaviors that are clearly inappropriate, however, do not. While ensuring that you are completely understood, very few words are necessary when telling someone that a report is poorly written, when uniform appearance is poor, that driving habits are unnecessarily dangerous, or when interaction with a citizen is poor. You weaken your position and send out the message that there is room for misunderstanding and/or discussion when you prolong a conversation over “no brainer” issues.

Do Not Over-React To Troubling Information. Those who overreact to bad news are usually avoided and end up knowing less than the rest of us! Further, it significantly inhibits the critical goal of knowing all that is occurring. Real leaders will often use phrase such as: “Let’s wait until we have all the facts” or “Do we have the perspective of all the players?” Keep in mind the absolute reality that things seldom turn out as they initially appear, and that things just about always look different the next morning. Never “kill the messenger” by even venting to the person who brings forward some bad news. Besides, people with a reputation for “flaming out” are usually seen as “squirrely” by the troops.

Do Not Look For An Incident Or Opportunity To Establish Yourself. Just be yourself, and exercise solid management and leadership practices. Those who look for a brass ring usually lunge at something less, miss it, and look stupid. As we look back on our careers, our defining moments were usually unexpected and tested us in ways we could not reasonably have anticipated.

Recognize That Some Of Your People Are Smarter Than You. Although probably unconsciously, some new supervisors tend to think that their new exalted status is an indication of their superiority over those who have not promoted. Nothing could be further from the truth. Promotions typically involve a variety of factors, including timing and luck. Practice solid leadership and do not hesitate to learn from your people.

Strive To Impart Wisdom To Your People. Many of our people, especially the younger and newer employees, associate success with numbers, as opposed to effectiveness. As we gain in experience, we learn that one solid arrest of the right person may be far more effective to public safety than numerous random arrests, and that a few citations at a dangerous location may be far more effective than numerous citations at random locations. Strive to be a solid mentor in helping your people to recognize those things that really make a difference, how to achieve the best results, and when they are just spinning their wheels.

Conduct Audits and Look at the Little Things. Audits are valuable as one of your leadership dimensions. Strive to find little problems and solve them before they become big problems. Beyond the obvious, are established policies and procedures being complied with, or inappropriately bypassed? The only thing better than solving a problem is to prevent one!

You Cannot Have A Bad Day! At least not visibly so. Among the key responsibilities of a supervisor is to create and maintain a positive atmosphere. Unfortunately, supervisor who have bad days often end up contaminating their subordinates. Realistically, we all have bad days from time to time; work to conceal your negative emotions, or minimize your interactions with your people, when your bad days occur.

You Do Not Have The Right To Act Like A Jerk. We can all recall instances where an immature supervisor ranted and raved in roll call, and sent a bunch of irritated officers into the field. Leaders recognize that their job is to create and maintain a positive environment, and not to subject their people to foolish and immature behavior.

No Bad News On Fridays. Unless absolutely essential, avoid giving people bad news just before they go off on vacation or days off. It often spoils not only their time off, but usually impacts their family as well. Just as it bothered you, it also bothers your people when some supervisors unnecessarily spoil their days off. There are few instances that cannot wait until Monday!

Practice Inclusiveness. A big and often legitimate complaint from officers is that they are seldom given the opportunity to voice their perspective in the consideration of things that affect them. When developing a new policy, procedure, strategy, or when evaluating a potential new piece of equipment, bring some troops into the process and invite their opinions. You will end up with an improved process and the troops will have ownership. Do not be afraid of dissenting opinions from your people. Remember, you do not have all the answers. Practice inclusiveness throughout your career.

Do Not Put The Responsibility For Necessary Action On The Back Of Your Boss. Do what is expected of you as a supervisor, and never attribute an unpopular decision to your boss or some other person. Never apologize for carrying out the policies and procedures of your organization, to do so damages both the organization and your credibility. Have the backbone to stand firm as a supervisor.

Nothing Is “Off The Record”. There is no such thing as an “off the record” conversation, pertaining to the department, when you are a supervisor. Beyond the legal realities, it is a poor practice and a very slippery slope that you must avoid. You must have the ability to handle situations in the appropriate manner, and not be restricted by some foolish commitment. Courts have held that anything said to a supervisor by a subordinate, even when both are off duty, constitutes an official notification to the employer! All of our departments have many examples where alleged “off the record” conversations were later revealed by subordinates and resulted in serious repercussions for the supervisors. Make it clear to your people that nothing is “off the record.”

Do Not Accept Sub-Standard Performance. The acceptance of lousy performance merely reinforces the belief that you will accept it, with each sub-standard acceptance lowering the bar one step at a time. If you get a lousy report, kick it back; lousy driving, confront it; indifferent to a citizen; address it, etc. If accused of being “by the book,” accept it as a compliment. A belief that you will maintain the Department’s standards is among the reasons you are a supervisor!

Watch For Behavioral Changes In Your People. Be sensitive to subtle, or not so subtle, changes in the behaviors and actions of your people. Tired looking? Uncharacteristically silent or irritable? Sad? When you observe these types of behaviors, take the employee aside and share your observations, see how you can be helpful, and make appropriate referrals. Do not be reluctant to get involved for fear of treading on someone's privacy; you owe it to your people to intervene, even if they do not initially agree. These behavioral changes may indicate partner problems, marital difficulties, drug use, alcohol consumption, emotional instability, etc. Familiarize yourself with the various referral services available. Do not forget to follow-up. To some extent, we have all been there!

Are You Going To Be A “By The Book” Or A Solid Supervisor? They are one in the same and do not permit anyone to convince you otherwise. Our rules have been carefully developed based upon the most appropriate ways of dealing with the various issues that may arise, were developed for good reasons, and are often based on past problematic situations. Occasionally, there may be reasons to act otherwise; however, deviating from the rules should be done only with valid justification and appropriate notification. The occasional negative connotation associated with someone who “goes by the book” is unjustified.

Do Not Immediately Start Changing Things. Absent something that is clearly wrong, resist the temptation to immediately start changing things. You will look impulsive, the command will be disrupted, and you may well find – after awhile – that you fixed something that was not broken. Your credibility will suffer when you change something that does not need to be changed. There will be plenty of time after you have settled in and understand the lay of the land to address necessary issues.

Delegate To All Of Your People – Not Just the Most Competent. While it is less difficult, for you and for others, to delegate primarily to the most competent people, avoid the temptation. Work hard to be a solid coach and mentor, and strive to develop all of your people. Strive also to delegate jobs to people who have an interest in the task, as they will do a better job. Do not forget the commitment you made during the promotional process to develop all of your people.

Do Not Be Conned Into Approving Something That Is Wrong. There are times when none of us want to do some of the things that are expected of us. Examples include the arrest of a fellow officer, a family member, disabled war hero, etc. In situations of this nature, it is not uncommon for subordinates to seek out a supervisor in an attempt to find a way around what has to be done, and to cover themselves by putting the monkey on your shoulders. Notwithstanding the reality that supervisors are expected to make tough decisions, they are also expected to ensure that matters are appropriately handled. Make it clear to your people that matters brought to your attention will be handled appropriately and professionally.

Do Not Go Out Drinking With The Troops. The “few beers with the boys” after work should be a thing of the past. Perhaps a quick beer and early departure at a celebration, but that should be about it. Family outings, Christmas parties, athletic events, etc., are a different story. You want to avoid the types of activities where other supervisors and/or the Department are likely to be criticized, to do so places you in an awkward and potentially compromising situation. Remember, whether on duty or off duty, you are still a supervisor and nothing is off the record.

Recognize The “Fish Bowl” Effect. All eyes are on you from the time you drive your personal vehicle into the parking lot until you leave at the end of the shift. You must at all times model the behavior that you want your troops to follow. Examples are plenty and may include the following: If you swear during briefing, your troops will swear; if you carry a non-authorized piece of equipment, your staff will do the same; and, if you project a poor attitude towards the public; expect nothing more from you personnel. Bad habits and poor behavior are contagious, don't be a carrier.

Never Complain Down. When you disagree or take issue with something done by a superior, do not complain down to your subordinates. Take it up with your boss, not your people. To do so merely undermines your credibility as well as that of those above you.

Do Not Wipe Any Slate Clean. It is not unusual for a problem employee to suggest that the slate be “wiped clean” by a new supervisor, with a fresh start and the forgiving of past poor behaviors. Don’t do it. It is fine, and appropriate, for you to suggest a new opportunity to excel and that you will be as fair and objective as possible, but recognizing that the past will be a “pattern of behavior” factor if performance does not improve. If performance does improve, document that as well. Forgiving past poor performance is particularly unfair to the better employees whose performance has never wavered.

Excel As A Trainer. Unfortunately, far too many supervisors do a lousy job in the preparation and presentation of training material. It is not uncommon for some supervisors to do no preparation, and to merely read the information verbatim. Put together informative and dynamic presentations. It does not take that long, is appreciated by the troops, noticed by all, and is a solid reflection of you. Also, do not hesitate to use knowledgeable troops to provide training as well.

Do Not Permit Jokes To Get Out Of Hand. There is no group of people anywhere who collectively have a greater imagination or love of humor than cops. Unfortunately, however, our profession is replete with stories of seemingly humorous incidents that got out of hand. Be quick to shut down anything that might be inappropriate. Know when to stop laughing and bring the humor to a halt. If it is clearly out-of-bounds, stop the behavior immediately rather than waiting for the activity to end and later taking the instigator aside. Make sure to look at the year listed on the current calendar, and measure words and actions by current benchmarks, whether you like them or not. It sometimes takes courage to do this; that’s why you have those stripes and others don’t!

Do Not Let The Department Be Used As A Cover For A Cheating Spouse. Do not tolerate any situation where an off-duty officer solicits on-duty personnel to tell an inquiring spouse that he or she is on duty, but temporarily unavailable. A credible individual lies about nothing, and that includes this type of non-sense. Just ask someone who has been confronted at the station by an irate scorned spouse!

Deploy With The Public In Mind, And Not At The Expense Of The People We Serve.

Whether a department of ten or ten thousand, there are never enough officers to do the job we would like to do. However, we need to deploy wisely and put the bulk of our resources where they are most needed, which is often on those days and times when many of our people would like to be off. Factor this reality into your planning at the beginning of the deployment period. You have failed if, at the end of the deployment period, more people had worked on Wednesday nights than Saturday nights. Our people occasionally need to be reminded that these shifts go with the territory.

Never Permit A Performance Evaluation To Be A Surprise.

It is critical to provide periodic performance feedback to your people, and to never let an evaluation come as a surprise to the employee. Go that extra mile to ensure the evaluation is fair, accurate, and reflects the entire spectrum of performance. The evaluation should be a performance mirror.

Providing Respect And Recognition For Seniority Does Not Mean Accepting As Gospel Those Things Said By Senior Officers & Supervisors.

It is most appropriate to let everyone know that you respect the seniority and appreciate the input of the more senior personnel, but recognize they are not always accurate in what they say. Some senior people have twenty-five years of solid experience, while others have one year of experience twenty-five times!

Do Not Be Apologetic For Doing Your Job.

Few people enjoy taking action that is painful to someone else, but this is a reality that goes with the territory for a supervisor. A human tendency that supervisors must avoid is apologizing for doing what is expected. Do what is expected and do not feel the necessity to win the war of public opinion by telling as many people as will listen why you did what you did. If your actions were truly such that some explanation may be warranted, and it is something that can be discussed, so be it; but do not overdue it.

Be Sensitive to Offensive Words And Actions. From day one, confront and shutdown any actions or statements that have the potential to be offensive based upon gender, ethnicity, etc. The devastating impact of a complaint and subsequent investigation can be unbelievably disruptive to a command, even those found to be without merit. The best approach is prevention. Besides, proof of supervisory indifference merely adds more zeros to any legal judgment.

Know Your Subordinates. Your troops care for their families, and enjoy their interests, just as you do yours. While they probably will not say it, your people will appreciate your interest in their families. Somehow we seem to have an even greater appreciation for our people when we see them as moms, dads, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters. Also, consider finding one thing -- as minor as a television program or sports team -- that you have in common with each of your people, as that will allow something comfortable to chat about, which in turn can lead to substantial discussions. Also know what each of your people did before joining the force. Real leaders know their people. Generally, people also appreciate your use of their first names. However, do not become overly familiar with subordinates; maintain a professional, courteous relationship.

Give Special Attention To Probationary Employees And To Their Training Officers. Give the same attention to probationers, and to their Field Training Officers, as you would hope someone would give to your son or daughter if on the force. Be conspicuous to probationers in the event there is something they might want to share with you outside the ears of their trainers. An FTO who has run out of patience, goodwill, competence, or commitment needs to be moved to other duties. Do not tolerate a degree of training that you would find unacceptable for your son or daughter. Pay particular attention to probationer's evaluation reports to ensure accuracy and fairness, and ensure that identified problems are quickly addressed.

Do Not Avoid Certain Personnel. There are some people who, by virtue of their demeanor, are easy to avoid; don't. People who fall into this category may include those who are bitter over discipline, negative peer leaders (or so they think) with big mouths, and psychological bullies. Do not deprive them of the right to your presence and supervision!

Having An Open Door Policy Means Nothing. Just as you may have issues that you will only want to discuss with your boss when the "time is right," there will be times when your people will also have issues that they will only want to discuss with you when the "time is right." While it is appropriate to make it clear that you have an open door policy, be aware that there are many instances where people will not see your office as an acceptable location for what they want to say. Be conspicuous in both the field and in the station, so as to create the "right time" for potentially critical dialog. This is not intended to circumvent the chain of command, but rather to create an avenue to critical communications in unique situations; if a chain of command issue, you can always diplomatically suggest that to an employee.

Do Not Hold Grudges Over Past Discipline. Internal investigations and discipline are part of police work. It is not unusual for an officer to get suspended. Do not take this process personally and hold a grudge against the suspended officer. After an officer has completed the suspension, the matter is over. Welcome the officer back so that he or she can get on with their life.

If It Is Not In Writing, It Did Not Occur. Supervisors do not, and need not, make a written record of everything that occurs. The typical day involves many issues and interactions that do not rise to the level of documentation. However, there are instances when documentation is essential in order to deal with a problem individual, either because of a situation at hand or in terms of developing cumulative data. Be very clear with yourself as to when documentation should occur, and have the courage to create that documentation. This duty includes advising the concerned employee and, if required, obtaining his or her initials/signature of acknowledgement. This documentation is essential for any personnel actions that may take place. Remember, if it is not in writing, it did not occur

Continually Remind Officers Of Their Responsibility To Keep Each Other Out Of Trouble. The very best tool that we have to police one another is the loyal and courageous partner who immediately intervenes when a fellow officer is on the verge of doing something foolish. Do not let your people lose sight of this critical responsibility.

Continually Remind Officers That Loyalty To Each Other Stops At The Misconduct Line. This is a very critical issue that requires constant reinforcement. The closeness of officers, and their critical and often dangerous shared experiences, understandably brings about intense loyalties. Unfortunately, these loyalties can become misplaced and applied at the wrong times for the wrong reasons, and result in cover-ups and other serious misconduct. The invocation of mutual silence is always among the traits found in rogue officers, who try to use the concept of loyalty to conceal misconduct. Officers need to be continually reminded that their primary loyalties must always be to themselves, their families, and the organization, and that any partner who suggests anything but the truth is suggesting something that may cost the other person his job. This reinforcement is especially critical for new personnel who are potentially susceptible to undue influence by senior officers.

Do Not Be Intimidated By A Strong-Willed Subordinate. Stand your ground when a bigmouth subordinate challenges you in an overwhelming way. The approach is simple, don't change a thing and do not be intimidated. Deprive the strong-willed person of what they like best: an audience. Most of these challenges occur at roll calls or in tense field situations. Move the conversation to a private location and at a time of your choosing.

Promptly Respond When A Supervisor Is Requested. Develop a reputation as someone who always promptly responds when a supervisor is requested. Those supervisors who "pick & choose" what they respond to, or who "drag their feet" because of the potential complexities or difficulties of an incident, are not worthy of their stripes!

Individual Failure or Systemic Failure? When something goes wrong, is it possible that the real villain is circumstances beyond the individual's control? When something goes sideways, ask yourself the following questions: 1. Was proper guidance given? 2. Did the person assigned have the necessary skills for the task? 3. Was any necessary training provided? And 4. Were adequate resources provided for the task? There is often ownership beyond the individuals involved.

4. Interactions With Your Peers

Develop Credibility With Your Fellow Supervisors. To have a leadership team, to achieve supervisory consistency, and to do the best job possible, the supervisors -- to the extent reasonable -- need to enjoy some degree of mutual respect and credibility. Those who might suggest that the opinions of fellow supervisors are unimportant are mistaken. There may be differences of opinion on specific issues, but there should never be differences with respect to credibility and good intentions.

Be Your Own Person and Do Not Fall Under Another Supervisor's Influence. Realistically, it will take you some time to solidify your assessment of your supervisory colleagues. First impressions are often inaccurate, and you may well have a different opinion of a colleague as opposed to when you were a subordinate. Be appreciative, attentive, and sincere in accepting the thoughts and philosophies of your senior colleagues, but keep an open mind and be an independent thinker. All of your colleagues will have something to offer; select and adopt their good traits as you develop your leadership style.

Strive For Supervisory Consistency. One of the historic top complaints of officers is a lack of consistency in the manner that various supervisors carry out their duties. Be candid with your fellow supervisors about your individual differences and philosophies, and how it sends out mixed and confusing messages to the troops. Strive towards a supervisory cadre that is united, both in deed and spirit, in how issues are addressed and resolved. Never, however, compromise ethical conduct or principles for the sake of esprit de corps.

Do Not Tolerate Supervisory Shopping. There will be times when an officer may not like the decision of the assigned supervisor and will approach you in order to obtain a "more acceptable" decision. Do not let this happen. Refer the officer to the original supervisor. Permitting this behavior reinforces bad habits among officers and can cause disharmony in the supervisory ranks.

Do Not Permit The Bias Of Your Fellow Supervisors or Superiors To Automatically Be Yours As Well. Having decent relationships with most people is among the traits found in our best leaders. Do not automatically buy into the strained relationships of others. Always strive to develop and maintain positive relationships with as many people as you can. This is equally applicable for outside agencies and other organizations that may become critical partners in unusual occurrences.

Make Your Own Assessments. Listen and avail yourself of the assessments of others in a variety of situations, but let your assessment be a reflection of *your* best judgment. Not all supervisors see things the same way, or apply the same weight to the various factors. Whatever you do, do not yield to the biggest mouth or strongest personality.

Be Realistic In Assessing the Energy and Overt Commitment of Your Senior Fellow Supervisors. It is very common for new supervisors to be at their peak in terms of energy, enthusiasm, and commitment. It is also a fact that some of your senior colleagues will often have less energy, enthusiasm, and overt commitment – just one of life’s realities. Factor this reality into your assessment of your colleagues and – at least initially – strike that balance between your level and their levels, and behave in a way that maximizes what you have to offer in a manner that does not appear condescending. They are your colleagues and you need to do your part in developing and maintaining a cohesive leadership team.

5. Interactions With Your Superiors

Introductory Chat With A Command Officer. This person is typically either the patrol commander or the station captain, and the chat is a result of your new assignment. The purpose is typically to get acquainted and be welcomed to the new assignment. It is not necessary to ask what is expected of you (you should know that by now!). This conversation will create the opportunity for the discussion of any special guidance or concerns, and start the relationship on a positive note.

Do Not Think That You Are Being Compassionate and Reasonable By Keeping A Heart Wrenching Problem From Your Superiors. When you become aware of an employee who is having serious personal and/or family issues, let your boss know *immediately*. Oftentimes, your notification will provide that critical missing link to bring other issues into focus and enable quick and appropriate intervention. Unfortunately, our profession is full of tragic stories, including suicides, DUI's, and other types of issues that may well have been avoided had the knowledge been communicated immediately as it should have been. A supervisor has a responsibility to take care of his or her people, and that means intervention when necessary

Make Those Notifications. Make sure you have a clear understanding as to when the on-duty or off-duty command staff desires notifications, and make them in a timely manner. If in doubt, make the notifications.

Keep Your Supervisors Informed. You are the eyes and ears to ensure that your superiors know what is occurring – do not fail in this responsibility. Remember, an intentional failure to pass on something that your boss would want to know reflects a conscious decision on your part to deprive him or her of that information. Recognize that candor and openness in upward communications encourages, and usually produces, candor and openness in downward communications, and increases the confidence of the superior in the subordinate. Do not fall prey to someone who asks that you not pass something on.

Be A Straight Shooter And Unbiased Investigator In The Conduct of Internal Investigations. When conducting personnel investigations, do not convey, explicitly or implicitly, any view you may hold regarding the subject's culpability, or non-culpability. Treat all interviewees with respect, phrase all questions objectively, and faithfully record the responses. When providing any witness characterization, make sure it is clearly identified as your opinion. You are neither a prosecutor or a defense representative. Leave conclusions to your commanding officer. Everyone will benefit from this approach.

Avoid The Appearance (And The Reality!) Of "Sucking-Up" To Your Boss. Beyond being obvious and disgusting, it is not an effective way to impress the people you work for. Do not unnecessarily hang around your boss. This behavior detracts from credibility and alienates a person from their peers. This will also be obvious to your subordinates. The long-term keys to success are hard work and effectiveness, not constant interaction and proximity to superiors.

Supervisory Logs. Your supervisory log is very important. It is a document to let others know of your observations, concerns, and actions. Supervisory logs allow the command staff a view of activities in the organization they cannot always witness for themselves. It is used for personnel issues, internal investigations, audits, communities concerns, equipment needs, planning, etc. When you identify a problem and it is within your authority and scope to solve it, do so. Ensure your logs are meaningful and properly prepared. These logs are a constant and accurate reflection of your abilities.

Create "Stand Alone" Documents And Supervisory Logs. There will be times when your superior will want to pass on the information that you provided to another person or entity. When you pass information to your superior, make it complete so that it can easily be passed to others without need for correction and/or expansion. In those instances where you are suggesting that correspondence of some incident be generated and passed on to another organization, attached a draft of the recommended correspondence. Your boss will really appreciate this approach.

6. Critical Realities To Keep In Mind

Everybody Sees Things A Bit Differently. Some people see things a little differently, and some people see things much differently. These differences are particularly evident in the workplace when dealing with subordinates, peers, and superiors alike. These differences are not good, bad, right, or wrong – just absolute reality. Examples include: Overly trusting vs. instant suspicion; broad direction vs. detailed guidance; inclusiveness vs. not wanting input; approachable vs. standoffish; quick to forgive vs. unforgiving; quick to see evil vs. understanding; etc. It is *critical* to be continually sensitive to this absolute reality, and to develop the skills to communicate with persons across this broad spectrum of preferred styles. Taking and becoming familiar with some of the more accepted style instruments, such as the Myers-Briggs Inventory, can be helpful to understanding individual differences.

Always Preserve The Ability For Potentially Critical Issues To Be Handled In A Formal Manner. There are times when a supervisor may *preliminarily* determine that something need not be further pursued, but certainly the matter needs to be communicated up the chain of command. In such instances, all of the investigative details (witnesses, photos, documentation, chronological log, statements, potential evidence, etc.) must be collected and preserved, to enable a full and complete investigation in the event the initial decision is overturned.

Do Not Underestimate The Capacity Of Some Of Your People To Do Some Really Foolish Things. Among the most dangerous of work place conditions can be the new officer who has yet to mature. Remember some of the foolish things that you did as a new officer? We hire wonderful men and women with an abundance of strong personal and professional qualities, however some of them still have room to grow from the standpoint of maturity and judgment. Just one of life's realities. Give your folks enough latitude to grow and be creative, but not enough to self-destruct! Also recognize the difference between room for growth and unsuitability for the profession.

Change Is Often Painful, But Less So With Mature And Courageous Supervisors.

Most difficulties associated with change stems from the resistance of those who desire to maintain the status quo, and have difficulty in accepting new realities. The key to success in achieving the desired change rests -- more so than with any other group of people -- with the first line supervisors. When the supervisors are weak and do not do the things necessary to change behaviors, the change is painful and prolonged. Mature and courageous supervisors, on the other hand, immediately confront, challenge, and change behaviors.

That “Gray Area” Is Not As Big As You Might Think.

The infamous “gray area” is much smaller for the smarter people. You can usually reduce its size by careful consideration and gathering additional information. It is the decisions in the gray area that can make or break a supervisor; those which are black and white are usually no brainers. Remember what John Wayne said: “It’s lonely at the top, and it is even lonelier when you’re stupid!”

Be Continually Aware That For Every Action There Is A Reaction – Think In These Terms.

Condition yourself, and your people, to identify the potential reactions to the various things you may consider doing. Will an isolated personnel action create a precedent? Will a given strategy cause havoc in the community? Will a considerate act be seen as favoritism? Etc. There are usually various paths to consider; be smart in deciding which one to follow.

Your Former Partners And Classmates Are Still Your Friends.

There is no need to treat your old friends different just because you have promoted, or to suggest they use your title instead of your first name (except for formal occasions). In a subtle way, you can let them know that you have a new role that you take seriously, and that you will appreciate their recognition of that reality. An old friend that expects you to permit him or her to do something inappropriate was not much of a friend after all.

Keep The “Peaks & Valleys” Reality In Mind. It is critical to keep in mind, and to remind your people when necessary, that life is a series of “peaks & valleys” for all of us, the only difference is the heights of the peaks and the depth of the valleys. When in the valley, it is important to realize that there are still peaks ahead, and when on those peaks to keep in mind that valleys lie ahead and to enjoy the peaks while you can. Keeping this reality in mind, especially when all is going well, somehow makes the valleys a little less difficult when that cycle occurs. When you find that your valleys are becoming particularly deep, be sure to reach out to a trusted friend or counselor. We have all been there! The failure of some people to be sensitive to this reality can have disastrous results, including: loss of positions, broken families, and suicides.

Do Not Be Too Hard On Yourself Over Mistakes. It is a common trait for conscientious people to put themselves under a far greater spotlight than is shined by others. Keep this reality in mind and do not beat yourself up too badly when you screw up. Learn from your mistakes and don’t repeat them.

Never Give Up And Lose Your Commitment. Everyone occasionally experiences rough times, personally and professionally. You are no exception. Some people lose their spirit and become just another supervisor when rough times occur. Real leaders pick themselves up, and continue to do the best job possible. Be a real leader when your rough times occur.

If It Does Not Kill You, It Will Make You Stronger. Hopefully smarter as well! Each crisis in our life, whether personal or professional, will make it a little less difficult to handle the next one. You will find that some of the things that really bother you today will be seen as minor irritations in the future. A good thing to remember.

Outbursts Are Never Forgotten. Outbursts of anger are a sign that you have lost control of your emotions. If you do have an outburst, life will go on and you will be forgiven, but the outburst will never be forgotten by those who witnessed or incurred your wrath. Just one of life’s realities. Outbursts are a good thing to avoid.

Handling Adversity Will Be A Key Measurement. You will be judged by many people in many ways in many situations. A critical issue for others will be the manner in which you perform when faced with adversity, both personally and professionally. Sometimes you have to be somewhat of an actor, and not openly display the anguish you are experiencing over a crisis in your life.

You Will Never Please Everyone – Just Accept It! And this means not only your subordinates, but colleagues as well. Once you have embarked on a course of action, and taken reasonable measures to ensure the intended actions are appropriate, do what you feel is right and maintain a steady course. Beyond explaining your rationale, do not keep the wound open by trying to convince someone who is really not interested in what you have to say.

Try To Gain Your Greatest Satisfaction From Your Knowledge That You Have Done A Good Job. You will find that it is this factor, more so than the accolades of others, that drive the most mature and competent leaders. Certainly it is very satisfying to know that your boss is pleased with your performance, but such may not always be the case. Deriving your greatest satisfaction from your perception of your solid performance will sustain you in the absence of accolades, and also when all is not well. This attitude will help keep you focused on the things that really count; consistently doing the best job you can for the organization and the men and women you are privileged to lead.

A Piece Of This Universe Is Your Responsibility. You may not be able to change the world, or even your department, but you -- more so than any other person -- do have the responsibility for that little chunk of the universe that you supervise. If you are a solid and conscience leader, you will have motivated and satisfied personnel who will feel good about themselves, their profession, their colleagues, and their organization. Work hard to make sure that your little chunk of the universe is a good one!

Continuing Leadership Education. Leadership skills are perishable! This is especially true for skills and behaviors which are not in complete sync with your personal makeup. Obligate yourself to seize every opportunity to reinforce and enhance your leadership skills through education, seminars, professional readings, and additional experiences. Take a personal inventory of your knowledge, skills, conduct, attitude, beliefs and job performance to ensure you are doing the job right. You owe it to your people!

Enjoy Your Time As A Supervisor. These are the best years of your life! Remember, one day you will retire and sit on your front porch and reflect on your career and job performance. You will ask yourself, did I do the job right? Was I a success? Make sure the answer is “yes!”

P.S. Look for the best in your people and you will often find what you are looking for!

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8. Additional Notes