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A PROGRAM TO ROTATE SELECTED POLICE PERSONNEL INTO SPECIALIZED
FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE ABILENE POLICE DEPARTMENT

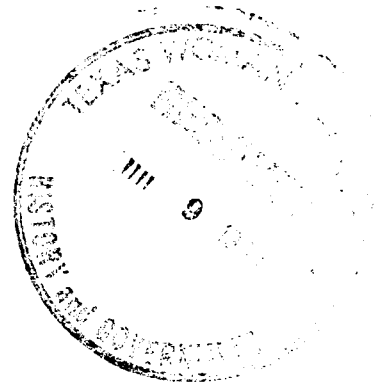
A LEARNING CONTRACT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
MODULE II

BY
RON HARRIS

ABILENE POLICE DEPARTMENT

ABILENE, TEXAS

JUNE, 1990



#95

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A PROGRAM TO ROTATE SELECTED POLICE PERSONNEL INTO
SPECIALIZED FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE ABILENE POLICE
DEPARTMENT

The rotation of selected police personnel into and out of special functions, if planned and implemented in the proper fashion, can be a valuable asset to a department and to individual police officers. The delivery of police service to the community will improve as the job skills and abilities of the individual police officers are enhanced. Rotation from one police function to another will enable officers to acquire skills they would not normally develop if they remain stationary in one job. As officers develop skills in one area and move to another area of service, they will take the new skills with them and will likely share their acquired skills with their peers. While an officer may not become an expert in every job, overall ability will likely improve.

This expansion of the career ladder will give officers confidence in their decision-making abilities, communication skills, requisite job knowledge, and will allow them the latitude they need to perform service to the community in the most effective manner. The more experienced officers will gain respect for their own judgment and will become more autonomous police officers. The interest of an organization is best served when every position is filled by the most competent person.¹ It is in the interest of individual officers to achieve the highest position they are competent to fill. Competence is not inborn and is partly

acquired through experience, i.e., formal training and on-the-job training. A department that is staffed with officers that have broad-based experience may provide better service than a department that is staffed with small groups of highly specialized individuals plus one large group of general patrol officers who have limited special training.

Departments that are highly specialized may make the following fallacious assumptions regarding specialization:²

- 1) specialization will always increase performance;
- 2) specialization will increase professionalism;
- 3) specialization is the primary route to career development;
- 4) specialization is the best method for effectively using the most qualified personnel;
- 5) specialization will always increase employee motivation and job satisfaction.

Specialization or extended assignments to special function units may invite complacency, job dissatisfaction, and possible "burnout," which will lead to ineffective delivery of police service to the public.³ These undesirable aspects of specialization can be avoided with a well-constructed rotation program.

The success of any rotation program is dependent upon its acceptance by the officers of the department. Acceptance can be achieved by having members of the department develop the program and then implementing the program at a moderate pace. Members of the Abilene Police Department were surveyed to determine how they

viewed career development, whether they viewed burnout or stagnation in a job as detrimental to the department, and how they viewed the department's method of assigning personnel to special function units. In general, the officers agreed that career development was important, that burnout was detrimental and that the department's method of selecting personnel for special function units could be improved. Most of the negative comments concerning a rotation program were received from those individuals currently assigned to a special function unit. Some of their concerns included:

- 1) general resistance to the rotation program from special function officers;
- 2) fear that short-term rotation would hamper department effectiveness;
- 3) concern over possible loss of technical knowledge and expertise;
- 4) fear that rotation might be seen as a demotion by special function officers;
- 5) fear that rotation might cause a morale problem among special function officers.

The concerns mentioned above are legitimate and must be addressed by any rotation program that is developed. One method of addressing the concerns would be to use special function officers as members of the task force that develops the rotation program.

The development of any new program within the Abilene Police Department must reflect the mission of the department which, in part, is to protect and safeguard the lives and property of all

citizens by dedicating its personnel and material resources to maintaining the public order, protection of the individual and constitutional rights of all persons, and equal enforcement of the laws of the land to preserve our cherished traditions of liberty, equality and justice for all. The department's mission will be included in the goals of the rotation program.

Goals of a rotation program for the Abilene Police Department would include:

- 1) Promoting the effective and efficient use of the Abilene Police Department's fiscal, personnel and material resources to achieve the department mission.
- 2) Deploying the necessary forces to deter crime and inspire public confidence in the department's ability to insure a peaceful environment.
- 3) Providing services that are responsive to the needs of the community and that are consistent with the department mission.

Objectives of a rotation program for the Abilene Police Department would include:

- 1) To select officers on a continuous basis to rotate into specialized functions.
- 2) To provide specialized training to all officers who are rotated into specialized functions.
- 3) To improve the quality of police service to the community by improving the skills and abilities of the police officer.
- 4) To positively affect job satisfaction within the Abilene

Police Department.

- 5) To positively affect the careers of members of the Abilene Police Department.

There are many factors that should be considered when developing a rotation program for the Abilene Police Department.

Some of the considerations include:

- 1) Which specialized functions should be included in the program?
 - a: All special functions should be included in the program, except for the identification section and the range master position which require specific talents. Identification personnel are often qualified expert witnesses.
- 2) How often should a position be rotated?
 - a: Positions will vary in the amount of time between rotation. Positions requiring special training or that present a more difficult assignment will rotate less frequently than other positions.
- 3) How many positions in each special function will be rotated?
 - a: The number of positions rotated will vary with each special function. In some functions, all personnel will rotate on a staggered basis while in other functions only a select number of positions will rotate.
- 4) Who will determine who is to rotate initially from

special functions to start the rotation program?

a: The division commander will initially recommend the individuals to be rotated to the appropriate Deputy Chief of Police who, after conferring with the Chief of Police, may agree with division commander or suggest another individual.

5) Who should design the rotation program?

a: Members of the department should be used to the utmost in developing such a program. "Rotation Program" is a sample plan presented in this paper.

A rotation program within the Abilene Police Department should be advantageous to all members of the department if successfully implemented. Not all members of the department view the proposed program in a positive light, but a successful program should change their attitude. The program should be seen as a positive move to provide the best overall service to the community, rather than a move to scramble personnel within the department. The advantages of a rotation program include:

- 1) A broadening of the base of experience, skills and job knowledge of more officers. The exposure to different tasks accomplished by police officers should produce an officer that is better able to perform more police functions in a more effective manner.
- 2) A reduction in jealousy among different divisions. Working in different assignments would promote a better understanding of how other divisions operate and help alleviate the "us v. them" syndrome among officers

assigned to different divisions. Officers would be exposed to the workloads, problems, and special situations associated with other divisions.

- 3) Providing more officers with a sense of accomplishment. Providing officers the opportunity to expand their careers, training and education should promote individual interest in their jobs.
- 4) Motivating officers to perform their assigned task to the best of their ability. Officers will be selected to move into special functions based upon past performance. Officers who wish to move laterally into other areas of police work will realize that they must do the best job they can in their assignment in order to be considered for placement elsewhere.
- 5) Reduction in "burnout" and job dissatisfaction. Some individuals who perform the same tasks on a continuing basis have a tendency to become dissatisfied with that job over a period of time. They may feel that the job no longer presents a challenge for them, and their performance may become substandard.

Any department that is initiating a rotation program will undoubtedly experience some problems that may seem, at first, to be disadvantages. However, it should be realized that these problems may represent opposition to change within the department that can be overcome in time. Some of the problems that are likely to occur are:

- 1) Morale problems with some individuals who are currently

assigned to special function units. Some individuals see their return to patrol as a demotion; they fail to remember that patrol is the backbone of any police agency: the better the patrol unit functions, the better the service to the community, and the more time special function units can devote to their tasks. Special function units should be indoctrinated into the ways a rotation program will benefit their units and the department as a whole. Patrol supervisors must be cognizant that individuals initially returned to patrol will likely resent the transfer and deal with each person accordingly.

- 2) Initial loss of experience within special function units. Because experienced officers will be leaving special function units, their talent will be lost to that unit but will enhance the patrol function. New officers will gain experience rapidly and should bring enthusiasm to the special function units.
- 3) Short-term rotation may hamper the department's effectiveness. Effective performance in special function units requires that individuals assigned there remain long enough to acquire skills necessary to do the job successfully. Therefore, assignments to investigative units should be made for a minimum of two years.

The aforementioned problems are real and cannot be overlooked by the police administrator. However, they do not negate the

advantages gained by implementing a rotation program.

The implementation of a well planned, employee-created rotation program will prove to be a practical method of enhancing individual police officer job performance and job satisfaction, which should affect the delivery of police service in a positive manner. Specialization has its place within the police department, and as special knowledge and experience are spread throughout the department, the community will benefit. The planned rotation of selected personnel into and out of special functions is a step forward for the Abilene Police Department, its employees, and the community which it serves.

ROTATION PROGRAM

In this program divisions or sections within the Abilene Police Department will be grouped according to whether there will be a partial or total rotation of personnel within that division or section. Reassignment of division commanders, regardless of rank, will be at the discretion of the Chief of Police.

GROUP I - Rotation of all personnel within the division or section.

Divisions or sections included in this group:

- 1) Traffic Division - 8 officers
- 2) Communications Division - 1 officer
- 3) Community Services Division - 4 officers

TRAFFIC DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1990.

METHOD OF ROTATION: One officer within the division will be rotated every six months, which will be equal to a four-year tour of duty in the division.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The division commander will determine the schedule of rotation for the officers currently assigned to the division. The selection criteria and the method of selecting personnel for assignment to the division will be the responsibility of the division commander.

Individuals who rotate out of the Traffic Division may apply for reassignment to the division after a two-year absence unless the position is filled by another applicant. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until

the scheduled rotation date.

COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1991.

METHOD OF ROTATION: The communications officer will be rotated once every three years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The division commander will determine the selection criteria and the method of selecting the communications officer. The individual who rotates out of the Communications Division may reapply for the position after three years unless the position is filled by another applicant.

COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1991.

METHOD OF ROTATION: One officer in the Safety Education Section will rotate in September, 1991. The second officer in the Safety Education Section will be reassigned in September, 1993. The first officer in the Crime Prevention Section will be reassigned in September, 1992, and the second in September, 1994.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The schedule for rotation out of the division will be determined by the division commander. The selection criteria and the method of selecting personnel for assignment to the division is the responsibility of the division commander.

Individuals who rotate out of the division may apply for reassignment after an absence of two years unless the position is filled by another applicant. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until the scheduled rotation date.

GROUP II - Partial rotation of personnel within the division or section.

Divisions or sections included in this group:

- 1) Training Division - 2 training officers;
range master is excluded.
- 2) Criminal Investigation Division
Crimes Against Persons Section - 6 officers
Crimes Against Property Section - 6 officers
Fraud Section - 3 officers
Crime Analysis Section - 1 officer
- 3) Records Division - 2 property officers;
identification officer is excluded.
- 4) Youth Division - 4 officers
- 5) Special Services Division - 5 officers

TRAINING DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1990.

METHOD OF ROTATION: One officer will rotate in September, 1990, and the second officer will be reassigned in September, 1992, making the tour of duty for each officer four years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The selection criteria and the method of selecting personnel for assignment to the division is the responsibility of the division commander. The division commander will determine which officer will rotate from the division first.

Individuals who rotate out of the division may apply for reassignment after a two-year absence unless the position is filled by another applicant. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until the scheduled rotation date.

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September 1990.

METHOD OF ROTATION: The division commander will determine how many officers in the Crimes Against Persons, Crimes Against Property, and Fraud Sections will rotate from the division, but he must rotate at least two-thirds of the positions assigned to each section. The division commander may choose to keep two positions in the Crimes Against Persons and Crimes Against Property Sections and one position in the Fraud Section as permanent assignments. The crime analysis officer will rotate every four years commencing in September, 1994.

One officer in the Crimes Against Persons and Crimes Against Property Sections will be reassigned in September of 1990, 1991, and 1992. If the division commander decides to keep any permanent assignments in the sections, no officer will be rotated in 1994. One officer in the Fraud Section will be reassigned in September of 1990 and 1991. If the division commander decides to keep any permanent assignments in the section, no officer will be rotated in 1993 and 1994. The tour of duty in the division will be four years for those positions that are rotated.

The sergeants in the division will rotate beginning in September, 1991. The tour of duty for sergeants in the division will be six years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The selection criteria, method of selection, and schedule of rotation will be the responsibility of the division commander. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until the scheduled rotation date.

Any individual who rotates from any section of the division may apply for reassignment after a two-year absence from the division unless the position is filled by another applicant.

RECORDS DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1990.

METHOD OF ROTATION: One property officer will rotate in September, 1990, and the second officer will rotate in September 1991. The tour of duty in the Property Section will be two years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The division commander will determine the schedule of rotation for the officers currently assigned to the section. The selection criteria and the method of selecting personnel for assignment to the section will be the responsibility of the division commander.

Individuals who rotate from the section may apply for reassignment after a two-year absence unless the position is filled by another applicant.

YOUTH DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1990.

METHOD OF ROTATION: The division commander will determine how many officers will rotate from the division, but he must rotate at least three-quarters of the positions assigned to the division. The division commander may choose to keep one position in the division as a permanent assignment.

One officer in the division will be reassigned in September of 1990, 1991, and 1992. If the division commander decides to keep a permanent assignment in the division, no officer will be

reassigned in 1993. The tour of duty in the division will be four years.

The sergeant in the division will rotate in September, 1991. The tour of duty for the sergeant will be six years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The selection criteria, method of selection, and schedule of rotation will be the responsibility of the division commander. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until the scheduled rotation date.

Individuals who rotate from the division may apply for reassignment after a two-year absence unless the position is filled by another applicant.

SPECIAL SERVICES DIVISION

COMMENCEMENT DATE: September, 1991.

METHOD OF ROTATION: The division commander will determine how many officers will rotate from the division, but he must rotate at least three of the positions assigned to the division. The division commander may choose to keep two positions in the division as permanent assignments.

One officer in the division will be reassigned in September of 1991, 1992, and 1993. If the division commander decides to keep a permanent assignment in the division, no officer will be reassigned in 1994. The tour of duty in the division will be four years.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: The selection criteria, method of selection, and schedule of rotation will be the responsibility of the division commander. The division commander is discouraged from making any personnel changes until the scheduled rotation date.

Individuals who rotate from the division may apply for reassignment after a two-year absence unless the position is filled by another applicant.

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ENDNOTES

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