

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

**Leadership:
Implement Training Program Prior To Promotion**

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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies and their officers are being looked at through a microscope these days because of the professionalism as leaders while doing their duty. Externally, supervisors are being blamed for not supervising their officers out in the field, which is pointing out officer's mistakes by citizens and the media. Law enforcement agencies and the upper chain of command need to be more aggressive when it comes to leadership training. The problem being seen by executives and officers is that officers are getting training after they are being promoted to the next rank. This does no good for officers to have no leadership skills prior to being promoted. Agencies would be setting up officers for failure in their career if they continue to allow this to happen in the future. Finding a department's identity is crucial, not only for the department but for the image that they want the public to view. Individual growth is something that every officer strives for in a career in law enforcement. They can identify their role in their departments and can see what type of leader they are as a person. A team mindset is what a chief of a department strives for in his organization. Working together for a common goal is important. In the state of Texas, it is not be required to have leadership training, but officers need to develop these specific skills. Limited budget and limited time maybe the cause of lack of training, but if one looks in the right places, one will be able to find the leadership programs that are needed for the future generation of leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's police profession, the police officer is having a hard time understanding what leadership is because they have been given so many different definitions due to different generations over the years. If a group of officers were asked what leadership meant, they would probably give several different answers or definitions. It is not the officer's fault. It is the fault of the supervisors and the upper chain of command. Supervisors may not even have known the definition of leadership due to themselves not getting the proper training prior to being placed in a leadership role. This problem is more often seen in larger departments.

Law enforcement agencies are starting to see that officers are being placed in supervisory positions without any formal training or experience. Taking an exam over policy and procedures has been the most popular way in large departments to determine one's ability for promotion. Once the officer has passed that exam, and if that officer scored high enough over the other officers that took the exam, that officer would be given that promotion to the next rank. They are being told to learn as they go but to do their best. This method is a major problem and very damaging to a department. Leadership starts from the top and goes down the chain of command. If this does not happen, the integrity of the department starts to fall apart and officers are lead incorrectly. Departments are seeing bad supervisors or unqualified leaders. In addition, departments have to deal with higher turnover rates due to retirement each year, and it places departments in a bad spot since they have highly quality supervisors as the majority of their turnover. Law enforcement agencies need to start training supervisor replacements now and not only when a supervisory position needs to be

filled. The next generation will need a better development of skills to become future leaders (Michelson, 2006). Law enforcement agencies should implement a leadership-training program prior to promotion of an officer.

POSITION

Developing a department's supervisory identity would ensure young officers and their citizens the quality leadership that is established within their police department. According to Scheer and Orrick (2016), a program was conducted with scenarios for the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Department in Georgia, to see if supervisors to their subordinate could handle the day-to-day duties of a sergeant. Once those scenarios were completed, a discussion was held with participants and facilitators to determine the pros and cons of their leadership and workplace ethic (Jones, 2010). It showed that this department's identity was not known until this program and training was conducted. Based on these results, there was a question about what assumptions they're using that made them believe their department did not have any leadership identity. This is a good example of how executive leadership thinks their departments are being run. This program also videotaped the sessions for future review and training for their next level supervisors.

Larger departments may not even see that their officers do not have a clear understanding of their identity on the department. They could be just seen as a number rather than a potential leader for their department. Smaller departments may be controlled by city councils and they may not have an identity either because of the lack of leadership training. A small police department in Damascus, Virginia had gone through an identity problem and a leadership problem. They have had four different

chiefs since 2007 (Johnson, 2015). According to Johnson (2015), the mayor of that town controlled the police department and its duties. The chiefs at that department could not establish an identity and did not have the leadership skills to handle the problem that they were receiving from the mayor of that town. Johnson (2017) stated, "Yet the questions about leadership, training and basic competence track an array of unmet public safety needs that threaten small-town policing operations in communities across the country" (para. 5).

Another town showed their identity, which was Ferguson, Missouri. The leadership from that department let the blame go solely onto the patrol officers and did not take any responsibility for their actions. It was so bad in Ferguson that people wanted to shut down the department because unbecoming an officer issues of the law and their professionalism. As shown over the television and through the media, the St. Louis County did not have an identity of whom their police department was other than them being harassed by them (Johnson, 2015).

The chain of command has to establish the department's goals and identity to have a successful department. Police officers want to be part of a great organization and to be proud of where they work. It starts at the top and works its way down to the lower ranks. Sometimes it takes leadership training to figure out one's identity as a person, which, in turn, will help figure out the identity and goal as a department. Having officers involved in the processes would benefit the officers from the start. Officers see it as they helped develop the identity of the department because they had a role in creating it. This allows everyone from the top down to have the same mission and goals. This also shows leadership on the part of the chief or sheriff at their prospective

departments. If departments did not have any leadership guidance, the officers would be in the same situation as the officers in Ferguson. Citizens would see their police officers as unprofessional and most all the lack of leadership within the department. According to Scheer and Orrick (2016), “The role of the line-level sergeant or supervisor has become increasingly important for law enforcement agencies in today’s rapidly changing work-place climate” (para. 1).

A supervisor or a patrol officer needs to grow individually to better understand who they are as people and a leader. This is also a way for them to define their role within the department. Each police officer that enters the job does not fully understand the job other than arresting the bad person, wearing a badge, and wearing a gun. In some cases, officers learn better in groups. Nowell (2017) states, “Leadership Academy isn’t about creating individual leaders; it’s about building a united force of strong leaders who, collectively, can accomplish anything” (para. 11).

All officers learn to be leaders as they go through life. For example, it could be how a parent allowed their teenager take the car out for the first time to a high school baseball game. Parents did this to see if their child could act like an adult and teach them responsibilities. Entering a job like the police department has similar traits of helping someone grow as a person. Nowell (2017) explained, “The experience challenges you to dig deep, you will begin to understand how your own characteristics—such as your personality traits, thought processes, and reactions to change-affect your decision-making” (para. 5).

These are some questions that each officer has to look deep inside him or herself to see if these would affect their daily duties out on patrol. As a police officer,

they see all these different personalities in the real world. This is crucial in the development stages of an officer when they have to go to court or deal with a suspect on the side of the road. Police officers will be the first to say that they wear many different hats within their duties; this is why individual growth is important to an officer's career and their supervisory role once promoted within the department.

Most departments place unproven officers in a supervisory position due to supervisory level leadership retiring in large numbers. These new supervisors are showing that they do not have the skills at the time they are needed to lead a group of 100 officers on a day-to-day evolution. A team mindset can help improve the quality and professionalism of that new supervisor that does not have the skills yet.

Some type of group mentoring could go a long way for newly appointed supervisors to be trained on the day-to-day duties of the supervisor that may be retiring in the near future. In a small department, they may not have the opportunity to have current supervisors mentor another newly appointed supervisor due to limited work force. Challenges arise when it is evident that senior law enforcement managers are retiring. This creates a shortage of leadership that could have assisted in the development of new leadership among current officers (Morreale 2004). Having the ability to develop new leaders has many different positive benefits for a department. Utilizing new supervisor mentorship would improve the police public's image that has been tarnished over the past several years. The police to citizen relationship out on the streets would change in a way where citizens understand and respect the job of an officer. It would promote stability and confidence with citizens on how they see police

officers in their prospective cities. Team building is another way of teaching leadership to new supervisors in diverse groups.

There could be many different and diverse groups of supervisors that have different views on how to lead a group of officers. A course called the “Leadership for the Corrections Professional” (Greatti, 2017) was put together to help corrections officers work together as a team. The leadership course showed that one could place “A diverse group of individuals to come together and connect for personal improvement” (Greatti, 2017, para. 2). The members of each group were challenged to rely on one another and see if they could handle being outside of their comfort level. They made decisions as a team to accomplish a goal and a task that was presented to them in their training. Each corrections officer found out their co-workers’ personalities and found a leadership style that worked for them. By thinking outside of the box, the individual is able to learn about himself or herself in a different way.

Every officer in the nation goes to work with goals to become the best officer they can be and move up the ranks to become leaders of their departments. Police officers do this by working every day to improve their skills while on duty. The one thing they do really well is pay attention and learn leadership skills and team skills they need to get the next promotion at work. Newly appointed officers need to be trained and groomed for the next level in their career. Command staff level leadership needs to pay more attention to the department to be able to have well-rounded department that their city can respect and be proud of.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

In the state of Texas, it is not required that a peace officer must complete leadership training prior to being promoted to the next rank. A large majority of departments send their officers within the first 12 months, as stated in the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE). According to the Texas Occupation Code 1701.352 (2017), “A peace officer...must receive in-service training on supervision as part of the course provided...not earlier than the 12th month before the date of that appointment or later than the first anniversary of the date of that appointment” (para. ii, d). TCOLE believes that leadership training and skills are not really a priority to the development of a supervisor on the job. If this were the case, then it would have been stated in TCOLE that officers would have this training prior to taking the next promotion. While this is a good mentality, the reality is not every officer has natural leadership abilities or instincts, and some should not have been promoted to the next level without the proper training.

This is the main reason that most police executives and officers could conclude as to why supervisors were not sent to leadership training prior to getting a promotion. Going further, TCOLE does not have any mandated courses in leadership that one must take as a continuing education course for current supervisors that are in leadership roles. Some departments have the same mindset as TCOLE when it comes to their officers needing leadership training. For example, larger departments tend to forget about officers that need training while holding a position of authority. They just do not have time to keep up with who needs training and who does not. These supervisors fall through the cracks within the department. This also affects the morale of other officers

within the department. Officers within a specific shift might lose trust in their supervisor as a leader, affecting the quality of work and them as a shift. This can cause inconsistencies and animosity within the department.

In today's generation, dealing with millennials who want things to happen fast, newer officers expect feedback right away. They want to move fast in their career. Some executives believe that this is a plus in their organization, but senior officers believe that they can hurt the department in the end. Brandon Hall group's 2015 State of Leadership Development Study indicated that other executive officers may say that limited budget and limited time puts them in a hard place when it comes to training their officers (as cited in Higginbottom, 2016). A Forbes magazine writer said, "The study found that just 20% of organizations identified the millennial leader segment as critical for development over the next 24 months. Neither are organizations invested in coaching and mentoring of millennial leaders" (Higginbottom, 2016, para. 2). This means that 80% of the organizations did not believe that leadership was worth the money or the time for their organizations.

In addition, a 2010 survey by McKinsey & Co. found that only 25% of trainees showed improvement in their performance (Popov, 2015). With 75% of trainees having no improvement, some might say training is worthless. As the baby boomer generation starts to hit retirement age, or reaching this stage in their careers, this will leave a large gap in the leadership of the organizations. Unfortunately, this is the mindset of most organizations. The executives that send their leadership level personnel to leadership schools believe that they came back with a different supervisor that did not learn anything, so in turn, they believe that it is just a waste of money for their organizations.

Upper level leadership feels that real life experiences in a supervisory position outweighs any training that can be given to a new supervisor. They also feel that administration can send people to training but most of them do not learn anything or they feel that the program course does not work for their organization. Departments and organizations show large problems in their training programs. According to Popov (2015), "They send the wrong people to the training, over-train them and spend too little time on implementation" (para. 3). This is where leadership training programs can hurt a department if the training is not specified or done correctly for the needs of the department or organization.

RECOMMENDATION

Some say people are born leaders, others say they still need to develop specific skills to become that leader. Most departments say leaders need to have certain traits to help become a successful leader in policing. According to Normore (2018), Dr. Ellis conducted an executive development program that was done by 500 executives from police departments, federal civil service, and the military to find out what it takes to be a leader. He had all of them do an assessment on six traits that were agreed upon and identified by them. The six traits were caring, competence, credibility, communication, courage and collaboration. Normore (2018) found that "The participants almost unanimously agreed that a leader missing any of these traits would most certainly fail. Furthermore, they frequently suggested that there was a sequential and/or circular flow to the individual traits" (para. 6).

Most leaders use their officers to make them look good when it comes to promotion because they forgot about how important it is to care for their people.

Leaders need to have the ability to reconcile conflict and handle cultural differences. Most of all they need to have integrity not only within themselves, but also with others that work for them. Without these vital traits, supervisors or leaders will be on an uphill battle trying to win the trust of their officers. Normore (2018) stated, "Always remember, becoming a better leader starts with you but at the end of the day it is really about others; influencing them to be better and to achieve the goal" (para. 20). Agencies need to be willing to make this happen to get high quality officers as future leaders. According to Commander Gregg Jacquin of the Chandler Arizona Police Department, "Everything we do, how we act, that's socialization, and it's how we as leaders develop future leaders. It's about what you do from day one" (Basich, 2014, para. 15). This is how a team is built from day one as well. If upper level leaders are not willing to provide their officers with the opportunities to develop these skills, or send them to schools to help them get exposed to leadership, by the time they are promoted, they will have a leader struggling at his or her position.

Often, the question arises as to what type of training would be the most beneficial for a department's first line supervisors. The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMITE), has a free Leadership Command College program for officers that have a minimum of five years of law enforcement experience. This course is for officers that want to learn and be better leaders at their prospective departments. If an officer wants to take this course they must apply for it. It is a nine-week program that provides law enforcement leaders the necessary skills and knowledge in order to be successful in their respective units. This program offers leadership skills at a higher level without burdening the budget of a police agency. It is

also broken down into three modules to help agencies with their manning power issues to allow their mid-level supervisors or their high executive officers to attend this program. In addition, the flexible and budget friendly course provides knowledge and skills to all officers and department all across Texas. With this program built for officers' with at least five years of experience, why not create a program with LEMIT that is built for officers that are eligible for advancement. This may help develop the skills that they would need to identify if they are ready for the next step as a supervisor, it may also help them to communicate better with their officers, or find their identity as a future supervisor within their department.

Overall, many agencies are seeing high retirement rates of highly qualified officers in supervisory roles, leaving room for younger officers to grow within their careers. The millennial generation is hungry for growth, but may lack education and the natural ability to lead. These factors make it important for officers to receive proper leadership training prior to their promotion into a leadership role. In return, departments gain a more developed officer who is able to work together with others to create the identity of their department, which in turn boosts the morale of the department and builds trust within the community. With such positive outcomes and easy accessibility to training courses, there is no doubt that officers should be trained before they are advanced to the next rank in their career.

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