



TAKING COMMAND

KEITH D. BUSHEY

Establishing Credibility...

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Introduction

Whoever said that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression really knew what he (or she) was talking about. Most of us are aware of situations where a new chief or command officer got off to a bad start by saying or doing the wrong, and either never truly recovered or was long plagued by initial missteps.

The purpose of this booklet is to hopefully be of value to command personnel as they take over new departments or new commands, by discussing what appear as best practices. I wish that I could say that I have always done the right things in the many commands that I have assumed, in both the civilian law enforcement and military arenas, but such has not always been the case. While I have always worked hard, gave a great deal of thought to what I planned to do, and had great intentions, there have been times – especially in my earlier command years – when my actions left much room for improvement. Like all aspects of leadership, hard work and good intentions are not enough, an understanding of leadership concepts and knowledge is essential.

We always seem to learn a great deal more from the things that we do wrong, as opposed to the things that we have done right. While it is always good to learn from our mistakes, it is even better to learn from the mistakes of others. If mistakes translate into wisdom, then I must be a very wise person, as I believe that I have made just about every mistake possible and have finally stumbled across the most appropriate approaches through the process of elimination.

Good luck in getting off to a good start as you assume command!

TAKING COMMAND

Philosophies to Articulate

The “Magic Bullet” to Morale (*and everything else!*)

The issue of morale is almost always an issue, it just depends on the degree. Short term and “feel good” issues, such as new uniforms or badges or patches or cars or whatever are just that; short term. *In the long run, the only issue that will maximize the degree to which personnel find satisfaction is that of the leadership skills and practices of supervisory and management personnel.* Solid leaders make solid decisions, give solid guidance, engage in solid personnel practices, have solid tactical skills, and do the right things promptly for the right reasons – it is that simple! Hard work, good intentions, and common sense are critical, but only when associated with solid leadership training and mentoring.

The Correlation Between Leadership & Public Safety

People must never lose sight of the absolute reality of the relationship between the leadership skills of key personnel and safety of the community. Plain and simple, solid leaders know how to lead, direct, plan, strategize, deploy, promote, hold accountable, and the myriad of issues related to managing a complex organization that performs critical tasks. Just about everyone with stripes, bars and stars has some degree of skill in these areas, but the degree of those skills are absolutely related to overall performance and public safety.

The Correlation Between Leadership & Organizational Drama

This reality is so absolute that it might as well be science! As leadership skills go up, drama goes down, and vice versa. Solid leaders give solid guidance, have the ability and inclination to coach and mentor and hold accountable, keep people on track, keep people and the organization focused, promptly resolve issues, understand and insist on appropriate delegation, and are widely seen in a positive and credible light.

Understand the Nature of Communities, And be a Cheerleader for those that We Serve

Recognizing that the majority of citizens in even our most challenging communities are law abiding and share our values is not just politically correct, but it is a reality. The conspicuous nature of criminals and crime in some of our neighborhoods is such that we sometimes forget the overwhelming number of wonderful citizens who are behind those barred doors, sleeping in their bathtubs to avoid being the victims of gunfire, and afraid to unnecessarily venture out of doors. Those homes are also full of broken hearts, because some of the crime is attributed to their children who were more influenced by neighborhood peers than by their own families; a tragic reality of many of our communities.

Don't See Audits and Outside Inquiries in a Negative Light

Emphasize the reality that different people have different perspectives, and availing one's self of additional perspectives is a healthy process. Just about all organizations become insular and fall into the habit of doing things a particular way.

A new command officer is wise to review policies, procedures, and practices as part of the process of getting a handle on the new command. Soliciting outside perspectives should not be seen in a threatening or negative light, but rather part of a continuing process of ratification and self-improvement. The results of such inquiries will not be accepted as gospel, but part of a review process. At some future point it is likely that subject matter experts from the existing department will be asked to review other agencies as part of the same process.

Actions & Behaviors Upon Assuming Command

Recognize That Your Initial Actions Will Be Immediately Noticed and Long Remembered

Whoever said, “First impressions are lasting impressions” knew what he (or she) was talking about! It is terribly important not make a bad first impression, which can often occur when you try to too hard to make a good first impression. When first arriving at your new command, the less said and done, the better. Be very careful not to do or say things that might end up defining you in a problematic way.

Be as Conspicuous as Possible as Soon as Possible

Except in extraordinary situations, you will be somewhat known by reputation before arrival. There is always some anxiety accompanying the arrival of a new boss, and that anxiety can be reduced, and the curiosity addressed, by being conspicuous and introducing yourself to the staff. Every boss has somewhat of a history, good and bad, and often distorted and exaggerated. Start the process of giving people the

opportunity to form their own judgments about you, as opposed to what they may or may not have heard from others. Whatever you do, don't over-react to potential negative perceptions and overly compensate to try to change perceptions, just behave in a balanced and professional manner; the best perceptions are those that emerge in a natural and gradual manner.

Have an Introductory Chat with Your People

Let people see you and get to know you to some extent. This is not the time to go into detail about what you intend to do, but primarily an introductory process. Without "blowing your horn," tell people a little about you, your family, and the things that you have experienced in the past. These types of discussions should be pleasant and low key.

Avoid Discussing Your Intentions

It is critical that you realize that your future actions are likely to be influenced by factors that you may not immediately recognize and by events that may not have yet taken place! Things are often not as they initially appear or as others may have described them. A wise executive is someone who knows that he or she does not have all the answers, and someone who does not comment on things, or worse yet makes judgments, on things that might not be completely understood. The best course of action is to indicate that you have an open mind and are anxious to learn as much as you can about your new command, and that means availing yourself of potential multiple perspectives.

Don't Reveal Your Bias or Concerns About Your New Command

It is the rare person who doesn't have some perceived notions about a new command, that is natural and to be expected. However, the wise executive recognizes that those perspectives may well be inaccurate and are only as good as the person who explained them. It is also not uncommon for different people to see different issues, and attribute those issues to different factors. Also, if your predecessor left under unpleasant circumstances, the perception is likely to be negative, which may or not be accurate and may or not be fair. Keep "your cards close to your chest" and don't make statements that may become problematic in the future.

Recognize that First Impressions Are Seldom Accurate

The initial impressions of personnel and situations invariably change in the first few weeks of your tenure. It is not at all uncommon for some people that initially appeared to be highly motivated and effective to be less so, and for people who did not initially shine to be some of the best employees. This can come back to haunt you if you allow yourself to be influenced by and mistakenly confide in the wrong person early in your tenure! This reality is among the many reasons to be careful about what you say and how critical it is to keep an open mind.

Ensure the Professionalism and Credibility of the Disciplinary System

Whether the disciplinary system you inherited is one person or an entire division, give immediate attention to ensure that investigations are conducted in an objective, professional, and ethical manner. Vicariously, the top person is responsible for

everything that occurs in a command, but the conduct and performance of the disciplinary process is a *direct reflection* of that executive, and an extension of his or her ethical standards and value system. Even the finest and most ethical process will occasionally draw criticism, but the goal should be for the workforce, in general, to perceive the process as professional and the top executive as someone who will always ensure that investigators go “that extra mile” to be fair and objective.

Conduct Internal Meetings with Specific Individuals and Groups

Groups and individuals are just about always anxious to meet with the new boss, and to start to process of influence and interaction. Don't let them down.

Do More Listening Than Talking

Excessive verbalization is one of the symptoms of being a bit uncomfortable, and that is why crooks talk too much. New command officers, in an attempt to facilitate “fitting in” or “being accepted,” sometimes do the same. Always recall the words of Confucius: “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt!”

Avoid References To Your Previous Commands

Listening to a boss who continually makes reference to past commands gets real old real fast. When discussing previous experiences, avoid specific references and use expressions such as, “in a past experience...” as opposed to, “when I was in River City...” This is not to say that discussions that include specifics about the past are inappropriate, just don't jam them down the throat of your new workforce.

Don't Start "Importing" Practices and Procedures from Your Previous Commands

There is a big difference between what is truly an improvement as opposed to what you may have previously developed a comfort level with elsewhere. As the new boss, don't immediately start changing things to reflect what you preferred in previous commands. For the new chief, immediately changing the uniforms, patches, badges, vehicle markings, call signs, etc...is not a good thing. This is not to say that changes may not be warranted, but let such changes be seen as reasoned, based on input and reflection, and not as things done impulsively by the new boss.

Don't Try To "Sell" Yourself - Be Somewhat Reserved

Avoid self-serving excessive verbalization! You are who you are and you have accomplished what you have accomplished, but don't jam your accomplishments down the throat of others. A wise executive is one who is equally candid about some of things that you could have done better in the past, and who is anxious to learn from past mistakes.

Accept Nothing as Gospel

As the new person, listen intently and politely, but don't buy into anything you are told! Let people know that you appreciate and will consider all perspectives, but recognize that there are often multiple conflicting perspectives. It is not at all unusual for difference people to "look at the same screen, but see different pictures." Also, recognize that sometime, "what people see depends on where they sit." All of us form impressions based on our own experiences, our positions, our

strengths, and our weaknesses, and your new employees are no exception. It is very easy to get off on the wrong foot by listening to a single perspective, and basing your initial actions on inaccurate or incomplete information.

Conduct a Transition Discussion

Seek to have a transitional discussion with your predecessor, and avail yourself of that person's perspective on the totality of factors involving that command. Be appreciative and attentive, but also recognize that he or she may also have a perspective on some things or some people that you may ultimately see differently. This is absolutely not intended to cause the new executive to be skeptical, but rather to keep an open mind based on the reality that different people sometimes see things differently. Having the benefit of your predecessor's evaluation on various issues (personnel, resources, training needs, community leaders, etc.) is invaluable.

Strive To Be Consistent and Accurate In Everything You Say and Do

Every one of us, and your new employees are no exception, hope that our bosses will say and do things that are consistent with what we believe to be the best courses of action. Unfortunately, sometimes people only hear what they want to hear, or will over-react negatively to other things. Work hard to be accurate and consistent in what you say to hopefully minimize the potential for misunderstanding. It is especially important to "not play to your audience" and potentially say different things to different groups of people.

Recognize “Cliques” and Attempts to Influence You

It is very common for “cliques” to exist in workplaces, and for those “cliques,” with their own informal leaders, to see things very differently. Just as *YOU* would like the opportunity to influence your new boss with your perspective on issues, there will always be employees who will seek to be the dominant force in educating you and influencing your actions. This is nothing sinister, just reality. Keep an open mind and do not permit yourself to be selectively educated in this manner.

Gently Discredit Cliques

Without criticizing the individuals involved, let your actions reflect your recognition of various perspectives, and a commitment to do things that reflect your best judgment with respect to the entire organization. It is likely that your actions will ultimately be consistent with the belief of a certain segment of your command, but let it be known that it is not a personal or “clique” issue, but a reflection of your best judgment based on much thought and reflection.

Discuss Loyalty To You vs. Loyalty To The Department

Let your people know that you are not seeking any degree of loyalty that has the potential to be in conflict with loyalty to the department. Encourage your people to directly confront and raise any issue where it appears that there may be a difference between loyalty to the department and to you, and commit yourself to providing the type of leadership where this problem is not likely to be perceived.

Articulate Decision Making Priorities (Community-Department-Employee)

Let your people know that as much as you care for the employees and their best interests, that the organization exists not for the employees, but for the citizens we serve. While your goal will always be to try to make decisions that benefit the citizens, the department, and the employees, when “push comes to shove” and a tough decision needs to be made, the order of your priorities will be as follows: First, the best interests of the city and its citizens; secondly, the best interests of the department; and finally, the best interests of the personnel.

This order of priorities may seem harsh an anti-employee, but it is really just the opposite. A strong and credible department is clearly in the best interests of the employees, and is often damaged – to the overall detriment of the employees – when an executive decides to retain someone who should be terminated, tolerates a senior person who is largely unproductive, accommodates a person in a position that is of questionable value, or takes other measures that detract from the effectiveness of the department.

Avoid Criticizing the Person You Replaced

Unless your predecessor was a horrible person that did some really bad stuff, he or she was probably pretty much like you! He or she probably did a few things to be really proud of, a thing or two (or more) that wasn't all that great, and maybe even a real bonehead mistake. Be gracious in your comments, indicating an appreciation for some of the accomplishments you inherited and suggesting that you hope your predecessor will be continually available as a resource. You should also

recognize that our predecessors are occasionally very popular with the troops, the community, or both. Criticizing the person you replaced won't really hurt that person very much, but it will be a negative reflection on you.

Recognize that You Are Not a Savior, But a Temporary Steward

The older we get, the faster the time goes by. As we look back on positions we have held, we can usually reflect on at least a dozen or so others that we know of who also served in the same capacity. In the big scheme of things, our tenure is but a small blip on a big historic screen, and our time in command positions is really not all that long. Recognize that it is your honor to be a steward in that position, like many others before you, and that you hope to be a good and positive steward and to leave your command, just like others have done, a bit better than you found it.

Strike a Balance Between Any Honeymoon Period and the Need To Not Act Prematurely

The good news is that a new boss sometimes has a bit of a "honeymoon period" where there is a potential to accomplish some additional things, such as a new chief getting authority to add a new sergeant, get new vehicles, etc. The bad news is that sometimes the new executive doesn't know enough about the organization to make the right decisions. If gains are made during this "honeymoon period," use those gains to achieve things that are not specific to any person (i.e., perhaps an additional sergeant, but the vacancy not to be filled immediately, etc.).

Discredit the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy that We Spend 90% of Our Time on 10% of Our Employees

We have all heard this so many times that we have started to believe it. It is time to shatter this foolishness and manage in a way that permits us to spend 90% of our time on 90% of our people. The real key is *DELEGATION* at all levels. Make it an organizational felony for anyone to use the expression, “it is easier to just do it myself or give it to someone else.” People will be given the tasks that are appropriate to their ranks and assignments, and if weak in those areas will be provided whatever additional training that may be required to establish proficiency.

Avoid Unnecessary Controversial Conversations and Remarks

Avoid making comments that have no relation to the workplace and which have the potential to create unnecessary friction with other employees. Examples of things to avoid would include issues related to abortion and religion, just to mention a few.

Communicate Your Vision In Broad and General Terms

While specific goals and actions are not appropriate for the new boss, it is fine to make statements related to overall issues such as: Seeking a reduction in crime, making our communities safer, addressing traffic injuries and fatalities, etc.

Conduct an “Assumption of Command” Audit

Seek to have an audit of equipment and selected evidence conducted if at all possible. You need to know what is on hand,

and what may be missing. Of particular concern would be to inventory and account for the location of all department-owned firearms, and to call for an audit of the evidence room with an emphasis on drugs, money, and firearms. Without these measures, long-standing missing or stolen property becomes your problem.

Ensure That The Correlation Between Leadership and Public Safety Is Institutionalized In the Things That You Say and Do

This is a message that needs to be continually stressed, as you never want people to lose sight of the reality those employees who are carefully selected, well trained, well-equipped, and well-led translates into safer communities. Seek opportunities to demonstrate this by examples. It is something that makes good sense and can be easily explained, but which many executives fail to stress.

Be Prepared To Confront and Explain Your Past

If you have made mistakes in the past, and we all have, your new employees will probably know of some of them. Be prepared to fall on your sword and acknowledge things that could have been done better, and with as few words as possible. Recognize the human tendency to engage in excessive verbalization in those areas where our pain is the greatest. Recognize also that the truth hurts, and is often validated by the way people over-react to verbal pain.

Draw Several Critical Lines In the Sand

It is acceptable and desirable for the new boss to draw several lines in the sand with respect to critical issues that will not

change with additional tenure. Examples would include making it clear that you will not tolerate officers who are untruthful, who steal, who mistreat citizens, and who are involved in any form of discrimination, to mention a few of the most important. Making issues such as these clear as soon as possible is in everyone's best interests.

Avail Yourself of a Superb Mentoring and Support System – Fellow Executives

Nobody has all the answers, and availing ourselves of multiple perspectives is critical to the development of an executive. The best lessons involve scar tissue, and if we can learn from the scar tissues of others so much the better. Just as you are likely to share your experience and thoughts with others, your fellow executives will also be there for you. Reach out to them and learn from their experiences.

Be Careful Not To Judge Your New Organization Based On Your Past Organizations

All of us have a tendency to judge our new organizations based on our past organizations. Avoid this reality, take the time to understand your new workplace, and don't be too quick to consider importing some things from previous commands.

Educate Your Staff On the Most Effective Ways To Get Your Attention and Influence You

Share your work-related pet peeves with your new staff, so that they will hopefully avoid doing and saying things that will detract from their effectiveness in dealing with you. If boisterous and excitable behavior (etc.) turns you off, let them

know so they will be careful not to behave in that manner in their dealings with you.

Commit To Nothing of a Specific Nature – Just an Open Mind

When new in the workplace, there is typically no shortage of things that people will want you to commit to (promotions, assignments, training, additional resources, etc.). Commit to nothing other than wanting to do the best job possible, taking issues and requests seriously, and having an open mind.

Don't Immediately Start Changing Things

This is very difficult for some persons, as the new boss is often anxious to get started in achieving goals and objectives. Unless a truly critical issue that must be addressed immediately, defer making any changes until you understand the workplace and the reasons why certain things are done in a certain way. To do otherwise is to look foolish and potentially fix some things that may well not need fixing.

Don't Wipe Any Slates Clean

It is not unusual for an employee to attribute his or her work difficulties to the last boss, and to suggest that the new boss “wipe the slate clean” for that employee, and get off to a fresh start. Don't do it! The best course of action is to just explain that if that was the case, the future should be good and “wiping the slate clean” will not be necessary. Progressive documentation becomes essential in personnel matters, and you certainly don't want to render past information as inadmissible for future use. Realistically, it is likely that the

problem is more with the employee than whomever he or she works for.

Supervisory Expectations

Expect Supervisors to Act Like Supervisors

In all instances and in all activities, among your primary concerns will be the performance and presence of supervisory personnel.

Was a supervisor present, and if not why not. Did a supervisor promptly respond, and if not why not. Did a supervisor provide appropriate supervision and guidance, and if not why not. Did a supervisor keep people on the right track with respect to professionalism and behavior, and if not why not. Did a supervisor ensure the completion, where appropriate, of comprehensive and accurate documentation, and if not why not. Did the supervisor ensure prompt and appropriate notifications, and if not why not, did the troops receive adequate training before and subsequent to certain situations, and if not why not.

You don't expect a perfect world, but that supervisors do the best job they can based on their skills and expertise, and that the continued professional development of supervisory and management personnel will be among your top priorities.

Expect Supervisors to be Accurate and "Honest Brokers" in Guidance and Comments Regarding Your Actions

Make clear that you understand that they will likely be people, including supervisors, who will disagree with some of your

actions and beliefs, and that is a reality that just goes with the territory of command. However, also make it very clear that you expect all supervisors to be “honest brokers” in accurately describing your guidance, your concerns, and the reasons behind that guidance and those concerns. While it would be nice to have warm and enthusiastic support for all that you say and do, that is not the real world and you understand that. Fairness and objectivity is not an unrealistic goal, and that is your expectation.

You Expect Decisions To Be Made Based On What Is The Right Thing To Do, And Not Concern As To How Someone Is Likely To Perceive Your Decision.

Decisions made based on potential perceptions as opposed to just doing the right thing are very often “today’s solution and tomorrow’s nightmare!” Just do the right thing.

Strengthen Organizational Communications

The accurate and timely flow of information is almost always an issue with most (yes, most!) organizations. Commit yourself to doing everything reasonable (things in writing in addition to verbalization, clarification, etc.) to ensure that information is communicated to all intended levels of the organization in an accurate and timely manner, and that you expect supervisors to play a key role in that objective.

Daily Actions & Behaviors To Sustain Credibility

Seek To Be Respected – Not To Be Liked

The importance of this issue cannot be overstated, and it reflects one of the greatest impediments to the effectiveness and credibility of supervisors. It is a human tendency to want to be liked and to fit in, and a very common objective of new supervisors. ***Shed this tendency!*** An absolute reality is that supervisors who seek to be liked or popular end up factoring that goal into their actions and decisions, and ultimately end up being less effective, not necessarily making the right decisions, and usually losing the respect of some of their people, if not all of them eventually.

While we often complicate things, it is truly as easy as it sounds: “Just do the right things for the right reasons!” There is no such thing as an effective supervisor whose actions pleases everyone; get used to it. It is about as good as it gets when your subordinates indicate that they don’t always like or agree with your actions, but must grudgingly acknowledge that your decisions are sound and respected. The only type of popularity that is worth a darn is that which is a derivative of respect.

Know Your People

If you like, respect, and appreciate your people, you need to take the time to get to know them, period! Nothing is more important to any of us than our families, and knowing something about the families of your people sends out all of the right messages about you.

Maintain a Pleasant and Consistent Demeanor

Your demeanor as an executive is critical, and sets the tone for your stewardship and your credibility. The days of being “one of the troops” are over, and the time has come to be somewhat reserved and very careful about what you do and say. While not consistent with some of our personalities, a worthwhile goal is to have a pleasant and somewhat reserved workplace demeanor. Recognizing the strong impact that the bosses’ demeanor has on the workplace environment, the very best leaders work hard to not have bad days at work (at least not visibly so).

Don’t Talk Too Much

Can’t say it any more clearly! Say what you need to say, be as detailed and comprehensive as necessary, but don’t be a motor mouth! This is not to say that casual conversations should be avoided; just do not be someone whose mouth works harder than your ears.

Avoid Jokes and Overly Chatty Behavior

This is a pretty tall order for personable individuals, but a goal worth pursuing. The nature of today’s workplace is such that it is very easy to offend someone, and that is certainly not something that the boss should be doing. Telling a joke is usually taking a little bit of a chance (to some extent), but no one has ever been criticized for not telling a joke. When it comes to being chatty and having conversations that can be construed as gossip, that type of behavior is absolutely inconsistent with the actions expected of an executive, and definitely detracts from credibility.

Stress the Importance of Developing and Maintaining Good Relationships

Over time, the single most valuable asset in achieving organizational goals is the development and maintenance of good relationships with other individuals and organizations with whom you interact. An effective executive does not have the right to engage in petty squabbles and unnecessary conflicts, as anything less than positive organizational relationships ends up being detrimental to the commands and to the employees. While there are times when positive relationships are tough to establish and maintain, those times should be pretty rare for an executive who has his or her act together.

Insist Upon Promptly Receiving Critical Information

Make it abundantly clear that you want to immediately receive critical information, *based on perimeters you have articulated*, and that when in doubt you expect your people to error on the side of caution and to contact you. The only thing worse than troubling information that you are aware of is troubling information that you are not aware of. Make it clear that you interpret an absence of troubling information to be an indication that all is well, and that you will not tolerate being kept in the dark when something is occurring.

On a related note, do recognize times when you truly need to have some peace and tranquility, such as when being on vacation. Hopefully, there is another employee in whom you have confidence that can act on your behalf and handle things to your satisfaction. Also, the tenured executive either has to die of a premature heart attack or realistically identify some

things that may not constitute immediate critical situations requiring his or her attention. Although we all wish that it wasn't true, worrying about what is going on at the department, or with the city manager, while we are away at conferences (or whatever) is one of those troubling situations that goes with the territory for a police executive.

Do Not Over-React To Troubling Information

The job of the chief is to maintain and perpetuate emotional stability, and to be an example of fairness and objectivity. Remember that things are very seldom as they initially appear, and that if you "flame out" or otherwise conspicuously react to something that appears troubling, your actions may very well turn out to be based on something that was not as it initially appeared. There are often multiple sides to stories and incidents, reserve your judgment and your actions – including statements and facial expressions – until you truly understand the situation.

Do Not Be Prematurely Judgmental

It is critical that executives avoid the human temptation to jump to conclusions. Reserving judgment until the facts have evolved is among the factors that separate the true leader from just another schmuck with stars on the collar. Crooks are innocent until proven guilty and our people also deserve the benefit of the doubt until the situation is understood.

Be Conspicuous Throughout Your Command

You cannot be a leader without being conspicuous. Get out, be seen, interact, and create the opportunity for people to share things with you that will never come up in the absence of

personal interaction. Recognize that having an open door policy is fine and well, but that there are many situations where employees will not bring something to your attention unless the time is right, and the time to orchestrate those opportunities is “management by walking around.”

Do Not Get Too Chummy with Subordinates

Everyone recognizes that *close* personal relations and proximity usually translates into increased influence, and that is exactly why the top executive should avoid close relationships with subordinate employees. Be cordial friends, go on group outings, attend weddings, and other things that casual friends do with one another, but avoid becoming “bosom buddies” until one of you retires or moves on.

Do Not Over-React To Criticism

This can be pretty tough to do, but it is a necessity for emotional survival. Equally as important, over-reacting to criticism results in foolish behavior, bad decisions, over-reactions and sometimes results in fixing things that are not broken. Your actions in dealing with criticism will be a reflection of your degrees of personal confidence and stability.

If you have subordinates you will have criticism, and you might just as well accept that reality. Worse, you will have critics who have mouths the size of the Grand Canyon and brains the size of buckshot, and who may well subject you to an unending barrage of nonsense! Even worse, some of these people have no life other than computers and blogs and will subject you to continuous cyber attack! Since knowing what is going on and also wanted to identify areas where we can all improve is part of our responsibilities, you pretty much have to keep an eye on

what your critics are saying, but absolutely must develop a thick skin so as not permit yourself to suffer physically and emotionally by the foolishness.

Insist That Your Personnel Engage In a Credible Decision-making Process

It is not enough to tell people to make good decisions, teach them how to do it! Make it clear that you want your people to follow a credible process as they make critical decisions. Generally speaking, elements of a credible process would include: Identifying the need; truly identifying and understanding the issues, solicitation of perspectives from all stakeholders, considering compromises and solutions, and ultimately anticipating both the initial and lasting impact of the decision. An ultimate goal is to have most employees acknowledge, even grudgingly, that the decision was arrived at in a fair and comprehensive manner

Develop and Maintain a Cordial Relationship With Employee Organizations

Don't take things personally! The wise and mature executive recognizes that his or her goals and what is perceived as best for the organization are often not the goals of a union or employee organization; the roles are very different. Their job is to do the best they can, individually and collectively, for the employees. To be blunt, a police union does not have just the right, but usually the responsibility as well, to advocate for continued employment of an officer who should be terminated. The best course of sustained actions is as follows: Be honest and upfront; never be the one to walk out of a meeting; endeavor to truly understand the perspective of the union and for their representatives to do the same (“walk a mile in one

another's' shoes!")); if you are wrong, admit it; if there really is a problem, solve it; don't back a supervisor who has done something stupid; always be available; when the union prevails, handle the matter with maturity and do not tolerate retaliation; in areas of disagreement, work hard to identify and isolate the issues for court or arbitration; deal in facts and not personalities; and disagree without being disagreeable.

Work Hard To Be Conspicuously Fair

There is nothing more important to your credibility than to be conspicuously fair, and to ensure that your subordinate supervisors are also conspicuously fair. It is not enough to just be fair, but it is critical that others recognize the conspicuousness of your fairness. Demonstrate by your actions that you do not form judgments, nor will you tolerate the forming of premature judgments by your subordinate supervisors, until you have all the available facts and completely understand a situation.

A note with respect to this issue and internal investigations. In criminal cases it is common to charge each and every potential violation in order to provide room for plea bargaining. In personnel disciplinary issues, avoid the stacking of charges and only sustain charges that warrant action on their own merit. Any stacking of violations will likely not be perceived well with the union or employee representative. Acting only on sustainable violations can be received as an

100% Honest or No Comment – Nothing In Between

Your people are just as smart as you are and know when they are being lied to or given the runaround. Either be honest or

be silent, everything in between is usually either a lie or misleading.

Exercise Transparency in Promotions

There will always be unhappy people when they are not promoted, and that is to be expected. However, are your promotions based on the types of merit and accomplishments that your workforce pretty much embraces and respects! If not, you have a problem.

Avoid Exceptions To What You Preach

Be the type of person who means what you say, and are not always breaking your own rules. Examples of troubling behaviors in this regard: Preaching a well-groomed appearance, but not insisting on the same from some people; emphasizing the importance of education, but promoting a person with a lean education to a critical position; stressing the importance of solid patrol experience, but prematurely moving someone into specialized assignment without truly legitimate justification; preaching fiscal constraints, then buying unnecessary police toys; etc.

Stress Continuing Professional Education

Cars run better when they are maintained by skilled mechanics, structures are safer and enjoy more longevity when designed and built by architects and engineers who are at the top of their professional game, and organizations are more effective and well-managed when run by skilled professionals! On-the-job training and the few things that people pick up here and there are not adequate for the challenges facing today's law enforcement agency. Move mountains to get people to

training, but the executive must also create and maintain department practices and programs that support and reinforce the concepts and practices that are advanced in the continued professional education. Even the best leadership training soon starts evaporating when the recipient(s) of that training returns to a department where those professional concepts are not realistically embraced and insisted upon by the department's top leadership.

Recognize and Discredit Demonization of People That Some of Your Employees May Not Care For

There are times when an officer goes sideways with a citizen over a minor issue, and then shares his or her disdain and perspective of what occurred with a supervisor, and the next thing you know the department is aligned against that citizen and gives little or no credibility to what that citizen says or is concerned about. While there are certainly situations where a citizen's behavior is such that he or she legitimately loses our confidence, there are other situations (unfortunately, far too many) where the officer is too quick to condemn and criticize someone whose only sin is seeking more police service than the officer is inclined or able to provide, and whose frustration might lead to a verbal exchange with which the officer takes exception. Make it clear to supervisors that you expect them to be sensitive to this occasional reality, and to not permit this type of citizen demonization.

Insist On Certain Skills For Certain Ranks and Positions – Avoid Yielding

All of us have friends and former partners for whom we want the very best, but many of whom do not realistically possess the skills, or sometimes even the inclination to develop the

skills, for the positions they and we would like them to hold. Be their friends, buy them dinner, and enjoy their company, but do not advance them beyond their skills and their contributions! As a steward of the public trust, you have the responsibility to promote the best and the brightest, and do not have the moral right to make selections based on personal bias and friendships. A violation of this sacred trust is obvious to all, and is a dead end with respect to your credibility.

Develop Behavioral Safeguards for YOU

Executives are still human beings and typically enjoy social interaction. Realistically, there are times when some conversations and social interactions are inappropriate in the workplace, and especially so for supervisors and managers. It is important to be continually committed to avoid doing or saying things that are inappropriate and which may be offensive to other persons. Candidly discuss this issue with your employees, especially those with whom you typically have the most interaction such as your secretary or administrative assistant, and ask them to be among your safeguards to avoid even the slightest potentially offensive actions. For those who might reply that you are not likely to say anything they have not already heard and for you not to feel compelled to be restrained in their presence, reply in unmistakable terms that you appreciate their graciousness, but being the watchdog that you have requested is something you consider to be ethical necessity for the position they hold. Unfortunately, our world is full of very painful and expensive lawsuits and ruined careers based on complaints and lawsuits filed by individuals who insisted they would never be offended.

Hold People Accountable

Probably the biggest complaint of better employees against their supervisors is a failure to held weak employees accountable. People are much better at lavishing praise than in being candid about weaknesses. There are several reasons why you are a command officer, and one of those is because of a belief and expectation that you will make sure that you and your subordinate supervisors held people accountable and deal appropriately with weak employees. Have the courage to hold people accountable and the skills to do it right.

Ensure That Employees Know Where They Stand

When questioned, *everyone* is adamant that they want to know where they stand, to be told if they are doing something that can be improved upon, and even spoken to if there is a mistaken perception that their skills are less than desired. Unfortunately even though everyone insists that they want to be told candidly if there is room for improvement, the failure to do so is among the most common failures of supervisors and managers. This is a critical necessity, and among the key issues that separates the leaders from the non-leaders. Being honest, coaching, mentoring, and resolving performance issues, is at the core of what leadership is all about.

Get People Trained

The failure to get people trained is the responsibility of the command officer, more so than any other person. Granted, some training can be expensive in terms of both time and expense, but a talented and creative executive can and must find quality shortcuts to help people acquire the skills they need to do the job. Anyone who might insist that training is too

expensive fails to recognize the all the costs associated of not training people.

When You Screw Up, Take Responsibility

When you screw up, have the courage and courtesy to say so and to apologize. Generally speaking, the increase in respect for you will be enhanced and last longer than your embarrassment. Obviously, this **may** not be the case in an extremely critical situation that could have the potential for troublesome litigation, but those situations are few and far between. An attorney will just about always argue against apologizing, but such may be among the many situations where you must realize that attorneys are staff advisors and not decision makers, and do what you know to be the right thing.

Discredit Patronizing Behavior By Subordinates

Any prolonged patronizing behavior by a subordinate is because such conduct is permitted, or even tacitly encouraged by the superior. By virtue of both your statements and your conduct, make it clear that unnecessary “face time” with you has no professional value and is something that you prefer not occur. On a directly related note, you need to continually state that the only key to success is performance, and ensure that your actions demonstrate this reality.

Give People the Latitude To Do Well, But Keep a Close Watch So They Won't Fall Too Far If they Fail

It is not unusual for highly motivated and well-meaning people to have more confidence than skills, and to a make the usual share of mistakes. As people are learning and developing, give them enough rope to be creative and successful, but not so

much that they will fall too far if they fail. Keep a close and supportive eye on folks to ensure that they develop in appropriate ways.

Stay Fresh and Abreast In Critical Areas and With Critical Issues

The failure to stay current and knowledgeable in certain critical areas can cause you to unintentionally make some very bad and troublesome decisions. These areas include, Peace Officer's Bill of Rights, Fair Labor Standards Act, and the memorandums of understanding for the employee groups that constitute your employees. Make sure that you and your subordinate command and supervisory personnel stay continually abreast of laws and changes in these areas.

Your Continuing Professional Education

There is no one in your command who needs more continuing professional education than YOU. Practice what you preach in personal and professional development, and do the things that you need to do to acquire, maintain, and practice the greatest possible leadership skills.

Keith Bushey is a forty-nine year veteran of law enforcement who retired from the Los Angeles Police Department as a commander, from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department as a deputy chief, and from the United States Marine Corps Reserve as a colonel. He has also served as a deputy sheriff for Los Angeles County, a deputy game warden for the State of California, and as law enforcement liaison on the executive staff of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. He presently serves as a senior faculty member for the FBI-Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA). He has written extensively and makes frequent presentations, primarily in the area of leadership, throughout the United States and Canada. (7/15)

