

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

The Necessity of Requiring a Mandatory Rotation of Detectives

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ABSTRACT

Marvin (1998) pointed out that “departments should place the most experienced officers in the patrol position, where 90% of the departments work is done” (para. 11). This can be accomplished when police agencies make mandatory rotations of detectives a top priority and ensure that all members of the management team understand the benefits of a rotation policy. Officers will enhance their leadership abilities by experiencing and working in the detectives division. Officers will also gain new skills by working cases requiring follow-up criminal investigations. Pride and unity are increased as a result of eliminating or reducing the tension between detectives and patrol. Gabor (1992) pointed out that high morale is the result of a solid rotation.

A recommendation is made to rotate a senior detective out of the criminal investigation division back to patrol and rotate a senior patrol officer into a detective slot. The recommendation is that the rotation occurs when the senior detective has completed his seventh year. Rotating after seven years allows for contacts to be obtained as well as training and conducting thorough investigations. Mandatory rotation of detectives is a way to provide that excellent customer service that the citizens deserve.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies, no matter the size, need to follow the direction that many corporations are taking in developing their future leaders. These corporations are ensuring their employees gain working knowledge in a variety of positions before they are promoted. The citizens, who law enforcement officers swore to protect and serve, and law enforcement employees deserve and need well-rounded persons in the leadership roles of police agencies. Numerous law enforcement agencies promote an officer to a higher rank after they work at that agency for a specified number of years and score highest on a test. The testing material usually comes from a list of books that an officer reads. The test, usually, is not of the police officer's overall knowledge of police functions within that agency or their overall police experience. It is important for law enforcement to begin training the future leaders of the department.

One solution that has several positive side effects would be to rotate officers into the detective division while at the same time rotating a detective to a different position. Geberth (1998) indicated that it takes a year for a police officer to become familiar with the investigative side of detectives and two years to competently contribute to the investigative division. Because of the time it takes to gain the knowledge and contacts to become a competent investigator, rotation out of detectives should not be done until the new detective has several years under his/her belt. Marvin (1998) stated that "departments should place the most experienced officers in the patrol position, where 90% of the department's work is done" (para. 11). By allowing officers to experience different job functions within the police department the current leaders of the agency are proactively fostering the leaders of tomorrow. Training and experience are being

received by the fresh detective in areas that are new to them. The detective's new position should also increase his or her morale. Law enforcement agencies should have a mandatory rotational policy for members of the criminal investigation division.

POSITION

Officers will enhance their leadership abilities throughout their career in law enforcement by experiencing and working in a different facet of the police department, such as detectives. Marvin (1998) pointed out that a rotation program helps officers "gain valuable leadership experience and a broad-based view of the organization" (para. 19). Leadership positions in police agencies come from within the agency usually through testing. Too often police officers remain in one assignment until they are promoted. Should an officer only hold one position before promoting, the officer is stuck with a limited view on how different divisions are organized or run.

Police agencies need to make certain that they are training their future leaders to have a vested interest and an overall view of how the police department is run. Whitaker (1980) stated, "the ultimate objective of police revitalization is to develop within police agencies the capacity of self-renewal" (p. 61). Officers and law enforcement executives need a toolbox in which they can reach into throughout their career. Officers and the law enforcement executives need to have a toolbox full of different tools and should be able to pull out the necessary tool to effectively do the job that is before them.

It is important that the toolbox has more than just a hammer in it when the officer is promoted to a leadership position. Cheraskin and Campion (1996) pointed out that in their research and interviews, rotation is a major tool for those seeking to improve their managerial talent (para 24). Officers and managers alike can become frustrated when

they do not have the proper tool to do a job. When an officer promotes having the necessary tools the promotion can relate to a positive environment. In a study by Champion & Stevens, promotion rates were found to be related in a positive manner as a result of job rotation (as cited in Stiles-Doe, 1996). Not only does this mandatory rotation benefit the officer, it also benefits the police department in the long term.

Officers gain new knowledge and skills from working cases and training related to criminal investigations. Cheraskin and Champion (1996) found that “as a training and development tool, job rotation’s primary advantage is employees’ improved knowledge and skills” (para. 22). Employees are hungry to better themselves and improve their job knowledge. The article entitled “Energize & Enhance” (2008) stressed, “Job rotation is best known and used for training new entrants to an organization or bolstering the development of high potential employees” (p. 6). With mandatory rotation, officers are able to learn firsthand what the needs of a detective are to make a case. This includes collection of evidence from a crime scene that needs to be gathered, interview and interrogations, statements, photographs needed, to putting the whole case together. The new detective learns what the district attorney will need to file a charge and ultimately filing the charge.

Marvin (1996) pointed out that officers who only work in patrol their entire career are at a disadvantage and “reduces their value to the agency and to the community by not providing them with a well-rounded knowledge of various department divisions” (para. 4). With new knowledge and new skills the new detective is able to know what is needed to make a case. Eventually, when the officer is rotated back to patrol, they will have the skills necessary to follow up certain investigations and provide relevant

information should a case need to be forwarded to the detective division. Another benefit of the new skills and what has been learned is that an officer, who once was a detective, is now able to follow up their own cases from start to finish. This has a side benefit of reducing the case load for the detective division. As cited by Munro (n.d.), “recent research by the Police Federation shows there are simply not enough detectives to investigate crime” (p.19). In a trickle-down effect, reducing a caseload sent to detectives will allow more time for the detectives to follow up on the cases that are forwarded to them.

Another pro is that the detectives rotated back to patrol can share their skills and knowledge with the patrol officers that have not been rotated to detectives. Barnes (2010) stated, “The officer could handle many of the initial investigative duties, such as taking witness statements, photographing crime scenes, fingerprinting scenes and collecting evidence” (p. 7). Another benefit would be the experience that was learned while in the detective division can be shown to inexperienced officers. Munro (n.d.) stated, “Experienced detectives will be able to show new recruits how it’s done and what can be achieved” (p. 19).

Oftentimes there is an “us versus them” attitude among the patrol and detective division. When officers gain the detective skills and knowledge from working in the detective division, they have a better understanding of what the detective division is doing. The same can be said for detectives returning to patrol. The article titled “Energize & Enhance” (2008) affirmed that rotation helps “eliminate the us/them mentality” (p. 7). By eliminating or reducing the division and tension between the two units, a sense of pride and unity are increased.

Officers' morale increases because they know there is a chance to transfer to the criminal investigation unit. Morale problems are an issue in many police agencies. Agencies are often trying to improve the morale of the department. One reason for low morale is because officers may feel that there is no place for them to transfer to within the department. The reason behind this is because the detective slots are already occupied by the more senior personnel. In the old management style, it has been common practice for those that promote to detectives to stay there until they retire or are promoted out. Knowing that one's opportunities are limited can cause a negative morale problem. Gabor (1992) indicated, "An organizationally sound rotation system will produce high morale, good interdepartmental relations, new ideas and a stronger team" (p. 1). Having the traits listed by Gabor (1992) creates employees who want to come to work and have high productivity. The article titled "Energize & Enhance" (2008) quoted Miceli as stating, "I would expect to see intangible benefits, like increased morale" (p.10). Benefits, even though they cannot always be seen or measured on a line item page, help build a solid and sound police department.

COUNTER POSITION

There are those that would argue that the mandatory rotation of detectives is not sound management. One of the reasons given is that there is a cost to train a new detective or detectives every year. Others believe that officers who suffer burnout, which police suffer at "rates significantly higher than other occupations," will not improve from job rotation (Schaible & Gecas, 2010, p. 316). Burnout occurs when an officer is tired of his current job or no longer has an interest in what he is doing.

Many feel the training that is provided to the investigator is wasted when the officer returns to patrol. Robert Stachnik (2001) quoted several police managers who opposed the rotation of detective or investigators because of the investment in training and cost of experience. The police administrators are worried that continued training will not be used or will be lost when the officer is rotated back to patrol. Gerberth (1998) claimed, "From an administrative perspective, there should be concern about the costs of continually having to train newly assigned officers. It certainly is not cost effective" (p. 195). Police administrators view rotating the officer to detectives and then rotating the detective back to patrol as a money pit they will continually be throwing money into without getting a return for their investment.

Arguable as this might seem, this is not the case. Once the detective returns back to the patrol division, they do not throw the knowledge and skills that they learned into the "money pit." They use the new skills in their new assignment in patrol. The reports flowing from patrol to detectives has information that the rotating officer now knows the detective needs. An even more positive way to look at the cost to train the new detective is as an investment. The positive deposit is made not only into the account of the police department but, more particularly, to the employee. Cheraskin and Campion (1996) stated, "the cost associated with rotation can lead employees to view it as an investment by the organization in their training" (para. 22). Employees see the company as vesting in their future and not just throwing money away.

Another consequence given for mandatory rotation is an officer suffering from burnout will still suffer burnout in the new position. It is Daniels who stated, "job rotation should not be used in an attempt to cure job burnout because poor job performance will

almost certainly follow the marginal performer from his original assignment to the new one” (as cited in Stachnik, 2001, para. 41). There are those who are of the same mindset that mandatory rotation actually stagnates the officer and puts his career in a hold position. Gerberth (1998) asserted, “Rotation impedes career growth and frustrates professional ambition” (p. 195). Job burnout can and does occur. Some officers do suffer from the lack of career advancement.

Mandatory rotation can be a very effective tool, when used properly, to reinvigorate an employee that is the victim of job burnout. Ferrece et al. stated, “rotation is routinely mentioned as a way to ameliorate the effects of plateauing by adding stimulation to employees’ work” (as cited by Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994, p.1520). In other words, an employee becomes bored with his current assignment and is seeking challenging assignments. Campion, Cheraskin, and Stevens (1994) quoted Hall when he indicated that job rotation is seen as an “environmental strategy for career development” (p.1519). For these reasons, job rotation stimulates the employee and presents the employee with a way to climb over the ledge that he has been stuck on so that he can continue up the mountain of success.

RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement agencies should have a mandatory rotational policy for members of the criminal investigation division. Police agencies are always looking for ways to increase morale. The mandatory rotation of detectives is a good way to start increasing poor morale problems within a police agency. One has to agree that gaining new knowledge, training and skills are beneficial to all police officers. As the old saying goes, knowledge is power. Those in power now at police departments are pouring the

foundation for future police executives. With patrol officers experiencing different job functions within the police department, the leaders of tomorrow's police agency will have a broader view of the police department's functions.

The benefits are not limited to the police officers and their individual agency. The benefits encompass all citizens who need or require their help. Law enforcement agencies should take heed and follow in the same direction as the major corporations.

A recommendation to police agencies would be to make the mandatory rotations of detectives a top priority and ensure that all members of the management team understand the importance of the rotation policy. However, there is no set way to begin the process and there are no steadfast rules. One approach would be to first consider the number of officers rotated in and out. This would depend on the number of detectives that particular agency has in that division. To start the process, management should rotate the senior patrol officer first with the most senior detective, providing the senior detective has been in that position for at least seven years. If a detective division has 14 detectives, then the two senior detectives would rotate out and two new officers would rotate into the detective division and so on.

Should a police agency have less than seven detectives, the rotation would start when the senior detective in that division and every successive detective reached seven years. Seven years would allow for a new detective to make contacts, receive the training and knowledge in the detective field, learn how the division operates and spend time actually investigating cases and building cases. Police administrators should not rotate any faster than the seven year mark to ensure that the listed skills can be obtained by the new detective. When rotating the senior person out of detectives, it

allows another detective or detectives to become senior. In other words, a seven year senior detective will rotate back to patrol, thus allowing the detective with six years to become the senior detective. This also allows and ensures an agency always has detectives with experience in place to help mentor the newer detective with a case that might require more skills than a beginning detective may have at the time.

When the detective is transferred back to patrol, the detective who now is an experienced officer, might have to be slightly retrained for patrol duties. There could be new computers or possibly new streets that he is unaware of since being off of patrol. There could also be new ways that patrol reports for their assignments. Whatever the case may be, this should be a short process and the experienced officer will be out on the streets in no time. Once the experienced officer is out on the streets by themselves, that experienced officer can help mentor other officers at scenes. They can help in showing and advising what the detective division needs in their reports and explain why it is important. Having a peer explain the reason or reasons in a way that the officer who has never been in detectives can understand and relate. The experienced officer can also better investigate cases and help reduce the caseload that is forwarded to the detective division. This is a win/win situation. It allows for a higher clearance rate at a patrol level and keeps the detective division from having to be bogged down with cases that with just a little more effort could have been cleared by patrol. This gives detectives more time to work on the more difficult case or cases that really need that extra time and effort.

The benefits of mandatory rotation of detectives are not only to the police department's management and police employees but also to the citizens. The public,

who the police are working for and who the police should provide them with the best customer service should be the aim of every police administrator and officer.

Mandatory rotation of detectives is a way to provide that excellent customer service that the citizens deserve and pay for.

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