

# **COMMAND LEADERSHIP**



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# MESSAGE TO USMC LEADERS

When invited to share my thoughts on leadership with my fellow Marines, it seemed appropriate to develop and ultimately provide thoughts and materials that go right to the heart of military leadership. With that thought in mind, I broke out some of my previous leadership publications with the intent of constructing a USMC-specific booklet on Command Leadership.

It did not take me long to realize that I was failing to recognize what I have long been preaching to others, and that is the absolute reality that leadership is a product of human behavior and is equally applicable for every field of endeavor. Although there are obviously various levels of effectiveness, degrees of proficiencies, conflicting terms and interpretations, sometimes used for evil as well as for good, the ultimate core of leadership and its impact on human behavior is just as applicable for military leaders as it is for the proverbial doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs!

I started but soon abandoned my efforts to change a few titles, modify a few terms and change or delete a few of the law enforcement-specific situations and examples – it just wasn't necessary! Whether describing a supervisor or non-commissioned officer, a manager or a staff non-commissioned officer, company grade officer or a junior executive, or a senior-level executive or a field-grade officer – titles are far less important than the tasks being performed by the men and women in those various arenas. Some bear arms and wear uniforms and others are in fancy suits, but in the final analysis – leadership is leadership.

Although this book has a fancy USMC cover, it is a verbatim copy of **COMMAND LEADERSHIP**, one of the eight booklets in my leadership series. I confess to the sin of plagiarizing but ask forgiveness since the original product was mine as well!

As is the case with all of the booklets in my leadership series, this booklet is not for sale, but is provided with the hope and expectation that will be taken seriously by those who read it, and that it will contribute to more effective leaders, strengthened organizations, greater mission effectiveness, more satisfied employees, and stronger and happier families of all who are affiliated with the organization. I charge each person who reads this booklet to be continuously mindful that command leadership has implications far beyond the workplace, and includes the wellbeing of our families as well.

While clearly law enforcement specific, I have opted to leave the original enclosures in the USMC booklet. Each of them provides a strong discussion on ethical leadership and can easily be used as examples of the types of challenges and dilemmas which – with a bit of tweaking here and there – can be applied to all of our human resource challenges.

I hope that this booklet is helpful to each of you personally, and to others who you coach and mentor as a key component of your leadership responsibilities.

Semper Fidelis,

Keith Bushey

# **COMMAND LEADERSHIP**

**KEITH D. BUSHEY**



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IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION. ATTRIBUTION IS  
APPRECIATED.**

## INTRODUCTION

It is critical for all of us to realize that there is a ***big difference between the leader and the manager***. We often throw these terms around loosely and interchangeably, but the difference is like night and day. More so than any other single factor, the difference between a productive and positive workplace, and one that is less so, is the person in charge. Attending schools and reading all the available literature is a good start in the right direction, but it is just the beginning. The development of leadership skills requires time in the trenches, pain, learning from our mistakes and those of others, a genuine respect for those we are honored to lead, a recognition that we don't know it all, and continuous professional development.

This booklet is intended primarily to fine-tune the leadership skills of the tenured manager. This material is not intended to replace the volumes of other writings in the leadership and management arena, but rather to assist leaders in recognizing and addressing special challenges, both individual and organizational, and to be reminded of those areas where even well-experienced individuals sometimes falter. This booklet certainly has applicability for less experienced managers as well and has the very real potential to accelerate professional growth as someone transitions beyond being a manager to becoming a leader as well.

This booklet has evolved and grown over a span of almost three decades and is a reflection of a great deal of pain, suffering, and mistakes! Many years ago, I approached my boss, a very tenured staff officer, with a very complicated problem and, when he told me how to handle the issue, I told him how impressed I was with his knowledge and wisdom. He replied that he was not all that smart, but that he had been around for so long and had made every mistake possible, and that he had stumbled across the right answers through the process of elimination! I think that he was wiser than he let on, and that he was very accurate in what he said. This booklet has evolved with the assistance of a number of very credible leaders who have also stumbled across the right answers through the process of elimination, and who have been generous in sharing those experiences for the benefit of those who have followed them in the leadership trenches.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police, in a report several years ago, identified ethics as the number one issue facing American policing. I must respectfully disagree, as I believe the number one issue, in broad terms, is a lack of adequate leadership skills on the part of far too many law enforcement executives. As someone who has made literally hundreds of leadership presentations to agencies and individuals across the United States, I am continually dismayed at the number of top executives who cite, as reasons for internal troublesome issues, a lack of skills on the part of subordinates; in a great percentage of cases, the key deficiency rests with the person at the top! As for the critical issue of ethics, I believe that is included among the key aspects of leadership.

For far too many law enforcement executives, there is something almost hypnotic about those stars on their collars, with respect to a mistaken belief that they no longer need leadership training. Nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps the fact that people constantly go to them for advice and mentoring creates an unintentional mindset that they have an abundance of wisdom and that it is others who really need the training. To be most effective, leadership needs to start at the top and permeate the organization. The need for chiefs and sheriffs to participate in leadership training has never been greater.

*This booklet is not just for and about you!* While I hope and have every confidence that the reader will find this information to be valuable, this booklet should be retained and used to mentor others as well. Among the key responsibilities of a leader is to insist that subordinate managers and supervisors practice those same behaviors! Finally, another of our greatest and most solemn responsibilities is to pass critical skills and knowledge to others who aspire to position of leadership. For the leader, there is no greater workplace joy than to celebrate the victories and achievements of those individuals around you, and to witness the advancement and successes of those you mentored.

It is important that executives and managers never lose sight of the absolute reality that good leadership, as well as poor management, has implications beyond the workplace. We all know that, despite

wishing it were not the case, and despite the denials of some, most of us take our problems home with us at the end of the day. All of us have suffered, and so have our loved ones, because of the unnecessary pain inflicted by a good person with poor leadership skills. We owe it not only to our subordinates, but to their loved ones as well, to be solid and effective leaders. It is a reality that pain and misery are part of the growth process, but we don't have to create or endure any more than is necessary.

This booklet has a chapter devoted to "Dealing With *YOUR* Boss." It is an absolute fact that your ability to lead is influenced, to some extent, by the relationship that you have with the person for whom you work. Mutual respect and credibility creates more freedom, support, and latitude. A lesser relationship often translates into less freedom, support, and latitude. Hopefully, this chapter will be helpful in developing and maintaining a quality relationship with the person for whom you work.

This booklet also contains several enclosures that I believe will be of significant value to persons in positions of leadership, and were developed, like most of my material, based on some hard and painful lessons. "The Consequences of Hiring a Weak Police Chief" is likely, if provided to the appointing authority for a chief vacancy, to result in the hiring of a stronger candidate than would otherwise have occurred. "The Unproductive Police Executive" will be of great value in helping the top executive recognize and articulate the troubling behavior of a person(s) in a critical position who is not performing adequately. The "Chief's Letter on Ethics to the New Officer" will be invaluable for the agency head who seeks a comprehensive program on this critical topic. Finally, "Ignore that Advice – Sometimes!" is a "must read" for every administrator.

As with all of my writings, these enclosures may be reprinted, including any desired modifications, without permission. Attribution is appreciated.

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COVER: The cover depicts a variety of command officer 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.

## 1. YOUR MINDSET AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

One of the absolute realities in the world of leadership is the relationship between the leadership skills of the boss and the wellbeing and performance of the organization. Related to this is the environment and the organizational culture. Good solid leaders provide good solid guidance, and insist that their subordinate leaders do the same. Generally, good leadership results in an organization where people feel good about themselves, their mission, and the organization, and where backstabbing, poor organizational relationships, personal attack-driven competitiveness, and other foolish behaviors that detract from the mission are at a minimum. Unfortunately, weak leadership yields just the opposite. It is essential for a leader to establish and maintain a positive and professional organizational climate.

- **It Is An Honor And A Privilege To Lead Others.** The most valuable asset that we possess is our people. The leader is entrusted to encourage, develop, mentor, and train our personnel. As we accomplish these tasks through subordinate leaders, our job becomes more satisfying and fulfilling.
- **Remember – Leadership Is Not Just About You.** Leadership is not just about your actions and decisions, but equally as important is the coaching and mentoring you provide to your subordinate supervisors and managers. Ensure that you provide not only leadership instructions, but that you *ensure that they practice what you preach!* Do not permit your subordinate leaders to pick and choose what they intend to practice – Be decisive and let there be no room for misunderstanding with respect to your expectations of their leadership behaviors.
- **Leadership Skills Are Perishable.** Leadership Skills and principles must be taught, practiced, remembered, and reinforced. If they are not, the leader tends to fall back on poor personal traits, thereby damaging the reputation and effectiveness.
- **Every Employee Is The Most Important Person In the World To Some Other Person.** We must never lose sight of the fact that our employees are also sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and the loved ones of a great many other persons. They are just like us in terms of the things that make them happy and sad, satisfied and otherwise, and in wanting the very best for themselves and for their families. Leaders are continually sensitive of this dimension.
- **Always Treat Every Employee The Way You Would Want Your Son Or Daughter To Be Treated.** Regardless of the circumstances! This is among the traits that truly illustrates the leader who genuinely cares about being fair and doing the right things. This sets the standard that contributes to an

organization that really cares about its people, and it is a quality that everyone can appreciate. While always applicable, it takes on special meaning when a person is facing discipline or even termination. This does not mean that we fail to take appropriate action in painful situations; just that we take those actions with the same degree of fairness, compassion, and professionalism that we would want for our loved ones in those same circumstances.

- **You Cannot Have A Bad Day!** At least not visibly so. A big part of true managerial maturity is the ability to not let your personal problems be reflected in your leadership at work. As a leader, you are always being watched whether you realize it or not. A stable temperament goes a long way in establishing your command presence.
- **Always Maintain A Positive Winning Attitude.** Just as a bad attitude is infectious, so is a good attitude. Your subordinates need to see a leader who is friendly, optimistic, and positive in all that he or she says or does. We can all reflect on situations where we arrived at work in a good mood that was quickly changed by a supervisor with a poor attitude.
- **Greet Everyone With A Smile And A Friendly Salutation.** This small gesture means a great deal to other people. Those who reserve this goodwill only for their superiors are all too obvious.
- **Create An Environment Consistent With Your Mission.** Do the furnishings and accoutrements of your facility compliment the environment that you seek to create? We can all take a lesson from the Navy and it's ability to create a recruiting office in the middle of the desert that makes a visitor feel like he or she is in the South Pacific!
- **Know Your People.** Recognizing that nothing is more important to most of us than our families, the leader who is familiar with the families of his/her people acknowledges that reality. It is sometimes a big job, but well worth the effort. Do not restrict this effort to just select employees. The best leaders know the names of the husbands and wives, the very best know the names of the dogs and cats! It is also important to know the goals and desires of your people so that you can help them on their journey.
- **Remember To Be A Cop.** Do not forget your roots and the core reason for your leadership position – police work. Remain current on training and issues related to field personnel. Never pass up the opportunity to back up a field unit or assist in a perimeter. However, recognize your potential physical and tactical limitations and that your best role is in support; don't be a gunslinger and look foolish. Acknowledging that we do not have the field skills we once possessed is a tough -- but necessary -- pill for senior people to swallow. These measures will assist you in maintaining appropriate perspective, not

lose sight of our basic mission, and remain current on the realities of what is required to provide police service.

- **Your Preferred Management Style Must Not Be Your Only Style.** Every leader has a preferable management style. In most instances, we know precisely what this preferred style is based upon written survey instruments such as the Myers-Briggs. It is critical, however that you not use your preferred style to the exclusion of other management styles that may be more appropriate. It may very well be that there will be few instances in your career where your preferred style is the most appropriate, or possibly none at all! Situational leadership means just that; an effective leader has the ability to adapt his or her leadership style to the situation at hand.
- **Wear Your Fairness On Your Sleeve.** Go out of your way in everything that you do to be as fair as humanly possible with your people. Go that extra mile to find out what occurred and why. Give people the opportunity to state their case, and listen carefully. Withhold judgment until you have all the facts. If necessary, delay the imposition of discipline to investigate potential new information, even if it is not likely to change the outcome. A well-deserved reputation for fairness is among the highest virtues a person can achieve, and is a key issue in distinguishing between a manager and a leader.
- **Learn To Hold Your Tongue And Never Forget That There Are At Least Two Sides To Every Story.** It is amazing how perspectives change as you talk to different people. To the extent possible, look at all sides of an issue before making judgments and taking actions. Have you noticed that things are almost never as they initially appear, and that things always look different the following morning? Those impulsive remarks that you make when angry or frustrated will long be remembered by those who heard them. Give some thought to what you are going to say, and if practical let some time pass, and do some reflecting, before responding to troublesome information.
- **Be A Cheerleader For Your Organization.** Regardless of your assignment, you should act as if there is no other place that you would rather be! To do otherwise sends out a very poor message to the men and women that you lead. Is it unrealistic to expect a leader to show enthusiasm for an assignment where he or she does not want to be? Absolutely not! A real leader is a positive force for the organization where assigned.
- **No Bad News To People Just Before They Go Off On Days Off Or Vacation.** Make every effort to avoid giving people bad news when it is likely to ruin a weekend or vacation. While bad news often goes with the territory and cannot be avoided, we can often provide it at a time when it is the least likely to be personally devastating. How many weekends have you spent worrying about something your boss said to you on Friday that could easily have waited until Monday?

- **Practice Inclusiveness At Every Reasonable Opportunity.** Just as you would hope to be able to provide input on the things that affect you, your people would appreciate the same courtesy. Two absolute realities are that what we do we do better when we have more input from those affected, and that people are more likely to embrace those things in which they have some ownership. In the development stages of procedures, strategies, and product evaluation, seize every opportunity to sincerely solicit input from the people who will be affected by the outcome.
- **Be Sincere In the Solicitation Of Input From Your People.** If you are going to ask people what they think, it is critical that you truly consider their points of view. Those who merely go through the motions of soliciting input, but who really do not give much attention to the feedback, are all too obvious. Go that extra mile in what you say and do to make it clear that you both consider and appreciate input from your people. Inclusiveness translates into ownership, better decisions, and better results.
- **Popularity Should Never Be A Goal.** The only appropriate type of popularity is a by-product of respect, which can only be obtained and sustained by acting professionally, making the hard calls, and doing the right things. Work hard to avoid the common tendency of new supervisors and managers to factor employee approval into actions and decisions.
- **Deceit And Untruthfulness Is Fatal.** The fastest way to destroy your credibility with your employees is to be dishonest with them. This is a character issue, and character is among the strongest foundations for any relationship that involves trust and confidence.
- **Be Charitable In Your Initial Assessment Of Others.** For the most part people have good intentions and want to do the right things. An improper snap decision that a person is a problem can be devastating to a well-meaning employee who has been misread by the boss.
- **Never Underestimate The Impact Of Your Words And Actions On Subordinates.** Most of the people who work for you are sensitive to your remarks, actions, and body language. Events such as the lack of a salutation or a seemingly innocent comment that could be constructed as criticism are the types of things that cause subordinates to go home at the end of the day and worry needlessly about work. Never be critical of employees to their co-workers, the word always gets out and you have unwittingly produced an enemy.

- **Do Not Mistakenly Characterize Eccentric Behavior As A Deliberate Management Style.** Avoid the tendency to be an apologist for a manager who does or says strange things and who does not exercise positive people skills. Such behavior is a reflection of weak or non-existent leadership skills, and should not be seen as a deliberate management style.
- **Commit Yourself To Reducing Organizational Intrigue, Posturing, And Sniping.** There is an absolute negative correlation between organizational effectiveness and organizational politics. To the extent that people devote energy to internal politics, the amount of effort devoted to our primary mission is diminished. There are far too many situations where key people foolishly expend too much energy on political gamesmanship, and where the backstabbing in the police stations exceeds the violence in the streets!
- **Never Forget Where You Came From And The Thoughts That You Used To Have.** Remember when you used to question foolish directives, questionable promotions, weak training, and weak supervision? Remember also when you used to ask yourself if the boss really cared and, if so, why certain things were permitted to occur? Are your people asking themselves these same questions?
- **Be Straight Forward And Direct.** You are doing something wrong if people have to “read between the lines” to figure out what you want done or to determine your thoughts on a particular issue. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- **Efficient Management Of The Status Quo Is Not Leadership.** In a challenging and dynamic environment, the efficient management of the status quo is not leadership! The qualities of energy, initiative, ingenuity, and pro-activity are essential ingredients in the makeup of a leader. A person who merely does a good job with respect to dealing with those things that come his or her way is not practicing leadership.
- **Silence Is Not Golden For Leaders.** Without suggesting that a leader should wade into every issue where there is disagreement, there are times when firm stands need to be taken. Do not be one of those shallow individuals who is quick to indicate that a particular issue is not worth doing battle over, but who in the final analysis never battles for anything where there is a risk and/or energy involved. A real leader occasionally walks the plank. Additionally, silence is sometimes construed as consent; do not let this assumption be made if it is not the case.
- **Keep An Open Mind And Be An Independent Thinker.** Without suggesting any disloyalty to your boss, do not permit his biases, prejudices, or individual disputes to become yours as well. Do not become lap or attack dog for the boss; a good leader is neither.

- **Let People Know Where They Stand.** Being honest with your people will give them the opportunity to either modify their behavior or resolve what may be a misimpression on your part. It is amazing how much can be gained when two people with good intentions chat honestly. Also, be clear about the severity of your concerns, and do not permit them to think that a serious problem is a minor issue.
- **Be Conspicuous At Off-Duty Activities Involving Your People.** Among the qualities of a true leader is someone whose care and concern for the troops does not stop at the end of the workday. Without suggesting that you should attend every possible off-duty event, you should make it a point to be accurately perceived as someone who cares enough to attend Christmas parties, major athletic events, and related types of after-hours activities. Spend most of your time visiting with your people and meeting with their families. Keep your drinking to a minimum and know when to leave. If the function needs to be monitored, use a subordinate supervisor.
- **Admit Your Mistakes And Be Quick To Apologize.** When you make a mistake – and we all do – be quick and **sincere** in admitting that mistake and apologizing to all who may have been inconvenienced and/or adversely affected. While it should never be the primary purpose of an apology, a frequent by-product of this type of candor is a strengthening of your credibility and respect in the eyes of others.
- **Avoid A Change In Your Demeanor When Talking To Superiors And Subordinates.** A person whose demeanor changes when talking to someone for whom he works versus a subordinate is immediately obvious, and troubling. Work to ensure that your interactions with all persons are pleasant and consistent.
- **Do Not Let Misery And Impulsiveness Roll Downhill Unnecessarily.** The fact that you have been dumped on does not mean that you have the right to dump on others. Have a big set of shoulders and do not permit the impulsiveness and unreasonableness, should it occur, of someone higher in the organization, to disrupt your organization, and cause you to be unduly harsh with your people.
- **Keep The Welfare Of Your People In Mind.** Always! Over the long haul, when just about everything else has been forgotten, you will be judged more than anything else by your fairness and how well you treated your people.

- **True Leaders Exhibit Sustained Tenacity.** True leaders are continuously “leaning forward” in trying to advance the organization and the best interests of their personnel, as opposed to merely demonstrating an occasional “burst of brilliance.”
- **Remember Life’s Priorities.** While our mission and objectives are well defined, remember the human element in dealing with your staff. Be sure to provide support and understanding when a member of your staff experiences a life tragedy such as a death of a family member, divorce, loss of a home due to a natural disaster, etc. This support, for all of the right and human reasons further earns their respect. One act of kindness will be forever remembered and further enhances your reputation as a true leader.

## 2. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS

It is impossible to understate the importance of prompt, clear, and accurate information within an organization. There is a military saying that is worthy of sharing: “If you can’t communicate, you can’t command, and any distortions or deletions in what is communicated will result in a serious lack of effectiveness.” The following paragraphs reflect realities and strategies that are essential for leaders to understand and practice.

- **Nothing is More Important For A Leader Than To Know As Much As Possible About What Is Occurring In The Organization.** Think about it; just about every major problem could have been avoided or minimized if the boss had been aware of the situation sooner rather than later. Even our weaker supervisors will usually take some action when they become aware of a problem. The real key is taking measures likely to identify problems so they can be identified and addressed in the early stages.
- **Information Defies The Law Of Gravity And Does Not Flow Downhill Without Continuous Effort.** Among the greatest challenges of a leader is to ensure the accurate flow of information throughout the organization! The information that you pass verbally to others will invariably become either distorted and/or partially lost as it verbally flows throughout the organization. Continuously recognize this reality and put things in writing whenever possible.
- **Distortion Will Occur Without Preventative Measures.** In just about every instance when information is passed verbally, it will be distorted. As it passes through multiple people, the distortion will increase, as will the things that fall through the cracks and will not be passed on. The only way to ensure accuracy is to deliver the information personally, create a video, or put it in writing.
- **Having An “Open Door” Policy Is Just The Beginning.** The real key to candid and critical input from your people will be influenced primarily by how you treat people, handle information, and orchestrate your availability. Just as you have things you are likely to discuss with your boss only when the “time is right” many of your people have things that they will discuss with you only when the time is right. Get out of that office and move around the organization as much as you can, so that you create the opportunity for critical dialog with your people.

- **Be Accessible And Mingle With Your Subordinates.** The extent to which people will be candid and bring things to your attention will be largely influenced by your accessibility. To just be available if called upon, or to have an “open door” policy, is not enough. There are things that people will tell you during a casual encounter that you will not learn in any other way. Consciously plan your accessibility and visibility. Developing the sources necessary to help you keep your finger on the pulse of your organization requires special efforts.
- **The Best Way To Dispel Myths and Rumors is to Promptly Disseminate the Truth.** The magnitude of the misinformation is directly related to the importance of the issue and the passage of time before accurate information is disseminated. Realistically, especially in the case of internal investigations, there are some things that we cannot discuss. However, to the extent possible, quickly get the truth out.
- **Do Not Permit The Creation Of An Information Void.** Any information void *will be filled*, if not by you by someone else. The last thing a leader needs is a void that has been filled with inaccurate information.
- **It’s Not What You Say, But How You Say It!** Truer words were never spoken! Regardless of intelligence, skills, or wisdom, a person who is weak in communication skills will never be strong as a leader, especially someone whose very conversation tends to antagonize others. It is critical for those who aspire to positions of leadership to understand that different people respond differently to oral communications, and to develop and utilize a wide range of approaches to convey your message.
- **Make Unannounced Visits And Chat With Your People.** This includes finding the time to talk to the “forgotten few” – the custodians, records clerks, and mechanics – to let them know how important they are to you and to the organization.
- **Do Not Be Known Only Through Other People.** Your people need to know you by virtue of their personal observations and interactions, and not by what they are told by others. This is especially important during troublesome times when you and the employee’s organization may have different perspectives and you are getting criticism from various individuals and organizations.
- **Keep Dialog Open With Employee Organizations.** This can sometimes be tough because of conflicting roles and priorities, but maintaining mutual respect with the folks who represent your employees must be a key goal. A union official can yell, scream, and storm out of the room, but you cannot act in a similar manner. There will often be differences of opinion, but try to create the type of relationship where you and the union can disagree without being disagreeable. Strive for a reputation of always being available, and of

listening and truly considering all that is being said. Work with the union and try to “walk in each others shoes” as issues are considered. Finally, remember that the union official may be a truly challenging individual, but is still the person selected by the employees to represent their interests.

- **Do Not Overreact To Bad News.** The way that you deal with bad news and adverse information will play a major role in the inclination of your people to keep you informed.
- **Be Sensitive To The Chain Of Command.** There is a balance involved with respect to staying on top of things that are occurring. On one hand, you want to know as much as possible. On the other hand, you want to be careful not to violate the chain of command. When some information comes your way that really should have gone to a subordinate supervisor, best to gently suggest to the provider that the chain of command is the most appropriate path for routine matters. However, always let people know that you are always available for some unique situation where the employee feels it is best to come to you (you can always diplomatically send them to the chain of command!).
- **Know When To Be Clear, Direct, And Decisive.** In much of what we do, our communications and guidance is often of a conversational nature, and in most instances that is an appropriate way to lead and provide guidance. However, there are instances when a leader has to be very clear, direct, and decisive so as to ensure complete understanding and compliance with direction. These situations typically arise in tactical situations, in situations for which there is room for misinterpretation, and when there is concern that a subordinate may not agree with the position of the boss.
- **Do Not Use Text Messages Or E-Mails For Communications That Should Be Face-To-Face.** Text messages and e-mails are an invaluable tool in many ways, but they can also be overused, and used inappropriately. As a rule of thumb, these forms of communications should not be used if the information is likely to be troubling to the recipient. True leaders have the courage and courtesy to look someone in the eye and be candid with their concerns, and not fire cyberspace salvos. If the issue were something that would be troubling for you to receive via an electronic device, it would most likely be equally as troublesome for your people.
- **Do Not Be Too Quick To Respond To Troubling E-Mails.** Promptly responding to things that trouble us is a very human tendency, and one that you should usually avoid. In immediately responding to troubling e-mails, we invariably say things we wish we had not said; think of things we should have described differently, and/or think of things we wish we had said. Many careers and relationships have been destroyed by a rush to the keyboard!

Unless it is truly an urgent necessity, keep your hands off the keyboard, let some time pass, and reflect on what you are going to say before you say it.

- **Do Not Overwhelm Your Staff With Excessive E-Mails.** Just as you are tired of some people sending you a steady stream of e-mails (many of which you delete without reading!), your people have the same thoughts. Give some thought to what you forward so you are not among the reasons it takes them so long to get started at the beginning of the work day, Some organizations put out a weekly list of topics, thereby enabling employees to know of issues and have easy access, but not be in information overload.
- **Develop Unique Sources Of Information Outside The Chain Of Command.** Work hard at developing the type of rapport with your personnel where you are likely to be told – out of a sense of loyalty – of issues that you need to be aware of but which might not come to you through conventional channels. A cordial relationship with employee organizations can be very beneficial in this regard. The early warning that something or somebody is starting to go sideways will often allow for early intervention and positive resolution before reaching more serious proportions.
- **Develop Diplomatic Devil's Advocates.** One of the strongest demonstrations of loyalty is the courage and inclination of subordinates to share their true thoughts with the boss when they think he or she is wrong, or there is a better way to do things. Encourage this type of loyalty in your subordinates.
- **Create A Supportive And Candid Environment For Your Key People.** It is critical that your key people be able to feel safe and comfortable in their candor, especially in issues where they may differ with you. Create private opportunities for group discussions, spirited if necessary, to truly flush out and exchange suggestions, thoughts, and perceptions. Your sincerity in truly desiring candor, regardless of how personally painful it might be, is essential and can only be demonstrated by your actions, not just your verbal assurances.
- **Do Not Over-React To Information From The Bottom Of The Organization.** While soliciting and taking seriously all the information you can obtain, remember that much of it needs to be inspected and that some people, despite their best intentions, may have concerns based upon incomplete or inaccurate data. Be particularly careful not to disenfranchise the supervisors who may have been by passed in the process.
- **Do Not Avoid Uncomfortable Work Locations.** Whether due to labor issues, grievances, personal animosities, or whatever, there will usually be workspaces in our organizations that are easy to avoid because of personal discomfort and/or the awkward nature of certain relationships. Be sensitive to

this reality and do not fall prey to the avoidance tendency. The lack of your presence and influence will create the opportunity for someone else's presence and influence to dominate a work location, and will detract from your overall leadership effectiveness. There will always be challenging employees anxious to fill any influence void that you may permit to develop. Be continually conspicuous throughout your entire organization.

- **Do Not Fall Into The Trap Of Spending Most of Your Time On Your Few Problem Employees.** Focus on the 95% who are doing the right things.

### 3. ADDRESSING BEHAVIORS

Among the behaviors, mannerisms, and strategies that the wise manager will exhibit, there is no one thing, or even several things, that make the difference as to whether a person is truly a leader, or just another supervisor. The key is a mindset and a wide array of behaviors and actions. The following reflect specific thoughts and actions that the wise leader will find helpful in dealing with various types of behaviors typically found in our workplaces.

- **Resolve Issues As Soon As Possible.** Do not let problems, especially those that cause others grief and concern, linger any longer than is absolutely necessary. Remember that problem that caused you so much grief and took so long to be resolved? Your subordinates have the same feelings.
- **Do Not Be Too Quick To Place The Sole Blame on the People Involved When Something Goes Wrong.** Ask yourself the following: 1). Were the systems or procedures flawed?; 2). Were the right people selected for the job?, 3). Were the people properly trained and/or given appropriate instructions?; and, 4). Were adequate resources provided for the task? You will often find that you have some ownership in those things that go wrong.
- **Look Beyond Poor Performance In Identifying The Reason(s) Why.** In order to correct or strengthen performance, it is critical to understand the reason(s) for the deficiency, so that proper actions can be taken. Generally, performance falls into one of the four following categories: 1). Skilled & Motivated; 2). Not Skilled & Motivated; 3). Skilled & Not Motivated; and finally, 4). Not Skilled & Not Motivated. An understanding of these categories can be helpful in developing remedial courses of action.
- **Do Not Permit Disharmony Among Your Top Managers.** Feuds and bickering among your top people create problems for the organization, for their respective subordinates, are conspicuous to everyone, and reflect poorly upon *YOU*. The men and women who work for you have every right to expect that you will develop and maintain a harmonious management team.
- **If It Is Not In Writing, It Did Not Occur.** This is an absolute! When applying sanctions, testifying in court or before an arbitrator, or initiating formal personnel procedures, your statements or testimony are worthless in the absence of a written record of the incident(s) and behavior(s). Further, you must ensure that the written record was developed in a way consistent with the law and internal organization guidelines (read and initialed by the concerned employee, etc.).

- **Do Not Permit Your Subordinate Supervisors And Managers To Overreact.** Giving them the latitude to grow and develop supervisory and management skills does not include letting them act foolishly. Learn to strike a balance between the latitude you provide and the control you exercise over the actions of your subordinates.
- **Do Not Weaken Your Stature By Excessive Verbalization In Addressing Behavior That Is Clearly Wrong.** Unlike new policies or procedures where there is room for misunderstanding and often a need for much verbalization, a leader only weakens his or her position by approaching poor behavior and/or misconduct with excessive verbalization and/or explanation. There is often a tendency, especially with new supervisors, to go overboard in this area. Weak employees need to understand that you will not tolerate rationalization on clear-cut issues, such as quality reports, safe driving, appearance, treating people with dignity, care of equipment, etc.
- **Never Give Up On the Development Of A Weak Subordinate Manager.** Avoid the occasional temptation to essentially “write off” a weak subordinate manager, thereby resigning yourself, and the rest of the organization, to his or her marginal performance until retirement. In most instances, such a course of action is a mistake. If you are the leader that you claimed to be when selected for your present position, you should have the ability to develop and bring out the best in all of your people.
- **Control Strong-Willed Subordinates.** Do not permit priorities to be disrupted by strong-willed subordinates who have thoughts about topics, which do not reflect your concerns or priorities. As a manager, you will find people who are anxious to have you play a role in turning their molehills into your mountains. Do not let this happen.
- **Do Not Permit Your Staff To Exercise Poor Behavior Under The Umbrella Of Your Authority.** The rude and pushy secretary, the arrogant administrative assistant, and the demanding staffer are reflections of YOU. Regardless of how skilled or otherwise valuable they may be, this should not be tolerated. Do not permit your subordinates to play out their personal idiosyncrasies while basking in the reflected glory of your position.
- **Ensure Balance In The Administration Of Disciplinary Issues.** Make sure that your assessments and administrative insights to disciplinary matters are well balanced and reflect the strengths and accomplishments, as well as the weaknesses and misdeeds, of the concerned employees. Such a practice will do much to minimize the all too often belief that disciplinary actions are merely hatchet jobs. More importantly, we owe it to our people to be as fair as we possibly can. Even though these are confidential personnel matters, the knowledge that you have gone that “extra mile” to be as fair as possible

and to look at all sides of the issue, by virtue of the people that you talk to and the things you look at, will serve you well in terms of respect and credibility.

- **Do Not Discipline Employees For Minor Issues Found In Unfounded Personnel Investigations.** A common practice in particularly serious personnel investigations is to add additional formal allegations for acts or omissions which, in the absence of the central serious allegation(s), would have been handled in a non-disciplinary manner such as counseling and/or training. In such instances, when the central serious allegation(s) prove to be unfounded, have the courage and common sense to downgrade the peripheral allegations to counseling and/or training status.
- **Do Not Permit Investigators To Drive The Adjudication Of Personnel Investigations.** An internal investigator is just like everyone else in that there is a tendency to become an advocate for one's own product, a tendency that can become inappropriately acute when dealing with a strong-willed personality. Look not only for information, but also for objectivity with respect to internal investigations, and be quick to ask for additional investigation when the need for more information or a more balanced perspective might exist.
- **A Dysfunctional Organization Brings Out The Worst In Subordinate Managers.** Those who would suggest that an organization with a weak or seldom available leader could function well with strong subordinate managers have never been in such a situation. Survive, yes. Effectively, no. When left to their own devices without any central leadership, even the best of subordinate managers become dysfunctional as cooperation gives way to competition and good judgment gives way to compromise. While some decisions can be effectively reached by the group consensus of subordinate managers, there are many decisions that require the type of insight, objectivity, and command emphasis that can only come from the single ranking command officer.

#### 4. YOUR ROLE AS A COACH, MENTOR, AND TRAINER

Stepping back and looking at the big picture, the primary job of a leader falls into two broad categories, leading and developing. A leader must be continually mindful of developmental responsibilities and incorporate this dimension in virtually everything that is done. Beyond giving guidance and instruction, we need to conduct ourselves in a manner so that others learn by watching our decision and actions, and that we expose our subordinates to our philosophies and thought processes.

- **Identifying The Best And The Brightest.** Among the responsibilities of a leader is the identification of employees whose skills and behaviors suggest potential suitability and worthiness for positions of increased responsibility. Also, leaders must nurture those persons through encouragement, special training, and developmental assignments. In these instances is it *absolutely essential* to ensure that such persons enjoy the respect and credibility of their peers. There are times when the boss sees someone as a dedicated and mature individual, yet that person is widely seen among the rank and file as a sycophant and self-promoter. Most leaders can tell you of a “bad investment” where they provided special nurturing to someone who turned out to be a disappointment. Give a lot of thought to this issue; the future of your agency may be at stake.
- **Excel As A Trainer, And Insist On The Same From Others.** At every level of the organization, there is a clear correlation between training and performance. Beyond the issue of instruction, a person who trains well is also demonstrating critical communications skills. In the great majority of instances, the difference between a mediocre trainer and an excellent trainer are the expectations and actions of the boss.
- **Push Your People In A Balanced Way.** It is an unfortunate reality that not all-beneficial training can be accomplished during the normal workday. Encourage your people to go to school, take courses, and engage in other forms of professional development. Some of these activities, such as command colleges and supervisory institutes, require periodic stays of several days away from home and the family. Push and encourage, but also recognize the family responsibilities as well. It is pretty painful when a person achieves a significant professional plateau and goes through a divorce at about the same time.

- **Insist That Subordinate Managers Possess Strong Writing Skills.** This issue is addressed in greater depth in Chapter Six.
- **Know And Understand Your People.** All of your people are just a little bit different (some a lot!) in their ability to absorb information and develop skills, obviously depending on the subject matter. Do not make the mistake of assuming that all of your people develop and grow at the same pace. What one employee may be able to understand in a short period of time, another employee may take quite a bit longer. Also, do not confuse aptitude with intelligence. Factor these realities into your training and professional development activities.
- **Strive To Impart Wisdom To Your People.** Learning the mechanics and procedures of a task is just the beginning. Help your people understand the things that really make a difference. Examples of this would include the correlation between the presence and absence of various public and private programs and their relationship to crime, targeting the top percentage of criminals who are likely responsible for the majority of the crimes, that many conspicuous and articulate neighborhood and community leaders lack the influence they claim to exercise, and that youth programs are a good way to make inroads into challenging communities. Develop your people to understand the likely consequences of their decisions.
- **Delegate To All Of Your People, Not Just The Most Competent.** In many instances, it is tempting to delegate to the most competent individuals, as it is much easier for all concerned. Worse yet, sometimes the person in charge feels it is easier to just complete the task personally. True leaders seldom do this, because it is an abdication of their responsibility to develop their people. In the case of people who have room to grow, delegate and keep close track of the progress. This practice will pay big dividends in the long run.
- **Develop People To Do Your Job.** This is not a nice thing to do; it is an essential thing to do! True leaders are continually developing and grooming people for additional responsibilities, and this means your job as well. Those people who intentionally do not groom potential successors for fear of jeopardizing their own positions do a terrible disservice to their organizations, and are certainly not leaders.

## 5. SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

The following paragraphs reflect a variety of critical leadership realities, actions, and strategies that the wise leader should embrace and incorporate as part of the way that he or she manages and leads others.

- **Delegate! Delegate! Delegate.** If you are constantly doing tasks that should be done by others, you are not giving adequate attention to your command responsibilities. If there is no one qualified to do the job, create a short due date and delegate anyway! This will help others to develop the skills they need and give you time to make sure it is done right before submission or action.
- **Unethical Decisions & Actions.** Every law enforcement executive is occasionally in the position where an unethical course of action is among the options being considered. Sometimes the issues involve something you would like to do, but know that it is the wrong thing to do; in other cases it may be based on pressure you are feeling from a superior. Only you can decide what to do, but it is critical to recognize that today's unethical solution usually turns into a future nightmare; you buy a little time, but most often suffer in the end. Every leader has to be personally clear on what he or she is willing to lose a job over. In these types of situations, your credibility can live or die on your decision. A boss who forces you to take unethical actions is not likely to survive, and neither will you.
- **Learn To Control Your Expressions.** Among of the major methods of human communications is through our facial expressions and our mannerisms. Learn to control your expressions to project and communicate openness and objectivity, as opposed to a demeanor that can be construed in a negative manner and may well hinder appropriate communications.
- **Face-To-Face Meetings Have No Equal When It Comes To Critical Coordination And The Resolution Of Conflicts.** Use the influence of your position to bring people together, as opposed to merely acting as a conduit for information. It is amazing how months of conflict among two people can be resolved in a short face-to-face meeting over a cup of coffee.
- **Consider Group Approaches In Problem-Solving And In The Formulation Of Plans, Policies, And Procedures.** Bringing people together generates an energy that goes beyond the sum of the individuals! Solid participants with solid conference leadership have no equal in exploring issues and developing recommended approaches. Do not be intimidated by the participative nature of such a process, you are still the boss and have final say. However, your opinions should be kept to a minimum; after all, you are soliciting the ideas of your participants and you do not want to unduly influence the creative process with your ideas.

- **Be Consistent And Predictable.** Your people, after a while, should be able to accurately predict how you will respond to different situations. These qualities will go a long way towards molding appropriate behavior in your subordinates.
- **Take The Time To Give Good Initial Direction.** Always remember that 95% of what occurs is heavily influenced by the 5% initial guidance.
- **Attorneys Are Staff Advisors And Not Decision Makers.** Attorneys play a critical role with regard to the legal aspect in much of what you do, but they do not bear the ultimate burden of managing your workforce, or dealing with the sometimes-catastrophic consequences of bad decisions and poor advice. The legal profession is not unlike other professions, where some members are better than others, and where workloads, energy levels, personal agendas, attitudes, and skill levels are sometimes factors in the work product. Listen carefully to the advice that you receive, but do not hesitate to challenge that advice and to seek second opinions. Good leaders certainly do not ignore the legal aspects of a particular matter. However, they put the legal factors into context within the totality of circumstances. Finally, make sure that you completely understand all of the likely consequences of the various courses of action before YOU make the decision.
- **100% Legal Certainty Equates To Organizational Paralysis.** There are instances where the law is somewhat murky and/or there is room for multiple interpretations on some of the issues you face, especially in the personnel arena. Without suggesting that you should ignore legal advice, always remember that it is just that. Encourage your legal advisor to not only provide advice on issues that are raised, but to also be your partner in searching for legally acceptable ways to accomplish your goals. Always be clear on the degree of potential severity if you do stretch an issue and take a chance; sometimes that potential downside is minimal and worth the risk.
- **Which Candidate Will Do The Best Job For The Organization If Promoted?** There are a number of variables that must be considered in determining whether someone is going to be advanced, including: tenure, experience, skills, personal desire, diversity, and related factors. However, two key questions are most appropriate: Which candidate will most likely do the best job for the organization, and which candidate would you prefer if your son or daughter was likely to be a subordinate of the newly promoted person. To the greatest extent reasonable, try to ensure that the continuing vitality of the organization is well-served by your personnel actions.

- **That “Gray Area” Is Not As Big As You Might Think.** You can usually sharpen the differences between people and issues by additional knowledge. Reduce the size of that “gray area” by talking to people whose judgment you respect, and by some administrative digging. Avoid gut level impressions and listen to your people, and you will make reasonable decisions.
- **Praise Your Predecessors.** The practice of criticizing former managers and executives is all too common, and is usually self-serving in nature. Show class and praise those who have managed before you. If you cannot say anything positive, then do not say anything. Besides, you did not walk in his or her shoes.
- **Think “Discovery” And Create Written Records Of Your Good Intentions.** A great many contested personnel actions ultimately end up in court where plaintiffs’ attorneys do everything possible to portray your actions and intentions, regardless of how appropriate and well meaning, as wrong and evil. You can do much to counter these predictable attacks by going that extra mile to ensure the creation of documentation which reflects not only your actions, but also your intentions and thought process.
- **Give Special Attention To The Development Of Probationary Employees.** Make sure that your trainers are doing a good job and that new personnel are given every reasonable opportunity to succeed. When a probationary employee appears to be failing, take a close look at the process, the trainers, and the supervisors involved. Be particularly alert for trainers who are judging new personnel based on their standards and idiosyncrasies, as opposed to the standards of the organization. Give the type of oversight you would expect if your son or daughter were a probationary employee.
- **Make Sure Your Boss Knows Of Programs Or Efforts That Are Diminishing.** Few things are more disturbing for a boss than to be laboring under the false impression that an effort or program is proceeding as planned when, in reality, it is fading away or has been abandoned completely. Keep your boss informed so that proper decisions can be made.
- **Make Your Boss Look Good.** He or she will certainly appreciate it, and to do so reflects most favorable upon your humility. Those who are constantly taking credit, even when it is deserved, send out a message of selfishness and self-importance.
- **Make Sure Your Boss Knows When You Are Unable To Comply With A Due Date.** It is not a sin to be unable to comply with an important due date, but it is if you do not let your boss know in advance that timely compliance is not possible. This is especially true if the delay may also reflect poorly upon your boss.

- **Develop Your People.** Take every opportunity, within reason, to loan them places, to send them to schools, and to permit them to experience new opportunities. While it is often difficult because of personnel limitations and deployment, you will survive. Take care of your people just as some of your previous superiors have taken care of you.
- **Real Leaders Routinely Do Things For Other People Who In Turn Will Never Be Able To Do Anything For Them.** Recognizing that the great majority of what a real leader does is something for which there will never be a personal payoff, it is wise to evaluate the degree to which a candidate *routinely* exhibits goodwill and selfless behavior when selecting persons for advancement, and in identifying persons for potential future management and executive responsibilities. This dimension is more of an innate quality than a learned behavior, and is not something that is likely to emerge in the future if it has been absent in the past.
- **Condition Subordinates To Think In Terms Of Multiple Subsequent Consequences.** It is critical to condition subordinate managers to identify the potential multiple consequences involved in various situations. Much like the pebble in the pond that results in multiple concentric ripples, try to identify the various ripples – and how they will be dealt with – before throwing the pebble!
- **Develop Good Relationships Before Problems Arise.** Endeavor to develop and maintain positive relationships with as many individuals and entities as possible. Such a practice will serve you well when difficulties arise and you need to call upon them, as opposed to attempting to initiate relationships in the midst of turmoil when problems arise.
- **Deliver Bad And Distasteful News Personally Whenever Possible.** Those who deliver bad or distasteful news in written form, as opposed to a phone call or face-to-face meeting, are demonstrating a weak character trait. In those instances involving an adverse personnel action, the failure to select somebody for a position that they sought, or other types of upsetting information, the bad news should be delivered personally.
- **Increase Your Listening Skills.** Bright people who possess an abundance of energy and new ideas – a trait frequently found in new supervisors and managers – are often better talkers than listeners. Sound like anyone you know? Be the first to listen and the last to speak.
- **Set Due Dates For Your People.** You will find that a measurable percentage of the tasks you assign outside of a control system will slip between the cracks. A good control system, with reasonable due dates, will play a major role in keeping you, your people, and your organization moving in the right direction.

- **Conduct Frequent Audits And Pay Attention To The Little Things.** If something serious should go sideways in your organization you will have a lot of explaining to do. A great deal of your credibility will depend on the proactive measures you took to keep your finger on the pulse of the organization, e.g., audits, inspections, training, assignments, supervision, etc.
- **Remember That For Every Action There Is A Reaction.** Always try to determine the various reactions to the things that you anticipate doing, and remember that one slight turn of your big wheel can cause the people at the bottom of your organization to spin like tops!
- **Do Not Accept Lousy Work From Your People.** Every piece of lousy work accepted reinforces your inclination to accept it. Kick it back, within reason, until it is done right! If you accept mediocrity everything in your command will eventually become mediocre. Demand excellence and the results will be rewarding to you and your subordinates.
- **Do Not Immediately Start Changing Things.** For the most part, there are usually pretty good reasons why things have been done a certain way; sometimes it takes a while to understand all of the factors involved. Do not start changing things until you have such an understanding.
- **Focus Your Energy And Attention Where You Can Do the Most Good.** The scope and magnitude of your responsibilities are such that you absolutely cannot be everywhere at one time, nor can you give quality attention to every task; those who try fail miserably. Focus the bulk of your attention on your subordinate managers and personal staff. Remember, you get your work done through people.
- **Keep A Steady Course.** You, more so than any other person, must ensure the stability of your organization. Nothing will disrupt an organization faster than a boss who is constantly overacting. The role of a leader is much like a person at the helm of a ship in rough seas; maintain a steady course and do not move the helm with each new wave.
- **Be Careful And Specific In The Guidance You Provide To Others.** There are people who, if given the opportunity, will distort and selectively interpret what you have to say to support their agendas. Provide effective guidance that leaves little room for misunderstanding, in writing or verbally.
- **Let Your Boss Know Of Your Concerns About His Actions.** Always ensure that your boss is the FIRST to know about problems that you may perceive with his or her actions; it is a mortal sin for the boss to learn of your concerns from external sources or through any type of “grapevine.”

- **Ensure That The Elimination Of Programs Or Procedures Are The Result Of Conscious Decisions.** Unfortunately, some of your subordinates, if given the opportunity, will quietly eliminate a program or procedure without the benefit of a conscious decision on your part. This most often occurs in the transition of managers when the previous manager is gone and the new manager does not know the difference. Strong control systems and quality transitional discussion will help to minimize this problem.
- **Do Not Become Scarce When The Going Gets Rough.** In good times and in bad, for both you personally and the Department, you are the person that people look to for leadership. A leader who becomes scarce and hunkers down in the office when things get tough is not showing leadership. Worse, it is a poor reflection of your strength and character. Sometimes it ain't easy, but no one promised you a rose garden. There are times when every one of us wants to slip into relative seclusion and be somewhat alone in our misery, but that is not an option for a leader. Get out there, be visible, and let your folks know that as long as you are in the saddle you are going to be a leader.

## 6. WRITING SKILLS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND NOTES

Long gone are the days when a person without solid writing skills can function effectively at the supervisory or command level. Get by, maybe, but certainly not without a serious void in necessary skills. Just about everything we do requires a written product, and our success in so many areas, budget requests, criminal investigations, administrative investigations, medical claim evaluations, etc., is contingent on the quality of our written work. Also, it is a reality that people who do not write well seek to avoid or minimize this part of their responsibilities. Finally, supervisors who cannot write well are not able to mentor their subordinates in this essential skill.

- **Guaranteed Method To Improve The Quality Of Critical Correspondence.** Write a draft, set it aside, and reflect on the issue. Invariably, when we immediately write or respond on a sensitive issue we later think of things we should have added, deleted, or said differently. Time and reflection is your best friend, and the impulse to immediately respond in a troubling issue, especially if it is your intention to “fire a salvo,” will not serve you well. Circumstances permitting put some time and thought between your initial inclination and writing the final draft.
- **Develop Dictation Skills.** Dictation is especially applicable for the busy executive. Whether to a stenographer or to a person sitting at a word processor, the wise leader is able to quickly create a document for dissemination, and to deal with a heavy administrative workload. This applies to everything from official directives to informal thoughts. Your skill in this area is directly related to the quality of organizational communications.
- **Personal Notes Have A Big Impact And Are Long Remembered.** Personal notes are a very powerful way to communicate a thought to one of your people. An accolade that falls short of a formal commendation. A note of congratulations on an honor conveyed. Thanks for a job well done. Note to a suspended employee to hang in there and you know that he or she will do a good job upon return. Congratulations on a nice personal event. Condolences for the death of a loved one. Consider sending it to the home; be assured that the whole family will see it. Remember, all writings are discoverable in a legal action.
- **Let Your Secretary Create And Complete Correspondence.** It does not take a secretary or administrative assistant very long to understand how the boss thinks, talks, and writes. For relatively simple notes and correspondence, such as acknowledgements, thanks, and condolences, consider having a staff create the document, where all you have to do is affix your signature.

- **Insist That Subordinate Managers Possess Strong Written Skills.** Strong written skills are essential for leaders! A manager with weak written skills translates into employees that are not adequately recognized, lawsuits that are unnecessarily lost, programs that are not approved, correspondence that is never initiated, subordinates who are not developed, and an increased workload for YOU. Also, look with great skepticism at the tenured supervisor with weak written skills who promises to improve those written skills if advanced to a management position; it just does not happen.
- **Institutionalization Of Congratulations And Condolences.** Let your people know that you share both their exhilaration and grief for personal events such as birthdays, births, and deaths. Keep on hand an ample supply of appropriate types of cards so as to be able to recognize these types of events. Condition your staff to advise you of such events among the workforce, to potentially include the preparation of the envelope where all that is required is your personal note on the card.
- **Sharpen Your Writing Skills As You Progress Professionally.** The most effective executive leader is strong in writing skills, as well as other critical areas. The better the skills the more effective in critical communications, which include subtle messages, continuity, organization of thoughts and material, legal thoroughness, and related issues. Equally as important is your responsibility to develop this same expertise in others. True leaders do not dismiss this critical requirement with some type of comment that suggests they do not have to be strong in this area because they have subordinates who are. Remember, “Walk the walk!”
- **Create A Newsletter For Retired Personnel.** This is a great way to keep in touch with our retirees and let all of our people know that we honor the service of not only active personnel, but those who went before us as well. Beyond the practical advantages of staying in touch and exchanging information. It adds a “family” value to the organization.
- **Consolidate All Of Those Yellow Sticky Notes & Scraps Of Paper.** Take all of those notes, found at different places in your office, and transfer the information to a single ledger (I have “*Notes, Messages, and Consolidated Scraps of Paper!*” in bold letters on the front of mine). This is a great way to retain bits of information that you might want in the future, but which does not fit in any other file.
- **Retain Rough Notes In Potentially Important Matters.** There are instances, fortunately few, when you may want to retain all drafts and rough notes dealing with a potentially controversial or complex matter, especially when litigation is likely. This is a double-edged issue, however, because you do not want to give opposing attorneys any more documents to tear apart, but

may want a detailed history of decisions and things that occurred. Use your best judgment, and do not hesitate to discuss this with your legal counsel.

- **Use Your Calendar Books For Notes.** Your calendar book is a great place to make notes on a variety of issues, from phone numbers to CYA notations, and everything in between. Remember, however, that it could end up as something that needs to be turned over in a discovery process, and should not contain inappropriate comments or notations, or confidential information.

## 7. ASSUMING COMMAND

Getting off on a positive footing as we enter a new work place is critical for a leader, as actions can easily set the tone, either positively or negatively, for much of the subsequent tenure. The following paragraphs should be helpful in identifying the things to do, the things not to do, things to consider, and issues to keep in mind.

- **Do Your Homework.** Learn as much as you can about the command you are about to assume. Talk to folks at all levels; review documents, and above all else, keep an open mind. You will hear good things from happy people and bad things from unhappy people, and everything in between. Do not form any hard impressions as you go through the process of learning about the challenges that lay ahead. You are not likely to have an accurate impression until you have actually been in the position for a period of time.
- **Reflect On Your Previous Experiences, And Those Of Others.** Our greatest lessons, and those that make the strongest impressions, are based on pain and past mistakes. Learn from the mistakes that you and others have made, and strive to enhance your leadership skills as the result of each experience and past assignments. Avoid the temptation to attribute past problems to others, be honest with yourself, and grow from your experiences.
- **Have A Clear Understanding With Your Appointing Authority Regarding Key Issues.** It is critical to have an understanding of important issues before you assume your new duties. How much latitude will you possess? Can you reorganize the organization; if so, within the existing budget and resources or is there a possibility of additional funding? Are you the sole appointing authority over hiring, promotions, and transfers; if not, to what extent do others have a role? Are you the final authority on disciplinary issues, or do others play a role? What is the permissible relationship with other elected and appointed officials? What issues and decisions require consultation and/or approval? How much latitude do you have to move funds around as long as you stay within the allocated budget? How will your performance be evaluated? The time to address these and related issues is before they arise.
- **Accept Nothing As Absolute Gospel.** Listen carefully, attentively, and seriously to everything you are told, but remember that everybody has an opinion about everyone else, and that those opinions are based on a variety of factors, some objective and meritorious and others petty and personal, and everything in between. Obviously, some input will have greater validity because of who it comes from, but your most valid assessments will come from your observations and perceptions.

- **Have A Clear Understanding Of Any Specific Tasks And/Or Missions Expected Of You By The Appointing Authority.** There are instances where a new chief or command officer is clearly expected to make painful *specific* changes, such as targeted terminations, reassignment, budget cuts, and other things which have been *pre-determined* by the appointing authority. Let there be no misunderstanding with respect to what you are expected and inclined to do. If you accept the position based on an agreement to do a number of pre-determined controversial tasks, be prepared to be seen as a “hatchet man” for the administration, put a seat belt on your chair, and do not plan on being around beyond the terms of your contract (if you make it that long!).
- **Have A Clear Understanding Of Relationship Expectations, Communications And Notifications.** *As the chief*, do you report to the City Manager, the Mayor, both or neither? If to the City Manager, is it permissible to also take some issues to the Mayor, or only through the City Manager? Can Council members come directly to you with any issue, or just complaints, or just constituent concerns, or must they funnel these types of concerns through the City Manager? *As a commanding officer*, to whom do you report, on a daily basis and in the absence of your regular superior? Are there others who have the ability to direct your work? What are the criteria for evaluating your performance? Given the often unique and strained relationships among elected and appointed officials, it is critical to address these issues before predictable problems arise.
- **Conduct Transition Discussions.** Hopefully, in concert with your predecessor, or a key subordinate, discuss the transition of command. These discussions would include, as a minimum, conversations regarding perceptions of: personnel strengths and weakness (individuals, by ranks, commands, etc.), community leaders, resources, readiness, standing plans (earthquakes, fires, etc.), key policies (use of force, pursuit, shooting, etc.), pending litigation, elected and appointed civic leaders, relationships with outside organizations, training strengths and weaknesses, budget details (adequate to complete the fiscal year, projects, overtime, potential retirement/termination payouts, etc.), rank eligibility pools, etc., etc.
- **Realize That First Impressions Of Personnel Are Seldom Accurate.** There will be a difference, often a big difference, between the way you perceive some of your subordinates between the first week of your arrival and several months later. People will generally seek to make a strong and favorable impression on a new boss, and their initial behavior may not be an accurate reflection of their usual performance. Some of your best people may not be self-promoters and will be somewhat reserved upon your arrival. For these reasons it is critical that you avoid making key personnel decisions until you are able to form an accurate impression of your people. While availing yourself of the assessment of your predecessor, avoid making critical

personnel decisions based solely upon his or her recommendation; there may be some personal loyalties involved, and you may well place a premium on different dimensions.

- **Have An Introductory Chat(s) With Your People.** Initial discussions should not be detailed (remember, you are still learning!), but more introductory in nature. Tell your new people about you, your family, and your background. It is appropriate to raise a few critical expectations about behavior that will not be tolerated (lying, stealing, mistreating the public, harassment, discrimination, etc.), but the overall tone should primarily be one of optimism and introducing yourself to the organization.
- **Do A Great Deal Of “Active” Listening.** Note the word “active” as opposed to just “good.” A real leader works hard to not just be a listener, but to actively comprehend and give quality consideration to what is being said. Just as you are usually able to distinguish when someone is truly listening or just not talking, your people are equally as perceptive. This is not easy for some people, but it is a critical trait for a leader to possess.
- **Issue A “No Change/Modification/Cancellation” Directive.** You may be assured that some personnel, when a leadership change occurs, will stop doing certain things they dislike or fail to appreciate, unless told not to do so by the incoming executive (you probably did this yourself a time or two!). Among the first actions of the new executive should be a written document that addresses this reality, with language such as “all requirements, reports, and expectations of my predecessor, whether orally or in writing, shall remain in effect and not cancelled or otherwise modified without my review and approval.” Realistically, many things will change, but let those changes be the result of a conscious decision on your part as opposed to the covert act of a subordinate employee.
- **Realize That You Are Not A Savior, But Rather A Temporary Steward.** Your demeanor should reflect responsibility as opposed to authority, grateful appreciation for the hard work and contribution of others, and a recognition that you are honored to be at the helm for a period of time and will do everything you can to advance the organization and its personnel during your tenure. Do not behave as if you are the great salvation.
- **Conduct Internal Meetings With Specific Individuals And Groups.** There are some individuals and groups with whom you will need to have private and dedicated meetings. These include: Your direct reports, union/associations representatives, legal counsel, human resources director, your secretary, and others with whom you will need to develop and maintain a special relationship. These types of meetings should occur fairly soon after you arrive, to relieve the anxiety that goes along with a new boss, and to enable

people to become familiar with you based on personal interaction instead of through the description of others.

- **Strike That Balance Between Any Honeymoon Period And The Need To Not Act Prematurely.** It is not unusual for a new executive to have somewhat of a honeymoon period, when the climate is good for accomplishing change and acquiring additional resources. However, be very cautious to not make changes unless you are truly confident that you understand all the dynamics and that the action is warranted. This is especially true for promotions, key transfers, and other types of personnel actions. This is a good time to seek additional organization structure, equipment, and funding that is not specific to any individual(s).
- **Communicate Your Vision And Goals In Broad Terms.** Do not *initially* go into detail about what you hope to accomplish, and how you intend to accomplish things, during your stewardship. As a new person to the organization, you may have good ideas, but not sufficient exposure to solidify your intentions. It is always safe - and appropriate - to speak in broad terms about working hard to further increase public safety, protect our communities, seek to apprehend and prosecute those who break our laws, and enhance the climate for businesses and residents. Hold off on the specifics until you truly have an understanding and familiarity with all the issues involved.
- **Be Clear To Your Staff That There Is An Absolute Correlation Between Leadership And Public Safety.** From the moment you arrive until your last day, take every possible measure to enhance the leadership skills of your supervisors and managers, and to set and maintain the expectation of effective leadership. ***As leadership effectiveness goes up, internal gamesmanship and bureaucratic non-sense goes down,*** with the result that personnel give more attention to preventing crimes and arresting crooks, and less to dealing with internal foolishness.
- **Be Prepared To Confront And Explain Your Past.** Beyond the background investigation, you have a past and a reputation and it will surface in the informal backchannel communications between your past and new employees. First, don't worry about it; if it was a big problem you wouldn't be in your new position, and we all have a skeleton or two in our closets. When issues come up, explain them (without violating personnel law). If it was something that, in hindsight, you wish you had handling differently, say so, etc., and move on to the next topic. Avoid being defensive and irritated that the issue(s) has come up. Also, remember that whatever travels through this informal conduit is occasionally somewhat distorted. Do not fret over this reality.

- **Draw Several Critical Lines In The Sand Upon Arrival.** Much will change during your tenure, including your opinions and perceptions. However, certain things will never change, and will be just as important on your last day as they are on your first day, and these are the things to make clear and communicate, verbally and in writing, to all your employees soon after your arrival. These should include zero tolerance for lying, stealing, unnecessary force, mistreating the public, benefit abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc. Set a tone right away, but do it softly. Tough talk is best served later.
- **Avail Yourself Of A Superb Mentoring And Support System – Neighboring Chiefs Or Executives.** With very few exceptions, you will find that your colleagues will be pleased to meet with you and become part of your support system. Collectively, they have probably confronted every issue that awaits you, and have made every mistake imaginable. Their success and survival, to some extent, has been based on their support systems, and they will be pleased to be part of yours. Reach out often for their support and perspective.
- **Be Careful To Not Judge Your New Organization Based On Your Past Organization.** Organizations are different, and many are very different. Do not fall into the trap of being critical of something in your new organization just because it is different than where you came from. Permissible behavior in one organization may be a mortal sin elsewhere. While some things are mortal sins everywhere (lying, stealing, etc.), there are often shades of gray and differing sanctions for lesser sins which vary from organization to organization. Be sensitive to this reality and do not start off on the wrong foot by applying past organizational sanctions to your new command. No one wants to hear how you did things in your old department.
- **Educate Your New Staff On The Most Effective Ways To Get Your Attention.** Educate your new staff on those actions and behaviors that you find troubling, as well as those behaviors that increase the likelihood that you will be receptive. For instance, if you are turned off by someone who pounds on the table or raises his or her voice for emphasis, let your people know this. While we all like to think that we listen closely and take seriously everything we are told, the reality is that some people, by virtue of their ways of interacting, are either more successful or less successful. Help your people understand how they can achieve the greatest effectiveness in interactions with you.
- **Commit To Nothing Of A Specific Nature, Just An Open Mind.** The new executive is often approached on difficult issues, usually by a person acting as an advocate, and asked to take specific actions: to hire an applicant who had previously been disqualified; to reinstate someone who had been terminated; to switch to a different vendor; etc. There are at least two sides to

every story, and you need to understand all aspects of an issue before formulating an opinion. The only appropriate commitment is an agreement to look into the matter with a fair and objective mind.

- **Do Not Immediately Start Changing Things**. In the absence of an issue that is truly compelling, such as strengthening the security of the evidence room or further oversight of overtime, do not immediately start changing things. Many things that appear initially to merit change, once the issue is completely understood, turn out to be performing most effectively. The complexity of our profession, coupled with sometimes convoluted legal requirements and factors beyond our control, sometimes result in procedures we do not prefer, but which in reality are the most appropriate courses of action. Additionally, the new executive who immediately starts changing things often appears foolish and impulsive. Get some time in the position, solicit input from your people, and do your homework before making non-critical changes.
- **Do Not Start Importing Things And Practices From Your Previous Agency**. Perhaps over time there may be some things from your past that are worthy of consideration, but certainly not right away. Those people who immediately want to change the uniform, badge, patches, vehicle markings, radio codes, and other similar things really send out the wrong message. Avoid the temptation to think less of something because it is unlike what you are accustomed to. Your employees have developed a pride in their Department over the years; do not attack their accomplishments.
- **Ensure An “Assumption Of Command” Audit**. It is important, and possibly critical to your survival, to establish a benchmark for the organization you are about to lead. The key areas are: evidence procedures and accountability, payroll and overtime procedures, status and inventory of equipment, budget expenditures, contractual services, status of pending litigation, and other types of issues critical to the organization. Whenever possible, it is best to have the audit conducted by outside subject matter experts. This type of audit will be beneficial in formulating your actions during the first several months, and also identify any problems that you inherited.
- **Do Not Criticize The Person You Replaced**. One of our profession’s unfortunate realities is that too often there is a tendency on the part of some people, either overtly or covertly, to criticize the outgoing executive. It is unfortunate when the new leader sees himself or herself as the great salvation, as opposed to a steward who has been given the honor of leading for a period of time. Unless your predecessor was truly a horrible individual, he or she was probably just like the rest of us, someone who had the best of intentions, who made a few mistakes, and achieved a few successes. Praise the person you replaced for what had been accomplished and do not dwell on things that might have been.

- **Do Not Wipe Any Slate Clean.** Upon assuming command, it is not unusual for an individual(s) who had a poor relationship with your predecessor to ask that the “slate be wiped” clean so that all parties can get off to a fresh start. Do not say or do anything that would suggest that the past be forgotten; it is what it is. If the employee truly wants to get off to a good start, the key is performance that will be void of the behaviors that caused difficulties in the past. Besides, those who did well with your predecessor do not want their slate wiped clean.
- **Do Not Permit Yourself To Be Influenced Or Educated By A Single Faction Within The Command.** There will always be people, usually with good intentions, who will seek to have you accept their perspective with respect to people, programs, and policies. Work hard to ensure that you receive a balance of input from all factions within the Department.
- **Do Not Make Promises.** It is fine to promise that you will do the best job possible, that you will seek every training opportunity for your people, that you will seriously consider input from all employees, and that you will do everything you can to leave the organization better than you found it, but absolutely do not make promises that you might not be able to keep. Those who promise to obtain pay increases, more personnel, additional promotional opportunities, and related types of tangibles will inevitably fail and lose credibility. One of Donald Rumsfeld’s rules may be worthy of consideration: “Under-promise and over-deliver!”
- **Be Careful To Minimize Self-Serving Excessive Verbalization.** New executives have every right to be proud of their accomplishments. This pride, however, sometimes gives rise to excessive self-importance that can further translate into talking too much about personal philosophies and accomplishments. This type of self-promoting behavior, usually done unintentionally based on pride and enthusiasm, can really turn other people off. Avoid talking too much, especially about yourself.
- **Avoid Unnecessary Controversial Conversations And Remarks.** Shy away from conversations and remarks that are controversial and have nothing to do with your responsibilities, because they can interfere with the relationships that are essential for you to develop. There is nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, when you start spouting forth on issues such as abortion rights, religion, and other topics that really have no bearing on your position; you will most likely unnecessarily offend some people. A safe, and appropriate, persona is somewhat middle-of-the-road, open-minded, and not overly rigid.

- **Make A Special Effort To Be Accurate And Consistent In What You Say.** In meetings with individuals and groups that represent various interests, there is always a potential to inadvertently say things that can be construed as inconsistent with statements made elsewhere. The new executive is in an environment where some people will be quick to describe an unintentional misstatement as an intentional misrepresentation, and to drive a wedge, and unfairly amplify that wedge, between potentially conflicting statements. Above all else, an effective executive must be seen as honest and credible. A weakness in this area can doom your tenure as a top executive, and must be avoided.
- **Be Conspicuous And Accessible.** Work hard to be conspicuous and accessible throughout the organization. Stop and chat with your employees and be seen as approachable at all levels. When an issue comes to your attention that should really go through the chain of command, gently nudge the person in that direction, but do not be so obsessive with respect to the chain of command that people may not approach you with critical issues. This approach is key to your degree of organizational awareness.
- **Recognize The Likelihood Of Community Loyalty To Your Predecessor.** Be sensitive to the reality that it is very possible that your predecessor will have a loyal following in the community. For this reason, and because it just makes good and decent sense, speak charitably and gratefully about the person you replaced. It is in the best interests of your predecessor and the Department, and is a very favorable reflection of your maturity and leadership.
- **You Will Be Confronted – Prepare For Likely Issues.** The new executive can often expect to be confronted on certain issues: Are you just a “hack” for the City Manager? What are you going to do about personnel vacancies? When are we going to get our old vehicles replaced? Why did the City reject our contract? etc. Familiarize yourself with the various issues facing your organization, organize your thoughts on appropriate responses, and be prepared when the questions are asked.
- **Start Gathering Data To Support Goals, Objectives, And Programs.** The wise new executive will avoid making commitments and formulating plans and objectives until a solid and strong degree of organizational understanding is achieved. In the meantime, gather data on critical issues, and start the process of familiarizing yourself with the organization, so that you have a reservoir of data to assist in making future plans for the organization.

## 8. DEALING WITH YOUR BOSS

There is usually a direct correlation between a leader's ability to effectively lead, and the relationship between the leader and his/her boss. Simply stated, the degree of energy necessary to deal with the boss results in just that much less energy for your subordinates. For the leader, a difficult boss usually means less confidence, some suspicions, and micro management; factors which can paralyze a leader and make it difficult to provide effective leadership. The following are among key strategies and considerations for a leader in dealing with his or her boss.

- **Seek The Respect Of Your Boss – Not A Friendship Or Popularity.** Just as you would with subordinates, your goal is not to be liked or popular, but to be respected. The respect will stem from your actions, and not your popularity. Most tenured leaders can tell of a number of situations where a likable person was unable to do the job, and in some cases was demoted or terminated. The key is respect, and if a friendship develops as a consequence of that respect, so much the better.
- **Your Ability To Provide Leadership To Your Subordinates Will Be Influenced By The Relationship With Your Boss.** The confidence that your boss has in you will largely dictate the degree of latitude and freedom you will be able to exercise in carrying out your leadership responsibilities. Among your most critical tasks, so that you can carry out your leadership responsibilities, is the development and maintenance of a solid working relationship with your boss. It is unfortunate, but a reality, that there are times when this will occupy much of the energy that you would prefer to devote elsewhere.
- **Unethical Actions Vs. Actions You Dislike.** It is essential that you are clear and accurate in separating those things that you dislike and disagree with from those things that are truly wrong and unethical. The fact that we radically disagree with an issue or guidance we are given does not mean that it is inherently wrong. It is fine, in the proper forum and manner, to voice disapproval, but do not invoke the characterization of “unethical” unless it truly applies.
- **You Will Not Always Have A Good Boss.** From time to time, most of us find ourselves working for a difficult person. Sometimes the person is just plain hard for others to deal with, and sometimes it is a matter of adverse personal chemistry between two persons. The only thing you can do, other than move on if that is an option, is just do your best and work hard to gain that person's respect. Most tenured executives have developed skills in this area, and are able to cobble together an acceptable relationship.

- **Keep Your Boss Informed.** Keeping the boss informed is of critical importance, and failure to do so approaches parity with a mortal sin. Make sure you are aware of the situations for which a notification is desired and, if in doubt make the notification. Beyond that, keep you boss aware of your programs, assignment of personnel, special challenges, and other factors of potential interest. Too much is better than too little.
- **Always Be Honest And Do Not Permit Misunderstandings.** The importance of being seen as an honest person and a “straight shooter” cannot be overemphasized; every true leader has these qualities. Work hard not just to be honest in what you say, but also to ensure there is no misunderstanding. The world is full of people who don’t exactly lie, and who are usually technically accurate, but who chose their words very carefully so as to put a less than candid slant on what they are saying. The troops see these people for the manipulators that they are, and so will your boss.
- **Diplomatically Establish Boundaries.** This is where your people skills and diplomacy are really put to the test; educating your boss on the lines that you do not want he or she to cross. Examples of decisions where you may want to have the final say might be: hiring, promotions, discipline, terminations, and deployment. A wise approach is to discuss these things early on in your relationship, and to indicate that you would hope your boss would be among the folks you might consult for input, while diplomatically stating clearly that the final decisions will be yours to make. You DO NOT want to defer this conversation and understanding until a situation arises – conflict and ill feeling will be among the consequences! Realistically, depending on various factors, some or all of these decisions may not be yours to make. However, an understanding, with no room for misunderstanding, needs to be agreed upon.
- **Do Not “Suck Up” Or Otherwise Overwhelm Your Boss.** Bosses *usually* know when an employee is a sycophant; the other employees *always* recognize this troubling behavior. Impress you boss by your actions and performance, not by patronizing behavior and unnecessarily “hovering” in his or her vicinity.
- **Do Not Waste The Time Of Your Boss.** If you plop yourself into his guest chair with a fresh cup of coffee when he is done with his, you will be wasting his valuable time. Some bosses will let you know when others are not so direct. You need to know when to visit and when to leave.
- **Share Credit With Your Boss.** Use the word “we” more often and the word “me” less often. In the absence of some valid reason to the contrary, when you are attributing the success of something to different people, throw your boss into the mix. Don’t overdo it and sound like a “suck up,”

but there is validity to the credit if your boss played a role in giving you the latitude, training, and/or resources that contributed to your achievement.

- **Avoid Going Over The Head Of Your Boss.** There are times when it cannot be avoided, but they are few and far between. When you do have to go over the head of your boss, be able to articulate why it was necessary, and advise your boss of what occurred as soon as possible.
- **Accept Responsibility.** This is closely tied to a couple of non-negotiable qualities that a leader must possess, honesty and maturity. When something does not turn out well, accept responsibility. But whatever you do, be very careful about putting the responsibility for something that went wrong on the backs of your subordinates; you are the boss and ultimately responsible. Take the hit and then get some training for the employee.
- **Understand Your Boss' Personality Traits and Work Habits.** A wise manager learns the work habits of his boss. Each of us have certain periods of the workday when we are most productive. There are often times when it may be wise to give your boss some solitude. Learn when your boss prefers to deal with issues, needs a break, or is overwhelmed and needs a break or assistance. Timing can sometimes be critical to what we accomplish.

## 9. FINAL THOUGHTS

The following final thoughts are worthy of consideration, and reflect things that need to be factored into your actions and thoughts, but did not reasonably fit in other portions of the booklet.

- **Encourage Your Staff To Be Your Watchdog.** The potential ability for an employee, whether the head of the organization or the newest employee, to inadvertently say or do something that may be offensive to another person will always exist. You are not immune from this human trait. Encourage your staff to be sensitive to anything that you might say or do that could potentially fall into the offensive category, and to have the courage and loyalty to immediately bring such potential transgressions on your part to your attention.
- **Pain, Misery, And Worry Are Part Of The Development Process.** Whoever said “if it does not kill you, it will make you stronger” was 100% accurate. Without suggesting that you should solicit or enjoy these workplace realities, each painful experience will toughen your hide just a little bit more, and help prepare you for greater challenges (and probably more pain!). Your past painful experiences will be very beneficial in helping you to sleep nights and maintain your composure in difficult situations. The individual, if there is such a person, who attains a great deal of responsibility without some real pain enroute, has some truly tough times ahead.
- **Be Kind To Your People.** In addition to all of the other traits and behaviors that are reflected in your performance, let them also see the parental and caring side of you.
- **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. You owe it to your people.
- **Significant Social Events Are Leadership Responsibilities.** Just as you should never apply pressure to subordinates to attend events such as Christmas parties and annual picnics, you personally should never miss these types of major organizational social events. While you and your loved ones will hopefully enjoy these types of activities, that is not the primary reason for you to attend. This is a great opportunity for your employees and their families to meet you and your loved ones, and to solidify mutual understanding as to the importance of our families. Somehow we seem to see things just a little bit differently when we recognize that our employees are also parents and spouses.

- **Do Not Worry Too Much About Making Mistakes.** Mistakes are part of the development process for supervisors, managers, and executives. Try to keep them to a minimum and, most importantly, learn from them. Most mistakes can be corrected.
- **Do Not Disappear From The Face Of The Earth When You Move On.** Few things are more distressing for employees and associates than a former boss, for whom they labored and showed great loyalty, who ignores them once he or she has moved on. While avoiding actions that might suggest a continuing effort to influence your previous organization, stay in touch, at least casually with those many people who were there for you when you needed them. Never let them forget how much you continue to appreciate their past support and assistance.
- **Enjoy Your Organization.** These are the best years of your life!

## CONCLUSION

In closing, it is important to remember that there is no single source of information or fountain of wisdom that a leader can call upon to ensure success. Such development stems from a variety of factors ranging from formal education to learning from the successes and mistakes of our predecessors, and from personal experience. To that end, I hope that these paragraphs, which reflect those things that have served me well, many based on some pretty painful lessons, will be beneficial to you!

P.S. Look for the best in your people and you will seldom be disappointed.

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## *Sobering Thoughts for Municipal Officials...*

# **The Consequences of Hiring a Weak Police Chief**

**Keith D. Bushey**

Selecting a police chief is among the most, if not the most, critical personnel decisions a city manager, or an elected body, will ever make. Without minimizing the importance of other public executives, the actions and influence of a police chief have strong ramifications not only across the entire public spectrum, but also play a major role in the well-being and vitality of both residential and business communities. The actions of a police chief, more so than almost any other public executive, have long-term consequences that endure beyond the tenure of the chief who initiated those actions. The purpose of this article is to hopefully be of assistance to city managers and administrators, elected officials, and others who may be involved in the process of selecting a police chief.

The selection of a new police chief is often a process that is heated, controversial, and dominated by individuals and organizations representing various special interests and points of view. Many will argue that the chief should be an insider or an outsider, a male or a female, of a certain ethnicity, a resident of the community or at least of the state, and/or other factors which are not related to potential performance. While the aforementioned factors may certainly be worthy of some weight and consideration in the selection process, there are far too many unfortunate instances – with catastrophic organizational consequences – where the zeal to select a particular type of individual, often reflecting the successful lobbying of special interest groups, has resulted in the appointment of a weak police chief whose non-performance-related profile weigh more heavily than leadership abilities. For the purposes of this discussion, a weak police chief is defined as an individual whose established skills and abilities are measurably below those of other candidates.

It is important to not demonize those individuals and/or organizations that place strong emphasis on non-performance-related factors. To the contrary, the selection of a chief who might be of an ethnicity that reflects the overall face of a community, or who is very familiar with the department, or who is a product of that community, can certainly be a worthwhile consideration(s) and should bear

some weight in the selection process. The problem arises when that zeal is so strong as to ultimately minimize, and in some instances ignore, the weaknesses of a candidate, in order to hire a police chief that fits a certain type of non-performance-related profile. In these types of unfortunate instances, the subjective nature of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of candidates can become interesting to the point of incredulous! Further, the often predictable weak performance of an individual who is selected based upon questionable weight given to a non-performance-related factor can ultimately be harmful not only to the organization and the chief who fails, but also to the overall goals of the special interests whose actions contributed to that selection.

This discussion is not intended to be personally critical of weak candidates or of weak police chiefs. An occupational reality for top executives is strong personal confidence in the ability to perform well. Law enforcement executives, with the very best of intentions, apply for top positions because they believe they can either do the job, or develop the requisite skills while in the position. Unfortunately, there are times when most of us are a bit more optimistic than our skills and/or experience might suggest. An individual who is somewhat lean in the necessary qualities, and who may not perform as expected, cannot be faulted for competing, or even obtaining a chief's position. The burden and responsibility is upon those who make the selection.

Those who advocate "taking a chance" with a candidate in order to hire a chief who fits a particular non-performance-related profile, or who might argue that such a chief who fails can easily be replaced, or that solid subordinates can "take up the slack," are potentially mortgaging the future of the political entity that they represent. It is critical that those involved in the selection of a police chief do not risk the public trust by adhering to a lower selection standard than they, if business owners, would apply to their own corporation.

The adverse impact of selecting an unqualified or marginally qualified police chief, and the impact of such a selection on various entities and functions, will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs. These difficulties are not far-fetched possibilities, but rather are based upon actual situations, hard lessons, and severe trauma experienced by individuals and organizations in a number of instances.

Without suggesting that all of the troublesome situations that will be discussed will in fact occur in every instance where an individual of questionable qualifications becomes the chief, they are very real considerations which, to some degree or another, will come to fruition. Obviously, the degree of

difficulties is influenced by other factors such as the size and complexity of the organization, political climate, and the tenure of the weak chief.

## **Police Personnel**

Just imagine how you would feel, as a high-ranking member of an organization, knowing full well that you and others who have long and honorably served an organization, are about to be lead by a less-qualified individual whose selection was based largely on factors unrelated to performance. Such an appointment sends out a blaring message that conventional and long-established accomplishments weigh less heavily than politics and special agendas. The sobering effect and negative message to those solid leaders within the organization is that advanced education, exemplary leadership accomplishments, years of outstanding performance evaluations, strong contributions to the community, and just plain hard work really do not matter that much when it comes to selecting the chief. While the ethos of leaders in progressive organizations is to “suck it up” and work hard to help that less-qualified chief succeed, based on a higher loyalty to the community and the organization, the internal pain and eternal disdain, along with the loss of confidence in elected officials, is both real and severe.

Among the most difficult organizational dilemmas can be the actions of tenured command officers, who have a strong ethical base, when confronted with unethical behavior, either by design or unintentionally, by a weak police chief who is either indifferent to advice or strong-willed and stubborn. Such a dilemma can truly be a matter of survival; does that command officer take measures to influence the chief for the good of the organization and its personnel, or become a facilitator for something that is not right? In these types of environments, the distinction between that which is questionable and that which is just plain wrong can – over a period of time – become blurred. The politics also become interesting as sycophants thrive, others hunker down and survive, and candor – regardless of how well intentioned and diplomatically provided – often becomes career ending.

The impact of a weak police chief on the promotional process, and the long-term consequences, can become organizationally catastrophic. It is unfortunately not uncommon for a police chief whose selection is overly influenced by non-performance-related criteria to apply that same troublesome criteria to key assignments and promotions. It is also quite common for those same special interests who contributed to the selection of the chief to attempt – often successfully – to influence that chief to apply the same unique criteria to the promotional process. These dynamics can result in the promotion of individuals who, although competent, are less qualified and deserving than other candidates, and to distort the merit principal to the point where it exists in name

only. In such instances, the consequences can include – due to civil service realities – the occupying of supervisory and management positions by less qualified individuals far beyond the tenure of the chief who made those appointments. In the business world where profits translate into survival, lesser individuals are moved aside for the most capable; in the police world, lesser individuals – absent serious misconduct or downright unsatisfactory performance – can remain in key positions for years.

The pain and trauma, and often disbelief, in the appointment of a weak chief is equally as evident with the rank and file as it is with supervisors and managers. Just as athletes look to their coaches, and military personnel look to their officers, law enforcement officers look to their chief for leadership. The respect of personnel for the chief is reflected in the overall performance of the police department. The great majority of law enforcement officers are smart and intuitive individuals who clearly understand right from wrong, strong from weak, and recognize when politics weigh more heavily than practicality and performance. Let there be no doubt, the selection of a chief who is less qualified than other candidates is clearly and immediately obvious to the rank and file. It is also a reality that programs, regardless of their merits, are often doomed to fail if those responsible for implementation lack confidence in the leadership. Despite the songs of praise and words of confidence for the weak chief by elected officials and others involved in the selection, the damage is severe and includes increased cynicism and decreased confidence in the political process.

Those who might suggest that the best strategy with a weak chief – and it has been employed from time to time – is to philosophically stand back and let the chief fail, themselves fail in recognizing the harm to the agency and its personnel in the interim. Equally as devastating – and also employed from time to time – are situations where the command staff take covert affirmative measures to accelerate the failure of a weak chief. Months of dysfunctional behavior by the command staff of a department can translate into years of hard feelings and residual damage.

### **Retention and Loss of Key Personnel**

Weak leadership generally results in some degree of organizational deterioration, which often contributes to the premature departure of valued employees. Just as a weak swimmer flounders in turbulent waters, so does a weak leader flounder when faced with the predictable challenges encountered in the typical law enforcement organization. The difficulties displayed and/or encountered by a floundering leader often include a number of the following difficulties: inability to develop a cohesive team, inability to appropriately prioritize, inability to develop and communicate a positive consistent vision, mixed and confusing messages in the assignment of tasks, reluctance to accept responsibility for

failures and to attribute the blame elsewhere, overreaction to political influence and special interests, poor selections for promotions and specialized assignments, and related problems. While acknowledging that even strong leaders make mistakes and experience occasional difficulties such as those previously described, a continuing pattern of multiple leadership weaknesses is absolutely predictable when a weak or unqualified chief is selected.

Just as people want to be part of a proud and professional organization, there is also a very predictable trait on the part of individuals, especially those who are particularly competent and who have other options (lateral moves to other departments, career changes, eligible for premature retirement, etc.), to look elsewhere for employment if not satisfied with the current situation. From the highest to the lowest levels of a department, the frustration and disappointment which stem from weak leadership, especially when it is obvious that the difficulties are the consequence of a politically selected police chief, are key factors in attrition. Although expensive and organizationally traumatic, increased turnover at the lower levels is usually manageable; but the loss of tenured specialized personnel – with years of hard-to-develop expertise – is immeasurable.

### **The Internal Discipline Process**

Weak leadership translates into increased internal discipline! A competent and confident leader generally gives solid direction with minimal likelihood of misinterpretation, is firm in both the delegation of authority and the acceptance of responsibility, stays on top of issues and makes minor modifications before situations get out of hand, and selects for promotion those individuals with a demonstrated track record for those same attributes. In the absence of the aforementioned competencies, it is not unusual to encounter mistakes based upon misunderstandings, poor results based upon inadequate direction, finger pointing as opposed to the acceptance of responsibility, major problems that could have been avoided if recognized while in the minor stages, and the disciplinary interpretation – by weak and/or inexperienced supervisors -- of situations which should be training issues. Interestingly, the initiation of a formal disciplinary investigation is often the least difficult and controversial course of action for a police chief. It requires special courage, common sense, and political credibility – qualities often not possessed by a weak leader – to be firm in declaring a controversial incident, not involving misconduct, to be a policy and/or training issue.

It is an unfortunate reality that overly political police chiefs, whose actions are often heavily influenced by special interests, have on occasion misused the internal disciplinary process for political purposes. The determination of what is and what is not discipline is not always clear. As an example to illustrate this

reality, the premature release of a prisoner could be an unintentional accident that stemmed from flawed procedures, or a mistake that would not have occurred with better training, or an intentional criminal act. Different people, depending upon a personal philosophy and/or the quality of an investigation, might see the same situation differently. The police chief is the person who decides what is and what is not a disciplinary issue, and is in a position to exercise a great degree of discretionary latitude which can easily be abused.

It is also not unusual for overly political chiefs to misuse the internal disciplinary process as a mechanism to harm and/or discredit key personnel who have raised reservations about command guidance and propriety, or by inappropriately disciplining an employee(s) for non-existent or minor training issues, based upon pressure from a special interest group(s). There have been instances – where weak chiefs have acted both out of malice and ignorance – where the pressuring special interest groups(s) have had actual or contemplated litigation against the agency that has been strengthened by inappropriately sustained personnel complaints!

### **Degradation of Police Effectiveness**

Strong organizations with solid leadership and direction, who recruit the best people and provide quality training, are needed to confront the law enforcement challenges facing our communities. Intelligent, motivated, and well-trained patrol officers and detectives are needed to patrol our streets, solve crimes, and develop crime-prevention strategies. High-quality supervisors, who possess solid experience, skills, and leadership training, are needed to deal with crisis situations which include, but are not limited to: coordinating the apprehension of fleeing suspects; both preventing and dealing with acts of civil disobedience; containing and/or managing high-speed vehicle pursuits; ensuring appropriate training and application of uses of force; and the myriad of other critical and dangerous tasks and incidents that law enforcement officers are routinely called upon to perform.

Much can be learned about policing – to include agency and effectiveness variations – by watching the various television programs that actually depict law enforcement personnel performing their jobs. These programs, made possible by film crew ride-alongs, show everything from routine activities such as the handling of family disputes to critical situations such as high-speed pursuits and barricaded situations. In watching these programs, the objective viewer will in some instances be very impressed by what is seen, and in other instances unimpressed and skeptical at the performance of the officers and their supervisors. In many instances, the shows portray sharp and well-spoken officers who are clearly motivated and effective as they take on the various tasks, and also the performance of impressive supervisors who are conspicuous

and who are providing solid direction where required. In some instances, however, the viewer will see situations involving slovenly personnel of questionable motivation whose efforts and effectiveness appear half-hearted, and whose supervisors are either not present or who reflect – to some extent – the same weak qualities of their subordinates. It is unfortunate to see a situation where the lack of motivation, or training, or supervision, or a combination of all three, plays a role in the failure to apprehend a suspect, suppress criminal behavior, or recover a victim's property. The skills and abilities of the police chief, more so than any other factor, are the reasons why some police departments are more effective than others!

### **Impact on the Community**

The quality of leadership exercised by police chiefs has a profound impact on the safety and well-being of the communities they serve. Those residential communities which historically have little or no crime -- regardless of police activities -- are relatively rare; the majority of neighborhoods can easily fall prey to burglaries, vandalism, code enforcement-related problems, and other situations which detract from safety and the quality of life. Those related factors which are reflections of solid leadership include, but are not limited to: continual situational awareness of trends, courage and inclination – sometimes opposed by labor organizations – to ensure dynamic deployment which is consistent with the periods when police presence can be the most effective, innovation and creativity with respect to the application of technology and new strategies, inculcation of a policing philosophy which results in a true partnership with neighborhoods, and the creation of an "ownership" philosophy on the part of assigned police personnel. Strong chiefs make for better communities; it is that simple.

The business community is generally quick to recognize a weak police chief. For the most part, business men and women are fairly intelligent individuals who place a premium on the variety of personal and professional skills that are necessary to run an organization, and are able to recognize individuals who are weak in those qualities. Because of the strong nexus between police performance and business vitality, the business community is most often anxious to develop and maintain a strong relationship with the police department, and to influence the police chief to take measures likely to enhance the security and safety aspects of business and industrial districts, most often in the areas of deployment and patrol strategies.

Simply stated, an inability to grasp the police performance-business vitality nexus by the police chief, as reflected in weak or non-existent strategies, translates into problems running the gamut from diminished profits to failed businesses. Solid police chiefs, while desiring additional resources, are not discouraged when those additional resources do not materialize, and are not reluctant to make hard calls

and demonstrate innovation, such as recognizing that deploying resources to rid a downtown business district of homeless individuals may – in the big scheme of things – contribute more to the vitality of the community than arresting heroin users in a desolate commercial district at night. Finally, the selection of a weak chief often creates an ethical dilemma for those business people who, as is often the case, work hard to support the chief, whether weak or strong, and then when predictable problems arise, are torn between continuing that support or advocating the selection of a stronger candidate.

### **Credibility Throughout the Justice System**

Just about every police chief of any tenure can tell of a troubling situation where their personnel and/or the agency became the subjects of criminal or civil litigation, or poor public perception, because of joint operations involving another agency whose personnel lacked adequate training and/or supervision. Also, most chiefs can also tell of situations where – again because of a lack of training and/or supervision – agency personnel have been encouraged to avoid interaction with a particular law enforcement agency. Recognizing the clear nexus between the qualifications of the chief and the performance of the agency's personnel, a weak chief can translate into a police department which other agencies are reluctant to work with.

The exchange of information, especially that of an intelligence nature, can also be among the casualties of a weak police chief. Recognizing that competency and confidence are probably the key factors in the longevity and survival of a chief, and that struggling chiefs frequently increase their interaction with special interests groups and individuals that might be able to play a role in job survival, there is often a very real concern that the struggling chief can become a conduit for the transmittal of intelligence, or other sensitive information, to special interests and inappropriate individuals. Sad but true, and a factor that can be devastating to inter-agency relationships.

### **Unnecessary Litigation**

Less qualified new officers, weak supervision, inadequate training, and weak guidance – all potential consequences of hiring a weak police chief – translate into increased civil litigation. I doubt seriously that it is necessary to remind any municipal official of the adverse legal, financial, and societal consequences of the officer who makes an inappropriate arrest, the supervisor who fails to give solid guidance in critical situations, the officer who uses more force than is required, and/or the poorly planned and executed search warrant which results in unnecessary property damage, injury, or death.

The predictable internal impact of a weak chief is equally significant from the standpoint of personnel-related litigation. Weak chiefs who make weak internal decisions become a human resources nightmare. Under the best of circumstances, and with the best of leadership, there will be grievances and litigation on transfers, duration of assignments, promotions, and related issues. In the case of a weak chief, whose actions are controversial and often seen as questionable and/or unfair, personnel-related claims and suits can be near-overwhelming. An increase in troublesome personnel actions is usually among the first indications of top-level leadership difficulties. While even the most competent of police chiefs will occasionally experience spurts of litigation, especially when changing the culture of an organization, there is a relative assurance that a weak police chief will result in more litigation that would otherwise have occurred.

### **Nightmare for Elected Officials**

The often difficult and controversial process of hiring a new police chief pales in comparison to the process of removing a police chief! Without suggesting that all forced departures are appropriate, and in fact recognizing the reality that many fine chiefs have been forced out for questionable reasons, the fact remains that most ousted chiefs feel that they have been treated unfairly and are not reluctant to place the blame where they think it belongs. The forced removal of a chief who was – in large part – selected on the basis of non-performance-related factors can be particularly painful to a city and its elected officials. It is not unusual for charges to be made – some subtle and others not so subtle – that the chief is being removed because of some sort of bias, be it related to outsider status, ethnicity, gender, or whatever. It is an absolute certainty that the influence of a special interest within a city is greatly strengthened when that interest contributed significantly to the selection of the police chief. In these types of instances, it is unfortunately common for the same special interests whose actions influenced the initial selection – and praised the process that resulted in that selection – to turn around and attack the same process and individuals who subsequently conclude that the chief must be replaced.

Short of malfeasance or illegal activities, making the case for removal of a police chief can be very difficult. Unlike other professions where there are often clear measures of effectiveness, the effectiveness of a law enforcement agency is often very subjective and influenced by a variety of variables that are subject to multiple interpretations. As an example, an increase in burglaries may truly be related to factors that the chief has little control over (influx of state-placed parolees, half-way houses, etc.) and a decrease may well not be related to police performance (exodus of commercial businesses, increase in alarm systems, etc.). In almost every instance, a chief can argue – with some justification – that various crimes are more heavily impacted by factors unrelated to police activities

(economic issues, educational factors, immigration trends, court sentencing criteria, etc.), and that is unfair to hold the chief accountable for essentially uncontrollable variables. Attempting to remove a weak chief based upon factors which are subjective, and which can be interpreted in different ways by different interests, can get real murky real quick. The best way to remove a weak chief is to not hire one.

Most tenured municipal officials are aware of situations which illustrate the complexity of removing top officials for whom the appointed authorities have lost confidence. These situations become particularly troublesome – with typically higher litigation and buyout costs – when ethnicity becomes a factor. It is not unusual for the same special interest groups which played a role in the selection of a chief to also become vocal for the retention of that person once the appointing authority determine that replacement is warranted. These situations become very troublesome as appointing authorities attempt to gage the true level of public opinion, and are forced to balance community input against leadership competencies. The collateral damage to the community, department personnel, and to the political process during such fiascoes can be significant.

### **The Police Chief Selection Process**

The process of attracting and identifying the best candidates who truly possess exceptional leadership qualities can be a challenge. Think of an hourglass with the candidates at the top and the chief's position at the bottom; the filtration that sometimes occurs as candidates pass through the center can easily deprive an agency of the best choice. Despite the very best of intentions and a clear understanding of the qualities being sought, the process is only as good as the person(s) who conducts it. Whether conducted by the municipality or an outside search firm, the most likely phase for a breakdown is during the review of resumes and the screening-down of candidates. It is not uncommon for screeners – some of whom are previous law enforcement administrators – to screen-down based on a short, simple, and unstructured resume; resulting in a process that may well screen-out candidates who should continue in the process. It is also not uncommon for the process to be tainted when the activities of a single screener reflects his or her personal, organizational, or style biases. Equally as troubling, some screen downs place almost complete emphasis on rank with seemingly little or no consideration given to other performance-related factors.

A comprehensive police chief selection process must include an evaluation of how each candidate is perceived by the membership of the police officer association (POA) with whom he or she has previously interacted. While difficult and fraught with dangers, such an evaluation is possible. The three key behaviors to be determined are: (1) is the candidate perceived as accessible and

desirous of input from the rank and file; (2) is that input seriously and conspicuously considered, and; (3) is the candidate perceived as fair? There have been instances where POA representatives have given inaccurate assessments for a variety of reasons, including: personal retribution, encouraging the selection of a favorite person, accelerating the departure of an unpopular individual, and strengthening the political clout of the association. For these reasons, it is critical to not place absolute stock in the POA organizational stance or the assessment of any single person, but rather to seek a collective assessment based on a number of individual interviews.

My suggestion is that municipalities conduct their own in-house selection process, consisting of the following major stages. First, be very clear about the qualities that are being sought, reduce those qualities to a detailed questionnaire, and have each potential candidate respond to that questionnaire. Secondly, assemble a small panel of law enforcement executives, with solid reputations for performance and credibility, to screen down the candidates. Third, subject those successful candidates to a comprehensive leadership oral interview process conducted by selected law enforcement executives and appropriate city staff. Fourth, subject those surviving candidates to an outside oral interview process conducted by appropriate community and business representatives. Finally, subject the remaining candidates to the final selection process (city council, city manager, etc.). This recommended process is likely to yield the strongest candidates, and to clearly separate the leadership review from the portion of the process where non-performance-related factors may be considered.

## **Summary**

I hope that the information contained in this article is helpful in terms of providing food for thought for those elected and appointed officials who play a role in the selection of police chiefs. Without suggesting that every troubling situation that I have discussed will come to pass in every instance, the reality is that these difficulties – to some extent – are likely to become apparent as a weak police chief settles into the position.

This discussion also illustrates the criticality of recruiting and hiring well-qualified entry-level employees who reflect the diversity of the community. Those law enforcement agencies that have solid outreach and mentoring programs, often to include feeder pools that start at the high school/explorer scout level, seldom find themselves in the position of having to place inordinate emphasis on non-performance-related considerations. Further, such agencies do not typically find it necessary to resort to the recruitment of outside candidates. Municipal leaders should insist upon, and hold police chiefs accountable for, long-range efforts and planning with respect to recruiting and hiring qualified men and

women who reflect the face of the community, and ensuring that strong internal development and mentoring is provided.

Regardless of the nature of the community, the majority of the residents want ability and effectiveness to be the primary considerations in the selection of a police chief! It is critical to not lose sight of the reality that most of those individuals and organizations who are the most vocal and visible in insisting that they represent the overall community, usually do not. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for the selection of a police chief to be heavily influenced by special interests who, although insisting widespread community representation, truly have little influence beyond others with the same limited agenda. It is important to solicit and consider input from all sources and factions, but to be continually cognizant of interests who will employ strategies intended to create the illusion of more influence than actually exists.

I hope that this discussion has provided those who may be involved in the process of selecting police chiefs some additional information and perspective which might otherwise have not been considered. The process of hiring a police chief, if the best candidate is to be selected, is difficult and requires special efforts and wisdom. There is probably no such thing as the absolute perfect candidate, nor is there ever an absolute assurance that the new chief will perform – across the board – as expected. The bottom-line factors that most can probably agree upon is that the best indication of how someone is likely to do in the future is how they have performed in the past, and that stronger demonstrated skills and experiences are likely to translate into greater effectiveness.

Those who play a role in the selection of a police chief have much to consider.

## *Focus on Leadership...*

# **THE UNPRODUCTIVE POLICE EXECUTIVE**

**Keith D. Bushey**

The unproductive police executive is a critical, often neglected topic. In far too many instances, marginal performance on the part of a long-tenured police executive is seen as an acceptable norm. Considering the critical need for exceptional leadership, strong and innovative administrative skills, and pro-activity in order to deal with today's special challenges, our organizations cannot afford leaders who fail to lead. *It is important to not lose sight of the fact that, in a challenging and dynamic environment, the efficient and effective management of the status quo is not leadership!* A harmful trait frequently exhibited by the unproductive executive is a degree of devil's advocacy that often results in near-paralysis, with the initiative and energy of subordinates being unnecessarily stifled. Those who suggest that such an individual, while of questionable suitability for a command, can still be productive in a staff assignment are mistaken. The need for energetic and dynamic leaders is equally strong for both staff and command officers.

I am not aware of any organization that factors decreased energy and productivity into a declining salary scale for senior executives; to the contrary, such persons are typically among the highest paid and best compensated members of our departments, predicated on the assumption of the highest levels of performance and leadership! Successful private corporations do not tolerate the continued presence of an unproductive person in a position of special trust and responsibility. As guardians of the public trust and given the honor of leading wonderful men and women who perform critical and often thankless tasks, our standards must be equally demanding.

## **Command Assignments**

The unproductive executive in a command assignment is devastating to a police organization! *Worse, the degradation is often not recognized as the organization gradually adjusts to a decrease in leadership and energy.* The consequences of a marginal commanding officer are many, including: failure to truly understand the needs of a community and allocate resources accordingly; failure to adequately fight crime and deal with issues that affect public safety; failure to adequately investigate crimes; failure to pursue the recovery of victims property; toleration of mediocre performance; failure to provide support and recognition to deserving personnel; failure to hold problem personnel adequately accountable for their actions; failure to ensure adequate processes that yield the best candidates for advancements and special assignments; failure to pursue questionable disability claims; degradation of community support; increased

cynicism and overall dysfunction throughout a command where subordinate managers are left to their own devices in grappling with issues that require high-level command and coordination.

The highly visible nature of most command assignments further intensifies the myriad of consequences associated with an unproductive executive. This reality magnifies the unproductive traits of a high-level leader, which collectively present a poor example for subordinates, raises legitimate questions of hypocrisy with respect to prevailing expectations, and sends the wrong message to other officials and to the public.

### **Staff Assignments**

The adverse consequences of an unproductive executive in a staff assignment are arguably even greater than his or her unproductive command counterpart. The unproductive staff officer, as opposed to having a negative impact on a single command, most often has a devastating impact on the entire organization, with severity that varies depending upon the specific assignment. Once again, *the degradation is often not recognized as the organization gradually adjusts to a decrease in leadership and energy.*

Like his or her unproductive counterpart in a command assignment, the adverse consequences of a marginal executive in a staff assignment are many, such as: failure to pursue policies, procedures, and resources that command officers need to effectively manage their workforce; failure to ensure the prompt and appropriate resolution of conflicts, grievances, lawsuits, and related difficulties; the unnecessary loss and/or settlement of claims and lawsuits (often capitulating to less experienced and/or overworked government attorneys) which creates horrible precedence and increases the difficulty in managing the work force; increased inappropriate influence of special interests and/or vendors; and other problematic situations that would not exist, or which would be greatly mitigated, had the staff executive possessed the loyalty and energy truly required of the position.

### **Conclusion**

It is critical that we set aside personal loyalties and tenure considerations in the selection and retention of subordinate executives. A simple inventory can help determine whether a person is continuing to advance the organization. Ask yourself what programs, policies, and/or initiatives the individual has been responsible for that were truly the product of his or her initiative, imagination, or vision? Ask yourself also if the individual creates and maintains a progressive environment, or if he or she exhibits a degree of devil's advocacy that often results in near-paralysis, and has the effect of stifling the initiative and creativity of subordinates? Finally, remember that the efficient and effective management of the status quo, including responding to unavoidable situations, is not leadership.

Those of us who have the honor of leading law enforcement organizations were selected based upon a belief that we would provide the best possible leadership, apply the strongest management principles, protect the public to the very best of our abilities, and do the best job we possibly can. We violate that trust when we fail to insist that ***energy, enthusiasm, initiative, and pro-activity*** are among the qualities expected of our key personnel. Our subordinate executives are highly visible to our personnel, civic leaders, and to the communities we serve. Their strengths and weaknesses are abundantly clear to all and are a continuous reflection of our own leadership and effectiveness.

Those who argue that civil service procedures are so rigid as to prevent the decisive handling of an unproductive executive suffer from the same lack of energy and initiative as the unproductive executive! Is it always easy? Of course not, but we hold the positions that we do in part because our appointing authorities had confidence in our abilities to deal with and resolve troubling situations. Certainly, our initial strategy must be positive, extensive, and intended to revitalize the unproductive executive. Should efforts to revitalize such individuals fail, it is important that we resist the temptation to suffer in silence and wait for the person to retire. We must take reasonable and necessary measures to ensure that key personnel are worthy of the positions they hold. Our department, our personnel, and the citizens we serve deserve nothing less.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF A NEW LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER**

*Keith D. Bushey*

All law enforcement administrators have struggled with the issue of determining the degree of culpability of a new law enforcement officer who has been involved in a disciplinary matter while acting under the guidance of a senior officer. Considering the tenuous status of a new officer and the traditional subservient role of probationary employees, is it truly reasonable to expect that a new law enforcement officer will demonstrate the courage and inclination to stand firm in the face of a senior officer who is acting inappropriately, and to either prevent and/or report criminal or serious disciplinary acts? The answer is yes.

The very first thing that all of us as law enforcement administrators must do is not be guided by what may have occurred – including with each of us – in the past, but rather recognize that our profession has evolved tremendously in a variety of ways over the last several decades. Some things that were tolerated in the past are appropriately considered as mortal sins today. In many ways, the “good old days” were not. As with most other professions, our folkways, mores, customs, and expectations have changed.

The new law enforcement officer, if he or she is to succeed and act in accordance with our expectations with respect to courage and ethical behavior, must receive strong and continuous reinforcement from the chief or sheriff. Obviously, this reinforcement must be institutionalized throughout the entire training process, and include the unequivocal message that senior personnel, especially training officers, who intentionally act inappropriately in the presence of those new personnel who are entrusted to their stewardship, will experience dire consequences.

What follows is an exemplar letter that the police chief or sheriff can send to probationary law enforcement officers. This letter is not intended to be the sole

method of communicating this message, but rather an additional way, in a very personal and direct manner, that the top administrator can communicate his or her expectations, related to courage, responsibility, and ethical behavior, to the new law enforcement officer.

*My Expectations of You in the Areas of Courage and Ethical Behavior*

Welcome to our Department and to the law enforcement profession. I join with you and with your loved ones in the pride of your selection, and in the excitement that you justifiably feel in the anticipation of a long and successful career in what absolutely has to be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding of professions. As someone who has survived a very long and difficult selection process, where the average ratio between those who are hired and rejected is 1 in 20, you have worked hard and diligently to be where you are today. The purpose of this letter is to hopefully ensure that you will not fail in my expectations by engaging in behavior that will cause you to lose all that you have worked so hard to attain – your job.

During the course of your probationary period, you will have the opportunity to work and associate with a variety of training officers and senior personnel. I have every confidence that you will find most, if not all, of these men and women to be fine law enforcement officers and fine human beings, and that you will both learn from them and enjoy the acquaintance. I take very seriously my responsibility to ensure that you experience the very best training and mentorship possible, and will ensure that prompt remedial measures are taken should this ever not be the case. While I would hope that such will not occur, there is always a possibility that you could be confronted with a situation where you are either asked or expected to condone and/or engage in inappropriate behavior. In the event that you are confronted with such a challenge, I want you to know exactly what I expect of you.

There are a number of reasons why you are that one person in twenty that I chose to hire, as opposed to the nineteen who ultimately did not make the cut. First, you met the basic qualifications in terms of education, health, fitness, and psychological suitability – those factors are all givens. What is more important is the confidence that I have in you based upon your demonstrated performance in interviews and all that you have done in the past as reflected in your background investigation. Quite simply, I believe you to be the best, brightest, most emotionally solid, and in summary a very special person. Otherwise, I would not have hired you. I expect a lot of you.

While you are new to the law enforcement profession, you are not new to the human race. While I do not expect you to be an instant stellar performer in those skills which require much training and experience such as investigations, report writing, and interview techniques, I do expect that your knowledge in terms of what is right and what is wrong is absolutely exemplary and is as good today as it will ever be. I am sure that it comes as no surprise that some of those other nineteen persons who failed to be hired were perceived as not strong in this critical area.

While all of your verbal skills in terms of articulation, public address, and interviewing techniques are most likely not completely refined, a critical factor in the decision to hire you was absolute and unequivocal confidence that you have both the inclination and courage to deal with any difficulties that may arise. This means speaking out or speaking up – whether in public, with suspects, or with co-workers! Should you ever be

confronted with a situation where you are either asked or expected to condone inappropriate behavior, I expect that these verbal skills will be put to instant use.

What I have been leading up to is my absolute expectation that you will not engage in and/or condone inappropriate behavior, and that you will not tolerate such behavior on the part of any other employee, regardless of their rank or position. While your probationary status appropriately places you in a subordinate position for the purpose of learning and development, you are not expected to endure and/or tolerate misconduct and/or criminal activity. If you engage in and/or condone things that you know to be wrong, I want you to know that you will not receive special favorable consideration, because of your subordinate probationary status, regardless of the fact that you may have been influenced by a superior or a training officer.

Please do not think that I expect you to object to and/or report every situation where you may disagree with the guidance of your superiors or training officers. To the contrary, as a new employee you are expected to listen, learn, and adapt to situations that may well be foreign to you based upon past experiences. Let there be no doubt that from time to time you will be called upon and expected to do things and perform tasks that are difficult, unpleasant, and dangerous. These things are all part of our Department and of our profession.

I do expect you to prevent misconduct from occurring, and to report it immediately if it does occur! Period. Let me give you some examples of the type of behavior that I expect you to prevent or report. If you see another employee steal something, report it to a supervisor immediately; you became a cop to put thieves in jail, not to condone their crimes. If you see another employee who has become emotionally agitated and potentially on the verge of using unnecessary force, pull them aside and do not let it happen; report it if it does. If your partner is driving like an absolute fool, even in a pursuit, *immediately* correct his or her behavior; it will be little consolation at a hospital or funeral that you intended to later discuss the matter. If your partner is starting to exhibit inappropriate personal interest in another person (street person, individual involved in criminal behavior, explorer scout, etc.), stick your nose right into his or her business and tell he or she to clean up their act; if the inappropriate association does develop, report it. *Silence and any anything short of complete candor and cooperation are not options in the event that misconduct occurs!*

You will note an overriding theme in my expectations, and that is that we are one another's keepers. More so than any other profession, we each play a role in governing the conduct and behavior of each other. Unlike a manufacturing company where there are safety devices on machines to keep problems from developing, we often serve as the safety devices for our colleagues. All of us, regardless of our position, have survived in this wonderful profession in part based upon the intervention of loyal co-workers who have intervened as our safety devices a time or two during our careers. An officer who has just had his nose broken by a combative suspect may need a partner to prevent an unnecessary use of force; an officer and a parent who has just taken a child molestation suspect into custody may need a partner who has the special ability to calm a tense

situation; an emotionally charged officer who is starting to become somewhat reckless in a high-speed pursuit may need a partner who has the courage and common sense to terminate that pursuit; and the young single officer who has temptation eyes for that seventeen year old explorer who looks twenty-one may need to be reminded that those thoughts are both stupid and prohibited. While I absolutely expect that you will report misconduct, I also expect that you will try very hard to be that safety device for other personnel and keep that misconduct from occurring.

I know that these are sober thoughts. My guidance to you is not based on casual considerations, but rather based upon years of experience. I have seen far too many unfortunate instances where difficult problems have developed and festered, which otherwise could have been avoided had a new employee demonstrated the courage and ethical behavior that I expect of you. I trust that you will always conduct yourself in a manner that will validate the wisdom of my having selected you as opposed to the other nineteen unsuccessful candidates who wanted to wear the badge that is now on your chest.

## **Safe Advice vs. Legal Advocacy...**

# **IGNORE THAT ADVICE...Sometimes!**

**Keith D. Bushey**

Does your department have the wrong person permanently assigned to the wrong position as a result of legal advice that you now question? If so, you are in good company. To one extent or another, most agencies are burdened with a similar festering situation that may not have truly been necessary.

Most of us have come to both depend upon and covet the advice that we receive from our legal counsel. Given the complexities of today's workplace, and the many laws that govern personnel practices, it is a careless individual who does not seek out the very best advice possible on the myriad of issues facing today's law enforcement administrator. With that in mind, however, it is imperative to recognize the limitations, as well as the strengths, that are occasionally demonstrated by our legal advisors, and the sometimes catastrophic organizational consequences of safe advice versus legal advocacy.

It can be argued, with some degree of merit, that our real challenges lie not in dealing with crime and public safety issues, but rather in managing the complex and often contradictory laws that affect the workplace! Beyond the legitimate and worthy situations, there are unfortunately no shortage of instances where problem employees take full advantage of the American Disabilities Act, worker's compensation rules, anti-discrimination laws and rules, and other types of state and federal programs and statutes to obtain questionable benefits and/or accommodations. Given the fact that most of these programs and statutes favor the applicant, the mere filing of a claim or complaint often places the employer in a defensive position. The need for proactive legal advocacy has never been greater than it is today.

What are some of the most common consequences of safe advice? The problem employee who, based upon medical advice, is accommodated in a position other than which the individual was hired for; both reducing that person's value to the agency and denying other employees an assignment to the position. The elimination of derogatory information from a problem employee's personnel file, based upon a grievance, further empowering a troublemaker and sending out a message of administrative impotence to others in the workforce. The problem employee who feigns or exaggerates a medical condition and receives undeserved benefits, but who is not subjected to discipline and/or

prosecution; a troublesome and often conspicuous situation that infuriates the good employees and serves as an unfortunate incentive for additional fraud and dishonesty. The promotion of a less qualified individual based upon a negotiated settlement, or threatened civil litigation, where gender and/or ethnicity is alleged to be the reason why the individual was not initially selected for promotion; a situation which can be devastating to the overall workforce and make a mockery of the merit system. The individual hired as a law enforcement officer who, although failing a portion of the selection process, prevailed based upon a civil service appeal; a not uncommon situation found in some of our problem employees. While many situations such as these are based upon absolute legal necessity, there are also many similar situations which are a result of safe legal advice, and which may not have been necessary had true legal advocacy been exercised.

In each of the situations described previously, the safest course of action was the one provided. It is safe and simple to recommend accommodation based upon a reported medical condition; to resolve a grievance by the elimination of a contested comment in an evaluation report; to fail to deal decisively with an employee engaged in medical fraud because of the complexities involved; or to resolve civil litigation by the hiring or promotion of a plaintiff. There are often other factors, which if considered and carefully articulated, may have mitigated and/or eliminated the need for the course of action that was provided in each of the examples. Our legal advisors must possess the energy and professional qualities to explore courses of action beyond the provision of safe advice! The potential long-term negative consequences to the organization, in situations such as those described, demand nothing less. The role of the attorney ends when the advice is provided; the consequences of that advice can last for a long time.

Legal advocacy goes beyond research and advice. It also involves education and oversight to help key personnel recognize what measures need to be taken, and how those measures need to be documented, to increase the likelihood that the department will prevail in the resolution of troublesome situations. It should come as no surprise that counsel for the problem employee, will do everything possible to bolster the employee's case, and either minimize and/or attempt to have excluded evidence that supports your agency. Legal advocacy should result in situations where proactive and appropriate measures are taken, and those measures - as well as the honorable intentions of the agency - are admitted and found compelling in administrative hearings and/or courts of law.

Beyond the isolated consequences of questionable safe advice, the cumulative consequence of months and years of questionable safe advice can actually result in varying degrees of real and discernable organizational paralysis. Every accommodation, to some extent, results in a loss of latitude for at least one person and one assignment,

which if multiplied in a number of instances results in a percentage of the organization over which the executive has a diminished ability to influence. As sad as it may be, it is an absolute reality that accommodations have a tendency towards a ripple effect, and almost always result in similar demands by other employees. As an example, one major law enforcement agency has accommodated so many dispatchers in positions outside of the communications center, that police officers had to be taken off the streets and assigned to the communications center in order to fill the many vacancies!

True legal advocacy is a combination of two factors: an attorney who truly recognizes and cares about the long-term consequences of legal advice, and a partnership between that attorney and the law enforcement executive staff. I wish I could say that all of the attorneys who support our agencies possess the energy and determination to be solid partners and strong legal advocates in helping us achieve maximum flexibility in the management of our departments; unfortunately, such is not always the case. The legal profession is not unlike other professions, where some persons are more qualified than others, and where workloads, energy levels, personal agendas, and attitudes are sometimes factors in the work product. All of these factors influence the quality of the legal advice that we receive.

Most of us can look back at times in our careers where we, without seriously questioning what we were being told, acted upon legal advice which in hindsight turned out to be the wrong thing to do. Today, the wise executive is one who is not reluctant to question potentially troubling advice, to seek second opinions, and instead of asking counsel what to do is more likely to ask the legal advisor how to achieve the objectives of the law enforcement executive. We must also realize that our attorneys are staff advisors and not decision-makers, and that the ultimate course of action is something to be decided by the executive based on a variety of factors.

Before being too critical of our staff attorneys whose advice tends to be on the safe and conservative side, it is wise to engage in some self-reflection. We must ask ourselves if we have done our job in developing and mentoring our legal advisors so as to ensure that there is no misunderstanding as to the role that we expect them to perform. Our legal advisors are just like the rest of us; they want to do a good job and to be responsive to our needs. Make it clear - and demonstrate through your behavior - that you covet the role that they play, expect them to be proactive in helping you find solutions to challenging situations, and that, without eroding your role in having the final say, you truly want them to be your partner in moving the organization in a direction consistent with your vision.

Should we as executives occasionally reject the advice that we are given? Absolutely! Legal issues are just like any other issue; we evaluate the pros and cons, consider what we have to gain and what we have to lose, and choose the course of action which is best for the organization. Although we need to avoid taking foolish and unnecessary risks, there are times when we walk the plank and take some legal risks; sometimes what we

have to gain far outweighs what we run the risk of losing. Obviously, we lessen the potential adverse consequences by doing our homework, looking at all sides of the issue, clearly identifying the additional and mitigating factors, and by clearly understanding the multiple consequences of our actions before we take them.

Many other persons, including our legal advisors, play a critical role in much of what we do, but do not bear the ultimate burden of managing our work forces, or dealing with the sometimes catastrophic consequences of bad decisions and poor advice. Give yourself and your organization every possible advantage, and develop your staff in a way that is likely to ensure that is the case. Developing your legal advisors in a manner consistent with your vision, and making it clear – through words and actions – that you desire proactive legal advocacy versus safe decisions is a “must do” for every law enforcement executive.