

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

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**Texas Police Executives Leading the Way with Education:  
The Need for Formal Leadership and Management Education**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to examine the current management and leadership deficiencies in executive level police organizations. The state of Texas has many training requirements for police officers; however, it fails to mandate any management or leadership training for executive level police officers. In order to improve the profession of law enforcement and provide the citizens with the best police organizations, Texas should mandate formal training in leadership, management, sociology, and psychology type disciplines.

Research conducted utilizing journals, articles, internet sites, and formal presentations will conclude the need for this proposed mandate. Increasing this standard will elevate the law enforcement profession to a level that will demand a greater respect among other comparable professions and professionals. Police executives are being called upon to perform a greater array of responsibilities requiring a greater demand for strategic planning and organizational development. Through the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, a prestigious state funded program, a foundation for meeting this challenge is in place. However, state officials need to take a more serious approach to increasing funding and mandating for higher formal education and training for police executives in order to break away from the status quo of police organizations. The future of the protection and services police organizations provide to the citizens is definitely at stake.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement is evolving at a more rapid pace than ever seen in the past. Specific skills and expertise are in greater demand related to organizational and human development. A large number of police executives are ill prepared for these challenges and therefore lack the ability to produce police organizations with full potential. The greatest asset in any police organization is its personnel. Communities are demanding a more quality police force, and many police executives are lacking the leadership and management abilities to produce the product.

Texas law enforcement has the ability to model the way by improving education standards for executive level police officers. Enhancing standards for executive level police officers throughout the state would improve law enforcement's professional profile, enhance the credibility of police leaders, provide police leaders with the necessary skills to deal with organizational development and behaviors, and set the example for the officers they lead. This, in turn, will have a direct impact to the success rate for police organizations and the image of the police profession as a whole. An examination of the current status of Texas law enforcement will show educational and professional standards are minimal. Further, executive level police officers lack needed leadership and management training to progressively and successfully lead police officers to the next level. This would improve the overall quality of police organizations and provide to the citizens the highest police product. The state of Texas needs to take the lead in law enforcement by requiring all executive level police officers to successfully attend formal leadership and management training in order to improve

success rates for police organizations and provide a more professional model for the citizens and officers they serve.

## **POSITION**

Law enforcement is arguably regarded as a profession. Profession is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (2011). Requirements for entry level police officers include: be at least 21 years of age, attend a state approved police academy, pass the state exam, several criminal background restrictions, and possess of high school diploma or equivalent. A basic police academy requires 618 hours of skills and educational training to be certified as a peace officer. These standards are governed by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education (TCLEOSE, n.d.b). This is undoubtedly less than “intensive academic preparation..” One can argue that law enforcement lacks the level of professionalism requirements required in other professions.

Once a cadet graduates from the approximate five-month police academy, employment research conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011a) showed that the median annual salary for a police officer is approximately \$51,410.00. This is a very fair salary based on the definition of profession when the National Association of Colleges and Employers estimates the annual average base salary of a college graduate is approximately \$41,701.00 (“Salary survey”, 2011). Public school teachers are required to obtain a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, earn an average starting salary of \$33,227.00 (n.d.b).

There is a substantial difference in salary ranges between these two public service employees. Additionally, approximately 84.3% of Texas seniors graduated high school last year (Texas Education Agency, 2010); therefore, they are qualified to earn substantially more money than college graduates, including their high school teachers, in a profession that requires a minimum amount of education. Enhancing professionalism through education could also result in higher standard salaries for police officers and executive police leaders. Higher credibility in the profession could provide a legitimate demand and competition against comparable professions and increase standard wages.

Law enforcement has always been considered a paramilitary profession that mirrors many aspects of the military including organizational structure. A prerequisite for holding the rank of Lieutenant or higher in the Army requires a candidate to possess a college degree. Once accepted, commanding officers must attend intensive training pertaining to leadership, management, and other strategic planning. The military has recognized the importance of leadership and management training for all of the commanding positions, and this is evident through the extensive training to achieve this goal. Although the enlisted military personnel have a greater ability through training and experience to carry out the missions due to specific skill sets, the command staff of the military need to possess a dimension more unique to the development of the mission. Law enforcement has modeled its organizational structure after the military; however, it lacks in the vital area of command development.

Executive police leaders in law enforcement today are not held to any state professional standard different from a basic police officer, with the exception of the

position of police chief. One step TCLEOSE is doing to improve police leadership is requiring first time police chiefs to attend 80 hours of leadership and management training (n.d.a). Although the state should be applauded for this effort to improve standards, research will later be discussed as to why this may not be enough. Other than this mandate, it is left in the hands of the employing municipalities to determine the standards for the police chiefs appointed and the executive police leaders they employ. Therefore, with the lack of increased standards for executive level police officers, agencies will continue to employ police leaders that may not be competent to progressively lead agencies to the next level.

A study conducted at Sam Houston State University provided many interesting statistics regarding Texas police chiefs (Garner, 2011). One statistic from the study revealed only 41.3% of Texas police chiefs possess a bachelors degree or higher. This statistic illustrates how Texas municipalities are appointing a large number of not just executive level police officers, but police chiefs to positions with minimal educational qualifications. Like many other industries, law enforcement technology and practices are advancing more rapidly than ever before. Thus, there is a need for leaders who will be able to advance with the profession, not status quo leaders who will be left behind along with the safety of the communities they swore to protect.

Credibility becomes problematic for those executive police leaders who fail to obtain training and education in management and leadership. Leadership and management skills are a learned trait that can be continuously enhanced. When leaders lack these abilities, the leaders tend to lose credibility with the people they lead. Leadership is a skill that requires an understanding of many complicated aspects. This

can be supported with research of Texas police chiefs showing the number one knowledge trait of a good leader in understanding human behavior (Garner, 2011). Police leaders need to evaluate the importance of their position and realize there is a much larger picture than a mere managing of officers and tasks. Police officers want to have trust in leadership that is competent, knowledgeable, inspires a vision, communicates well, and shows empathy (Garner, 2011). It is difficult to achieve these traits for many people without training and education in management, leadership, sociology, psychology, or other human behavior studies. With a solid background in understanding human and organizational behaviors, police leadership can motivate employees from a reactive or “status quo” type of mindset to a proactive mindset.

By enhancing the leadership and management educational requirements for executive police, leaders will have a great potential to trickle down to the officers they lead. Although it should not be a mandate at this point, the influential side effect of line level officers increasing their education based on leadership role modeling should be examined. In law enforcement today, police agencies see a high turnover rate due to several components. In an article written by Mark Terra in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, he stated, “In a healthy job market, an unhappy employee will leave for a 5 percent salary increase, but it will take a 20 percent increase for a happy employee to leave” (Terra, 2009, p. 11). It is important to note the ingredients of this happiness were identified as being several things. Many people surveyed stated the one major component was the perception that supervisors lack leadership skills (Terra, 2009).

Providing a leadership model, education, and development will increase job satisfaction and drive their thirst for more knowledge. This profession is in a constant



state of change, and the profession is becoming more challenging. Police officers are called upon more and more to think outside of the box and perform more rigorous problem solving situations than the everyday service calls. Police officers are involved in the development of action plans, prepare for community meetings, research equipment, and make the best decisions based on prior experiences, education and the research performed. Many of these tasks are difficult, if not impossible, without knowing or having the education to perform these tasks. They require the officers not only to make a decision but provide supporting evidence as to how and why the decision was made. Officers will also have a better understanding of the professional processes and the organization, thus making budget, salary, equipment, and staffing issues more easily explainable.

Educational plans for the officers will demonstrate from leadership the desire to see them succeed and make them succession leaders in their profession not just subordinates. Officers look at leadership and want to have someone that is overseeing the organization that they can respect and will make the best educated decisions based on research, practical and critical thinking, and has the ability to advance the department.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Many critics would argue that law enforcement is commonsense along with the leadership responsibilities associated with it. Police departments have survived without a great demand for formal education or management and leadership training. One may suggest the primary responsibilities of law enforcement is the enforcement of laws and provide a public service. Although this seems like a logical and very common sense

approach, police work has evolved far beyond this viewpoint. In fact, many could argue the profession of law enforcement is far behind in regard to educational requirements needed to actually perform the evolved tasks.

To examine this argument, it is important to understand that common sense is defined by (Dictionary.com, 2011) as “sound practical judgment that is independent of specialized knowledge, training, or the like; normal native intelligence.” Law enforcement leaders are required to perform a magnitude of managerial responsibilities that are requiring more “specialized knowledge” to include but not limited to: budgeting, strategic planning, presenting, researching, allocations, analysis, needs assessments, and predictive policing. These abilities are the just the basic managerial responsibilities and do not include more important skills of leadership like the following: communicating, motivating, and mentoring, along with understanding and influencing human and organizational behaviors. In response to those who make the common sense claim, Victor Hugo quoted it best as, “Common sense is in spite of, not the result of, education” (Hugo, 2011). Law enforcement today is more complicated then ever before with tightening budgets, greater transparency, and growing criticism of police agencies and practices.

Police leaders need to be more prepared to face these challenges. Police executives tend to find themselves promoting into positions not prepared to deal with management and leadership responsibilities necessary to be successful. A survey of Texas police chiefs revealed several of the top areas they wish they would have had more training and knowledge in pertained to communication, interpersonal skills, and better management and leadership skills (Garner, 2011). This can be seen as a fair

assessment of the needs police executives lack at the highest levels of police organizations. If this is the case, it should be assumed the lower level executives have less training and education in management and leadership. Therefore, police leaders find themselves many steps behind the curve once they step foot into the executive roles they promote in to. It could be assumed that the success rate for leaders with incompetency in education and training will continue to grow. Common sense plays an intricate role in police work; however, by itself, it cannot sustain the demands of this intensifying profession. If everything was commonsense, then every solution, in turn, would be commonsense. Law enforcement, and specifically police leadership and management, is far from simply being common sense.

Police budgets for law enforcement are getting tighter and department training, and education funding is an area that may be affected. Police officers who would utilize this funding to pursue training and formal education may find this resource no longer available through their departments. Therefore, officers may use this as an excuse for their lack of pursuing higher education and training to better prepare themselves for leadership roles. One may argue that in order to raise the educational standards, police departments need to provide the officers with the resources to achieve this goal.

This argument tends to support the original assessment of why officers should obtain a formal education or training prior to entering into this profession. When police officers have minimal education entering the profession and are paid substantial salaries, there is very little incentive to achieve any higher education. This can lead to complacency and an entitlement attitude, which can result in the original issue of the lack of education for police executives. In the private sector professions, employees are

required to obtain their own educations prior to entering the field or obtain the education in order to promote. This builds a sense of personal enhancement in order to achieve greater reward. Law enforcement in Texas has found many answers to the problem and continues to take advantage of alternatives to assist officers in achieving an education. Several avenues exist that officers can take advantage of to help obtain education and training consisting of non-profit organizations, departmental education reimbursement, state-funded higher educational grants, and state and federal funded management training. With the number of options that exist for opportunities to obtain education and training, there should be little or no excuse for officers to meet this challenge.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The law enforcement profession continues to demand greater skills and abilities necessary to be successful in leading police organizations. Requiring police leaders to obtain formal training in leadership and management would help meet the demands of the evolving needs. Texas law makers are taking notice of this need, and this is aparent when, in 2009, Texas Legislation passed a bill that amended the Texas Education Code 54.208. This bill pays for police officers in Texas to attend qualifying state funded institutions of higher education (Texas Education Code, 2009). This law funds tuition for criminal justice courses to assist police officers in achieving higher educational standards. Further, the 70<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature created the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. It was created to provide free training to police executives in the areas of leadership and management. This

institution is “the largest and most sophisticated statewide preparation program for police management in the United States” . (LEMIT, n.d.)

With the many options that lawmakers have provided executive level police officers, there is no reason why mandating a minimum of the attendance of LEMIT should not be feasible. In order to accomplish this task, it is recommended that the state utilize more public safety revenue in order to provide increased funding for the mandate. Making a college degree desireable at the least and the graduation of LEMIT mandatory for all executive level police leaders will enhance the professionalism of law enforcement, increase leadership credibility, better prepare police leaders with the necessary skills to deal with organizational development and behaviors, and set the example for the officers they lead. With Texas taking the lead with this mandate, it is almost certain that other states will follow suit; therefore, it will make the profession of law enforcement in the nation more premiere, credible and competitive.

Increasing the funding for this mandate would eliminate the argument of the budgetary constraints of municipalities or even the individual financial issues officers may have to obtain the training. This would help provide equality in the Texas police profession and standardize the practices. It is clear that law enforcement has evolved from simple problem solving into a much more intricate profession. Therefore, the standards of common sense are no longer feasible to sustain this profession. Texas has the opportunity to lead the nation and provide the example of what professional policing consists of. Mandating all executive level police officers to successfully attend formal leadership and management training will improve success rates for police

organizations and provide a more professional model for the citizens and officers they serve.

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