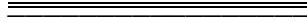
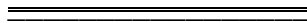


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Providing Stress Training to Employees



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Stress and how it affects people, specifically law enforcement officers, has been researched extensively. The events officers have to face on the streets, coupled with family and organizational stressors, leave room to ask the question of why organizations do not provide training to inform its employees of what to expect physically and emotionally when dealing with stress. Most police organizations spend little time and money in addressing a problem such as stress in its organization. Specifically, supervisors and administration lack the training to identify the stressors in employees and ways to provide help. The biggest hurdle facing organizations is the understanding that some stressors are created by them through shift schedules and excessive paperwork. The ability to acknowledge the issue and do something about it makes a difference for everyone involved, from the employee to the community.

This is why every law enforcement agency should provide training in stress management and how to identify potential issues in employees. Stress training can give so much relevant information to the employees. It can show, from the start of the academy that the organization cares and produces quality officers that will stay in law enforcement for many years by giving them the tools for success.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement, like many other organizations, has been aware of stress and how it affects not only the individual but the organization. As the years pass, more and more is learned about stress and the way it can alter a person physically, mentally, and emotionally. Stressors can be created internally or externally. Law enforcement definitely has external stressors unique to the job placed on the employees. This paper will identify some stressors and how they affect an employee or organization. It will also show the importance of an organization to take an active interest in understanding stress and the need to provide training to help their employees cope.

Business News Daily published a survey, from job search site CareerCast, that placed police officer as the fifth most stressful job in 2015 (Brooks, 2015). This is important to every law enforcement administration because “as a consequence of the many studies related to stress and the law enforcement officer, administrators have begun to recognize the degree to which they themselves are responsible for preserving and maintaining a healthy, stable, productive workforce” (Ayres, Flanagan, & Ayres, 1990, p.1). Each employee has a life outside of work that can inevitably affect their work performance which is why administrators also need to understand internal and external stressors outside the occupation. Stress can be defined as “any event that requires us to adjust in some manner- physiological reactions, thinking, feeling, or behaving” (Anderson, Swenson & Clay, 1995, p. 2).

Unique law enforcement stressors are those that normal citizens would not have to deal with in their daily lives. The stressors can range depending on the employee, type of event, and severity of that event. The stress on an officer having to patrol the

community in a uniform post 9/11 is among an external stressor. That particular event has changed how police view the public and the way employees are trained. The training provided today is to always be in an alert state of mind. This can create stressors in an employee because they are constantly in that alert mode due to the possibility of something unexpected happening. Daniello (2011) listed several job related stressors such as the police conception of criminal justice and how it actually is, lack of recognition, excessive paperwork, unable to relax, death or major injuries of coworkers, loss of a victim from a prolonged rescue, and may be under heavy workloads. If the job related stressors go unidentified because the lack of training, it can lead to “cynicism, suspiciousness, emotional detachment, heart attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), weight gain, ulcers, suicide, reduced efficiency in performing duties, reduced morale, excessive aggressiveness, relationship and family problems, extramarital affairs, divorce, domestic violence, absenteeism, and early retirement” (Finn & Tomz, 1996, p. 14).

All law enforcement agencies should provide training in stress management and how to identify potential issues in employees. Perry Hollowell, Vermillion County Sheriff’s Department Director of In-Service training believes that “the most important part of any officer’s response in an emergency situation is how that officer reacts to stress” (Hollowell, 2011, para. 2). That is why training should start in the academy but above all, supervisors and administration, because “the most important training program must be the one aimed at the top management” (Ellison, 2004, p. 153). Supervision has the responsibility of keeping their employees healthy and productive to better serve the community effectively and efficiently. Blak (1990) found that only four to ten percent

developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when exposed to a traumatic event but ninety percent developed some other kind of stress reaction to that event. Every law enforcement agency would benefit from training their employees to identify stress and providing them the tools in which to deal with that stress. Being able to identify the potential issue early will inevitably improve the culture of the department and develop better relationships between the employee and their families, friends, peers, and the organization. This paper is intended to help administrators and supervisors understand the impact of stress training and how it can truly make a change not only in the employee but the organization.

POSITION

Providing quality training that can help detect early warning signs of stress in an employee benefits in so many ways. A publication in The Institute for Justice by Finn and Tomz (1996) would agree that training officers to help recognize signs of stress and providing potential ways of coping is the primary goal of any stress management program. The best thing an employee could get out of training provided by the organization is knowledge. Knowledge is placed high in any police organization because the employees have to know laws, policies, procedures, and the way to conduct their business. As administrators, providing knowledge on the matter shows the employee that the organization cares about their well-being. The agency can start to foster a true relationship with the employee and break down some of the barriers associated in police work. Law enforcement organizations provide training in an academy teaching federal and state laws, firearms, pursuit driving, hostage situations, suicidal subjects, and defensive tactics but many do not provide the most critical

training, how to deal with the stress of those situations. The Counseling Team International (2005) states that training would increase the officers awareness about the stress encountered, the different work they may face in law enforcement, acknowledge warning signs that they, their co-worker, or family may be experiencing related to the problem and possibility of needed assistance.

Stress causes many issues such as absenteeism and poor productivity which are both important to a law enforcement agency functioning efficiently. When an employee calls in sick the department still has the responsibility to provide adequate police coverage which could result in overtime for the organization. Providing supervisors with the training to identify stress in their employees helps maintain the organizational goal of providing the citizens with fast, effective, and efficient service. First line supervisors have to be accountable to administrative goals as well as the goals of the employees. By training supervisors they would be able to recognize personality changes, physical changes, and work pattern changes (Ellison, 2004). An example would be that a young motivated employee is always on time, ready to work, no citizen complaints, and is a top producer of quality work. In a few weeks the supervisor starts to get several citizen complaints of angry outbursts and the employee begins to be absent from work a lot. With proper training, the supervisor would see three potential concerns for intervention. In regards to administration, it is harder to know everything about every employee in the organization but the first line supervisor usually has insight into the personality and work habits of those employees they closely supervise. Knowing "the critical task is to identify, at the earliest stage possible, when particular law enforcement officers incur an excessive stress reaction to the numerous pressures confronting them" (Territo &

Sewell, 2007, p. 50). To summarize, identifying the stress either by the employee themselves or a supervisor is critical in order to provide assistance as soon as possible. It is imperative to give every employee, especially first line supervisors, training in how to identify stressors.

Another benefit for training employees and supervisors in stress is the ability for the agency to explain avenues it has in order to help the employee. Finn and Tomz (1996) explains stress can only be prevented by eliminating the sources of stress or dealing with the stressful situation before it leads to problems. The employee will need to know if the agency has an employee assistance program (EAP). Another common but may be unknown to the employee is having a counselor or chaplain available to talk. An organization could have several avenues in which to help their employees but need a way to inform them. Training is the key component used to get that information out to the employees. The programs an organization may utilize can be one or several in the form of 24- hour crisis assistance, critical incident debriefing, counseling services, stress/health education, organizational consultation, pamphlets or newsletters, and family support services (Deisinger, 2002). Every organization should have some type of program to help employees deal with stress. Remember, recognizing the signs of stress is only half of the equation. Once the signs of stress have been identified in an employee, the organization needs to provide a way to help the employee cope with the situation. Training can take care of both identifying stress and providing information about the programs available that will benefit the employee.

Every public and private organization has to protect its most valuable asset which is the people. That holds more truth to law enforcement because no robot or machine

can perform the job duties required of a police officer. Administration and supervisors have an obligation to their employees to provide a good workplace that includes trust from the organization to the employee, sense of pride in their job, and a feeling of family amongst the members of the department top to bottom (Ayres et al., 1990). By providing the training particularly in stress management, it would “reduce the stigma frequently associated with obtaining help for stress-related problems” (The Counseling Team International, 2005, Ch. 8, para. 2). That allows people in the organization to talk more freely about how they feel and in turn creates a more open communication between employee-employer interactions. By getting assistance with some of the major stressors the employee could improve performance, attendance, behavior, and safety (Daniello, 2011). The organization would have the potential to create a workplace with less stress and happier healthier employees but only if they provide the training necessary.

COUNTER POSITION

With budgets shrinking and staffing shortages across the nation, the cost and time to provide adequate stress training will be a definite obstacle for any organization. With all the TCOLE training required now, some agencies are having trouble sending their employees to that training or holding a local class with enough participation. Several costs are associated with sending an employee to training such as fuel, lodging, registration, and meals. The agency would have to find an actual stress management class geared specifically for law enforcement. Another important aspect of money would be the cost to send or hold training for the organization. It was explained by (Hollowell, 2011) that the first thing that seems to be reduced on a budget is training

and the measure of that training is difficult to see by the untrained person holding the money. Organizations need to take into consideration what the alternative would be if they did not provide stress management training.

Many factors will show an administration that the money and time spent to train employees in stress management outweighs the consequences of doing nothing. The first example was shown by Territo and Sewell (2007) that 70% of officers that were involved in deadly force leave police work in five years. Having to replace that employee not only includes his position but all the money spent on schools and the knowledge he received from the department are lost. The agency would have to replace the employee with a new employee that will require training, uniforms, equipment, and years of experience to reach the level of the employee that resigned. Territo and Sewell (2007) stated that "It costs a department approximately \$100,000 to replace a five year veteran" (p. 325). Any agency would have to take a hard look at the importance of retaining that five year employee. The cost alone to replace one employee that leaves the department because they had no mechanism to cope with the stress of the incident could provide training for a lot of employees in a law enforcement organization.

Another key point for providing training is that "police agencies can be held liable in court for ignoring lingering stress-related problems or for disciplining workers who exhibit the behavioral effects of trauma from a job related critical incident" (Territo & Sewell, 2007, p. 324). With the known problem of stress and the aftermath of not dealing with it can make many administrators second guess not training their employees in stress management. Even though money and time are diminutive in police

departments, it was concluded by Finn and Tomz (1996) that identifying the stress early and providing treatment quickly resulted in saving departments “early retirement claims, absenteeism, medical costs, reduced disability, and litigation against officers” who abused or mis-treated citizens. The initial cost to train employees and even conduct in-service training can really save any department money on the investment of its employees.

An alternative argument for not providing the training is police organizations can create their own stressors placed on employees. “The literature is almost unanimous that the organization is a major source of stress for police officers” Toch, Brown and Campbell, Ayres work (as cited in Ellison, 2004, p. 137). A law enforcement organization is responsible for the safety and abidance of laws with respects to the municipality, county, precinct, or state they serve. Some of the occupational stressors placed on employees “cite routine police duties, work overload, poor communication and inadequate support from management, and organizational policies as significant stressors that add to the cumulative stress levels of police officers” Brown and Campbell’s work (as cited in Chapin, Brannen, Singer, & Walker, 2008, p. 339). Employees can deal with a few of these stressors but in an organization with several, they start to accumulate on the employees and begin to overwhelm causing the stress. It is hard to deny that every organization will have occupational stress but the best alternative to invalidate is training.

Just like trying to identify stress in an employee, an organization can provide the stress training to identify it in an organization. When trained, the organization can assess their situation and start to implement changes where needed. Many

organizational changes can occur to improve the department's image, morale, and efficiency. Territo and Sewell (2007) suggested changing the supervisory style that allows for more open communication between ranks and across each level. Opening the channels of communication allows everyone to feel more at ease when needing to ask a question or assistance with an issue. Training will help the department assess their policies and procedures when dealing with critical incidents. It would cause stress in the department if the chief never came to the hospital after a shooting for a wounded officer. "The chief executive officer and other commanders of a law enforcement agency should make it a matter of policy to pay hospital visits to every officer shot or involved in a serious accident" (Territo & Sewell, 2007, p. 447). Show the employee that the organization cares about them not just professionally but as a person. The need for a law enforcement organization is to inspire the employee and build a clear vision of openness and trust. Consider this, "Learning occurs by finding discrepancies and making adjustments, by finding out what prevents and enhances attainment of goals" Argyris and Schon's work (as cited in Anderson, et al., 1995, p. 304). In order to learn, providing stress training would definitely help the organization find the discrepancies and move it towards a better place to work.

RECOMMENDATION

Providing stress management training to employees, especially supervisors, will help the employee and organization become more effective and efficient in providing top quality work to the community. If the employee is not provided the training, it essentially puts the employee at a disadvantage in dealing with stress and that tends to transfer negatively into the work produced for the organization. The employee can create

physical, emotional, and health related issues that can put strain on others. An organization owes it to their employees to provide them with a workplace that allows for open communication, trust, and the family atmosphere proving to the employee that the organization really takes an active interest in their wellbeing.

The greatest gift an organization can provide to its employees is training in stress and providing them the tools to combat the issues. Training can help identify the stressor, provide an avenue for the organization to promote programs that deal with stress and in doing so, and will develop happier, healthier employees. That will tend to flow throughout the organization making it a more desirable place to work. The only issues that can be associated with not providing the training is agencies with little money or time and those agencies themselves create occupational stressors. Those issues are of a moot point because research shows that not providing training can result in more money being used to train new officers or providing payouts for lawsuits due to the lack of training in stress management. It was also shown that occupational stressors can be reduced drastically with the proper training.

Any agency can provide the most important training, stress management. A few examples of many is asking local area health professional to come in and develop a training program or seek actual organizations that provide those types of trainings. Agencies could also contact other law enforcement organizations and see what they are doing to provide training in the area of stress management and programs they utilize. The best outcome that could happen is TCOLE make a requirement that this specific stress training geared for law enforcement employees be part of academy curriculum. A final recommendation would be that TCOLE develop management level trainings that

will help agencies identify occupational stress and ways to reduce stressors in their departments.

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