

**The Bill Blackwood
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**Creating Corporals:
A Path to Law Enforcement Leadership**

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ABSTRACT

Creating the rank of Corporal to serve as a Field Training Officer (FTO) or Criminal Investigator is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the modern law enforcement supervisor must be prepared to assume roles that far exceed the traditional supervisor role of the past and must assume duties that will prepare them for leadership responsibilities within his or her law enforcement agency. A first line supervisor is traditionally held by the rank of Sergeant and is responsible for leading, directing, controlling, coaching, training, mentoring, and disciplining his or her subordinates, while also serving as a mediator with higher ranking Commanders whose interests are often in conflict with subordinates.

The purpose of this research was to examine the viability of establishing a rank of Corporal to serve as an FTO or Criminal Investigator in additional law enforcement agencies and to persuade law enforcement and city administrators to establish a promotional process that requires officers to assume duties that will prepare them for leadership responsibilities within their agency, thereby developing a more competent supervisor through training and experience. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: review of literature consisting of books, articles, periodicals, and journals. Further, a survey was distributed to 40 participants and personal interviews were held with law enforcement administrators.

The researcher discovered that law enforcement supervisors that serve as an FTO or Criminal Investigator prior to promotion to Sergeant receive training and experience that improve his or her leadership skills and enhance the abilities of subordinates to perform his or her law enforcement duties. Through the investment in

human capital, performance is improved, resulting in decreased liability to the department and improved retention of personnel in the law enforcement agency.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary law enforcement supervisor must be prepared to assume roles that far exceed the traditional “supervisor” role of the past and, therefore, requires a pathway to establishing leadership abilities. He or she must be prepared to assume the “leadership” role while staying aware of the changing generational and organizational culture present in law enforcement agencies today. A first line supervisor, which is traditionally held by the rank of Sergeant in law enforcement, is responsible for leading, directing, controlling, coaching, training, mentoring, and disciplining his or her subordinates, while also serving as a mediator with higher ranking Commanders whose interests are often in conflict with subordinates. In addition, he or she must be prepared to work with administrators in promoting future leaders amongst officers with whom he or she previously worked as a peer and, therefore, fail to view him or her as equipped to lead.

The issue to be examined considers whether or not to create the rank of Corporal in law enforcement agencies to serve as a Field Training Officer (FTO) or Criminal Investigator prior to being eligible to promote to the rank of Sergeant in agencies with 51 to 100 sworn personnel. The relevance of creating the rank of Corporal to serve as an FTO or Criminal Investigator to law enforcement agencies is the experience to be gained by Sergeants serving as first line supervisors who have chosen to accept auxiliary responsibilities within their agency prior to promotion. This, in turn, results in enhanced instructional and leadership skills that are essential to supervision. The purpose of this research is to examine the viability of establishing a rank of Corporal in additional law enforcement agencies and to persuade law enforcement and city

administrators to require officers to assume duties that will prepare them for leadership responsibilities within their law enforcement agency.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not serving in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator would develop a more competent supervisor and, ultimately, enhance leadership skills of officers through training and experience. It also questions whether or not including a promotional process, which includes a promotional assessment center, better identifies leadership skills and potential for career progression in personnel seeking promotion. The method of inquiry to conduct this research includes a review of literature consisting of books, articles, periodicals, and journals as well as a survey distributed to 40 survey participants and personal interviews held with law enforcement administrators. The anticipated findings of the research is that it will be demonstrated that law enforcement officers that serve in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator will receive training and experience that will result in improved leadership skills. Through improved supervision he or she will enhance the abilities of their subordinates to perform their law enforcement duties. Because of this research, the field of law enforcement will benefit through the appropriate enhancement of leadership skills of future supervisors and new officers. Through this investment in human capital, performance will be improved resulting in decreased liability to the department and improved retention of personnel.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The development of talented leadership is essential to the growth of the law enforcement profession and is attained through the training and experience obtained by personnel throughout his or her career. Law enforcement administrators increasingly

face the challenge of recognizing and selecting qualified personnel for leadership roles in their existing agencies (Hughes, 2006). Progressive law enforcement officers in search of recognition and promotion can enhance their leadership skills by serving as an FTO or Criminal Investigator prior to promotion to Sergeant. Sun (2003) suggested there must be recognition by administrators that new law enforcement officers are influenced more by their FTO, who often pass on agency culture and processes than by agency policy and procedures; thus, more consideration in FTO selection and training is necessary. Because of this, it is vital that a new officer be trained and supervised by personnel that adhere to and promote department policy and procedures. Whetstone (2001) indicated that officers cite current job satisfaction and the belief that newly promoted Sergeants become “overwhelmed” with new responsibilities as well as a “distrust of the promotional process and departmental management” as reasons they do not seek promotions (p. 155). Beaver (2006) suggested that a promotional process for FTOs ensures fairness and unsurpassed abilities of trainers to instruct and guide recruits. Glensor, Peak, and Gains (1999) suggested that a “supervisor is caught in the middle” of subordinates and upper management and are expected to represent the unique interests of each. Further, they suggested that the complexity of supervision is made bigger by the increased responsibility of maintaining discipline for the first time, while also being reminded of his or her previous performance.

Among the most challenging roles of law enforcement executives is identifying and promoting the top personnel to a supervisory role (Eisenberg, 2001; Hilgenfeldt, 2000; Hughes, 2006). The ability to effectively identify the qualities of a leader cannot be discovered by written exam alone. Hilgenfeldt (2000) suggested that many law

enforcement agencies are still using the traditional process for promotion that involves a written exam and oral board, and this method provides a limited ability to determine potential abilities. Although a written exam can determine understanding of concepts and knowledge of policy, an assessment center provides a reliable method to identify personality traits and the future potential of personnel by evaluating what a person does in addition to what they know (Hughes, 2006). Hughes (2006) stated, “observed performance is a predictor of performance on the job and an indication of the candidate’s knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the job” (p. 108). A survey of seven law enforcement agencies that assessed officers competing for the rank of Corporal or Sergeant between 1979 and 1988 showed that “in 132 of 173 cases, assessment center performance was positively related to career progression” (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 23). Beaver (2006) put forward that “FTOs should attend an accredited field training officer course and first-line supervisor school as soon as possible”, and they also need to be encouraged to recognize a problem and solve it with minimum supervisory involvement to help develop their leadership potential (p. 12). Proper training is essential to improving performance and ensuring accountability of law enforcement officers, which reduces agency liabilities; therefore, the training of subordinates is considered a crucial responsibility of a supervisor (Glensor, et al., 1999).

Law enforcement agencies tend to hold fast to distinct rank classifications amongst its personnel and, therefore, promote different responsibilities for officers within the organization. This can limit growth beyond a current assignment. FTOs can develop their future leadership style through active problem solving of incidents

encountered while working and modeling appropriate behavior (Beaver, 2006). Law enforcement supervisors serve various unique tasks such as planner, counselor, disciplinarian, communicator, arbitrator, evaluator, and manager in addition to training, educating, and inspecting their subordinates; a Criminal Investigation Supervisor is also responsible for reviewing cases, preparing case information, assisting the prosecutor, and evaluating testimony and courtroom demeanor (Garner, 1981). These skills are developed through training and practice. Effective supervision requires policy compliance when making immediate decisions in the field as well as providing guidance to subordinates through correction and evaluation in an appropriate situation (Garner, 1981). Glensor, et al. (1999) identified the role of a supervisor as:

“The supervisor's role, put simply is to get subordinates to do their very best.

This task involves a host of actions, including communicating, motivating, leading, team building, training, developing, appraising, counseling, and disciplining. Getting subordinates to do their very best includes figuring out their strengths and weaknesses, defining good and bad performance, measuring performance, providing feedback, and making sure that subordinates' efforts coincide with the organization's mission, values, goals, and objectives.” (p. 18)

An organization benefits through the development of qualified personnel who strive to increase proficiency as a law enforcement officer. For an FTO and Criminal Investigator to develop their skills, it requires establishing a means to critique him or her self and correct deficiencies based upon previous experiences. With few exceptions, a talented officer can transfer to multiple assignments to improve his or her skill and ability to promote; however, without the opportunity to obtain advanced training or to transfer

or promote to positions of greater responsibility, some officers with higher education levels may become frustrated and quit (Whetstone, 2001). Whetstone (2001) suggested that the ability to promote and fulfill career expectations improves job satisfaction; however, this becomes complicated within agencies with stagnant or reduced supervisory positions. Eisenberg (2001) and Garner (1981) put forward that a law enforcement leader must be knowledgeable of laws and procedures and demonstrate honorable conduct for the officers they lead. An administrator responsible for developing a professional organizational culture must use a promotion process that best predicts leadership skills in subordinates prior to promotion to supervisory positions. An assessment center provides agency personnel feedback about their talents while preparing them for future assignments (Hughes, 2006). Hilgenfeldt (2000) suggested that although the assessment center is not perfect, it is a fair and more reliable way to identify future leaders for a position than traditional methods. Eisenberg (2001) stated, "the better the candidate performs in the initial first-line supervisory assessment center, the more likely it is that he or she will be promoted to that rank as well as higher ranks in the future" (p. 23).

Police Chief Fred Garza stated to the researcher that he created the rank of Corporal in the Uvalde Texas Police Department to create a positive environment and expand promotional opportunities within the department. He said officers promoted to the rank of Corporal maintain patrol responsibilities and act as a Supervisor in the absence of a Sergeant. Prior to appointment to the rank of Corporal, each patrol officer is evaluated through a process, which involves a written test, an oral review board, and a review of his or her accomplishments file. Chief Garza advised that appointment to

Corporal is not a requirement to promote to Sergeant; however, it is considered in the promotional process. In addition, the creation of the rank of Corporal helps to improve officer retention (F. Garza, personal communication, October 23, 2007).

Police Chief Dan Shiner stated to the researcher that he created the rank of Corporal in Santa Maria, California as part of a career development plan, which he implemented by collective bargaining that required a vote of all officers. Prior to the development plan, the agency had permanent detectives and traffic officers that received assignment pay. Detectives and traffic officers were provided five years to promote to Corporal or Sergeant, or they could return to patrol duty with a loss of assignment pay. Chief Shiner said that Corporals were assigned to serve as “lead officers” on each shift as well as one Corporal each is assigned to traffic, gangs, narcotics, the criminal investigation division, and as a beat coordinator in the Community Policing program. The position encouraged advancement and provided officers opportunities for specialty assignments (D. Shiner, personal communication, June 10, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not to create the rank of Corporal in law enforcement agencies to serve as a Field Training Officer (FTO) or Criminal Investigator prior to being eligible to promote to the rank of Sergeant in agencies with 51–100 sworn personnel. The researcher hypothesizes that it will be demonstrated that law enforcement officers that serve in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator will receive training and experience that will result in improved leadership skills and, therefore, will enhance the abilities of their subordinates to

perform their law enforcement duties. The agency benefits from more competent officers and reduced liability accomplished through the retention and training of experienced personnel.

The method of inquiry to conduct this research will include a review of literature consisting of books, articles, periodicals, journals; in addition, a survey distributed to survey participants and personal interviews will be held with law enforcement administrators. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of creating the rank of Corporal to serve as an FTO or Criminal Investigator will include a survey distributed to 40 survey participants and personal interviews of law enforcement administrators. The size of the survey will consist of ten questions, distributed to 40 survey participants from the State of Texas. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 36 survey instruments being returned, resulting in a 90% rate of return. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by tabulating the response of each category in the survey instrument and determining the percentage rate for each sub category.

FINDINGS

The law enforcement profession provides opportunity for career advancement to individuals whom assume duties that prepare his or her leadership skills. However, contemporary law enforcement administrators face increased challenges in the identification and development of personnel qualified to assume leadership roles within his or her agency. This is caused, in part, by personnel who decline to assume tasks, such as becoming an FTO or Criminal Investigator, which prepares him or her for a future supervisory position, although these assignments provide opportunities for

recognition. Further, it is essential that as a law enforcement officer begins his or her career, he or she is trained and supervised by personnel that adhere to and support department policy and procedures since new officers are influenced more by his or her FTO than by established agency policy and procedures. Therefore, it is established that through proper selection and training for personnel prior to promotion to a supervisor role in a law enforcement agency, leadership abilities be identified and developed benefiting the department through improved performance and decreased liability.

Research indicated that officers point to current job satisfaction in addition to distrust of the promotional process as reasons they do not seek promotion to the position of a “first line supervisor,” which is most often the rank of Sergeant. It was indicated that there is a belief among officers that newly promoted Sergeants become “overwhelmed” with their new responsibilities, which include maintaining discipline for the first time. Further, the role of Sergeant is complicated by the expectation to serve as a mediator for subordinates and upper management and represent the unique interests of both. Results of a survey distributed to 40 Texas law enforcement officers participating in the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas - Leadership Command College indicated clear distinctions between agency requirements and officer performance. Participants reported that 83% of represented agencies do not require an officer to serve as an FTO or Detective/Investigator prior to promotion to Sergeant; however, 83% also reported that serving in these capacities improves the performance of a supervisor. Table I demonstrates similar inconsistencies amongst the respondent’s agencies.

Table I. Survey results of supervisor staff that served as a FTO or Investigator compared to patrol level staff that declined or expressed no interest to serve as a FTO or Investigator but desired promotion in last five years in respondent's law enforcement agency.

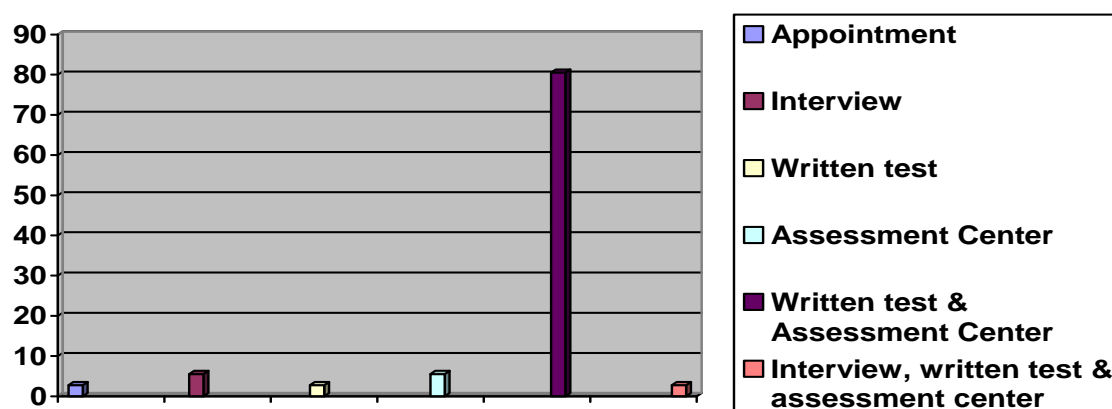
	n/a or none	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Supervisor staff that served as FTO or Investigator	8.40	44.44	13.88	13.88	19.44
Patrol staff that declined or expressed no interest to serve as FTO or Inv.	30.57	44.44	13.88	11.11	0.00

A contrasting view presented in research is that the field of law enforcement essentially limits leadership growth in personnel by limiting promotional opportunities of qualified staff. Although an agency benefits from the development of personnel with increased proficiency, growth beyond a current assignment is limited because of tendencies to maintain distinct rank classifications that maintain order and define responsibilities. With limited exceptions, a talented officer can transfer to multiple assignments to improve his skill; however, without the opportunity to promote, some officers may become frustrated and quit. Research suggests that although the ability to promote and fulfill expectations improves job satisfaction, agencies with reduced or stagnant supervisory positions cause complications for officers.

Identifying and promoting qualified personnel is a challenging role for law enforcement administrators. Although many agencies are still using the traditional process of promotion that involves a written exam and oral board, research indicates this is an ineffective method to determine potential leadership abilities. A written exam determines knowledge of concepts and policy, but fails to provide a reliable method to identify personality traits and leadership potential. A law enforcement administrator needs to use a promotion process that is the best predictor of leadership ability prior to

promotion. Although an assessment center is not perfect, it is a more reliable way to identify future leaders than traditional methods, and it provides personal feedback about his or her talents assisting with future leadership roles. Research suggests that career development and future promotion of entry-level personnel can be more effectively predicted through performance evaluation of the first promotional assessment center in which an officer participates. Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified the use of an analytical written test and assessment center as the process that would best prepare an officer for a leadership position, with a response of 80.55%.

Chart 1. Survey results of percentage of selection process that would best prepare an officer for a leadership position.



Fifty percent of survey respondents reported he or she had served as FTO and Detective/Investigator prior to promotion to Sergeant, and 30.55% served in at least one of these assignments. A promotional process for FTOs ensures fairness and helps to ensure trainers have the ability to instruct and guide new officers. It is recommended in research that FTOs should attend an accredited field training officer course in addition to first-line supervisor school as soon as possible, and they are encouraged to perform with minimum intervention from supervisors to develop his or her leadership potential. Research suggested that a supervisor must be respected by subordinates because of

his or her performance, in addition to knowledge of laws and procedures, in order to be effective.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not serving in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator would develop a more competent supervisor and, ultimately, enhance leadership skills of officers through training and experience. The purpose of this research was to examine the viability of establishing a rank of Corporal in additional law enforcement agencies and to persuade law enforcement and city administrators to establish a promotional process and require officers to assume duties that will prepare them for leadership responsibilities within their law enforcement agency, thereby developing a more competent supervisor through training and experience.

The research question that was examined focused on whether or not serving in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator would develop a more competent supervisor and, ultimately, enhance leadership skills of officers through training and experience. The researcher hypothesized that it would be demonstrated that law enforcement officers that serve in the capacity of an FTO or Criminal Investigator would receive training and experience that would result in improved leadership skills and, therefore, would enhance the abilities of their subordinates to perform their law enforcement duties. Law enforcement administrators will benefit by establishing a promotional process that predicts leadership potential and advancement of personnel.

The researcher concluded from the findings that the field of law enforcement provides opportunity for career advancement, thus enabling individuals prepared to

assume positions of responsibility to enhance his or her leadership skills. However, patrol officers are often thrust into supervisory positions without appropriate preparation to lead subordinates in achieving the goals of the law enforcement agency where they are employed. Often, attempts to train personnel within an agency results in providing a broad range of training to numerous officers, instead of focused training that broadens the ability of individuals desiring promotional opportunities to lead subordinates and improve performance. The rank of Corporal in a law enforcement agency provides an administrator the opportunity to promote personnel to positions that prepare him or her for future leadership roles through training and experience. A promotional process for the rank of Corporal that includes a written exam and assessment center will help law enforcement administrators identify the future leadership potential of personnel and aid the officer to discover his or her talents prior to assignment to a leadership position.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to future leadership potential often being identified through demonstration of knowledge and skills exhibited in a promotional process. The training provided to personnel who serve as an FTO and/or Criminal Investigator is consistent with skills required to effectively supervise and lead subordinates in a contemporary law enforcement agency. Further, an FTO and Criminal Investigator develop communication, evaluation, planning, and management skills necessary to effectively lead others. Research indicated personnel performance is improved through proper training, which reduces agency liability. This illustrates the need to have skilled leaders in first-line supervisory positions since training is accepted as a primary function of a supervisor in a law enforcement agency.

Research indicated that an FTO develops his or her future leadership style through active problem solving and modeling appropriate behavior for trainees. Effective supervisors benefit his or her agency through their leadership, which is developed through training and practice. Personal interviews held with Police Chiefs Fred Garza and Dan Shiner supported research associated with developing leadership of personnel within their respective agency through selection and training with the creation of the rank of Corporal to assume leadership roles. Chief Garza created the rank of Corporal to create a positive environment and expand promotional opportunities, while Chief Shiner cited career development of officers. Both agencies implemented a promotional process to attain the rank of Corporal and required Corporals to assume supervisory responsibility in the absence of a Sergeant. Glensor, et al. (1999) identified the role of a supervisor as:

“The supervisor’s role, put simply is to get subordinates to do their very best.

This task involves a host of actions, including communicating, motivating, leading, team building, training, developing, appraising, counseling, and disciplining. Getting subordinates to do their very best includes figuring out their strengths and weaknesses, defining good and bad performance, measuring performance, providing feedback, and making sure that subordinates’ efforts coincide with the organization’s mission, values, goals, and objectives.” (p18)

Law enforcement officers who have been properly prepared for leadership roles within a law enforcement agency are equipped to assume responsibilities such as an assignment as FTO or Criminal Investigator prior to promotion to Sergeant, thereby benefiting the agency in which he or she is employed. Limitations that might have

hindered this study resulted because the researcher discovered inadequate amounts of literature to review pertaining to the selection and training of personnel for the rank of corporal.

The study of creating the rank of Corporal to serve as an FTO or Criminal Investigator is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the modern law enforcement supervisor must be prepared to assume roles that far exceed the traditional “supervisor” role of the past and must assume assignments that will prepare them for leadership responsibilities within his or her law enforcement agency. Because of this research, the field of law enforcement will benefit through the development of leadership skills of future supervisors and new officers. Through this investment in human capital, performance will be improved, resulting in decreased liability to the department and improved retention of personnel. The agency benefits from more competent officers and reduced liability accomplished through the retention and training of experienced personnel. Law enforcement and city administrators determined to identify and develop talented leaders within their agency stand to benefit through the establishment of a process to better predict the leadership ability of personnel prior to promotion, thereby creating a more effective leadership team within his or her agency. Law enforcement officers seeking recognition and promotional opportunities because of his or her leadership skills stand to benefit by the results of this research through the ability to participate in a pathway to law enforcement leadership while serving as an FTO or Criminal Investigator with the rank of Corporal, becoming prepared for future leadership roles within the law enforcement profession.

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