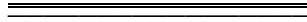


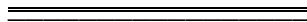
**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Professional Development for New Law Enforcement Officers



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



**By
Trey Coleman**

**Houston Police Department
Houston, Texas
September 2022**

ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies devote countless resources towards recruiting and training new officers coming into the ranks of their organizations. The highs of graduation from an academy training program are then met with the realities of the job. Stress, financial problems, career stagnation, and feelings of unfair treatment can demoralize or derail the career of young law enforcement officers. If a law enforcement agency does not focus on combating those issues that plague new officers, then the monetary and human resources expended during the recruiting and training process will prove ineffective with officers leaving faster than can be replaced. These reasons are why law enforcement agencies should implement a professional development program for their newest officers.

Many of these pitfalls could be avoided with the implementation of professional development programs aimed at new officers in the early stages of their careers. A professional development program preparing officers for the known and unknown stressors before the stressors build up would lead to better coping ability. Breaking down the disciplinary process and providing what to expect if the officer was the target of an internal affairs investigation would provide perspective, guidelines, and deeper relationships. Financial literacy training would enable officers to begin developing their strategic plan for a career where the days are long and the average 24 year-career is short. Finally, a professional development program demonstrates that a law enforcement agency cares about their employees as more than a cog in the government machine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	2
Counter Arguments	7
Recommendation	9
References	12

INTRODUCTION

Law Enforcement Agencies dedicate voluminous amounts of resources, both monetary and human, towards the recruitment and training of new police officers. This focus on the front-end of a police officers' career is necessary before they can be issued a license.

A new recruit will be offered a chance to become a police cadet after completion of a background and screening process. The accepted police cadet will then go through a six-month training academy that will push their mental and physical limits (Houston Police Department, n.d.). A cadet that can make it through the rigorous six-month academy training will graduate and become a probationary police officer. The probationary officer will then train in the field for approximately 55 to 85 days where the lessons learned in the academy will be shepherded by different active police officers (Houston Police Department, 2019). Field training turns to evaluation where a probationary officer's extensive training culminates in practical display of the learned skills and techniques. The end of the probationary period signals a change to a basic peace officer following an intensive year of training and the agency recognizing the officer's state license (Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, 2020).

The payoff and satisfaction of completing this year-long process to become a basic peace officer resonates with each officer whether it was their life-long dream or a profession that someone was recruited into. Law enforcement agencies invest a great amount of education and resources that first year, and then an insufficient amount of education and resources moving forward. New officers are often left to their own professional and personal development in a vocation that evolves rapidly. New

generations are entering the profession and bringing their values and motivations with it. The challenge is how law enforcement agencies can ensure their investment in the new generations of police officers pays off in retention and development.

Those new officers are dealing with traditional stress factors of the policing profession and new stressors such as the worldwide pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. Law enforcement agencies should be focusing on avenues of support preparing officers to cope with everyday stress as well as the extreme stress presented by an unforeseen pandemic (Stogner et al., 2020). Law enforcement agencies should implement a professional development program for their newest officers. A professional development program could be a selling point during recruitment by demonstrating their agency buying into the growth beyond recruiting another cog in the machine. The development program could be referenced during the training program to provide additional credibility from the organization, and prevent it being dismissed as just another training program by the new officer. Finally, the program should aid retention by preparing the new officers early in their career for success in multiple facets of their personal and professional lives.

POSITION

Law enforcement agencies need to demonstrate ways in which they prepare and support their officers through stressful times. Moon and Johnson (2012) indicated officers are less committed to their work when experiencing job-related stress (as cited in Stogner et al., 2020). The mental reserves to deal with stress shrinks quickly when the stressors of an evolving pandemic are stacked onto the normal job-related stressors (Stogner et al., 2020). A professional development program involving higher-ranking

supervisors as the group leaders would demonstrate additional support that new officers would value at the entry level of the agency. These leaders could demonstrate formal leadership with their participation and build informal relationships with the officers to provide the agency-perspective throughout the beginning stages of an officer's career. An officer that was unable to participate in professional development, or turn to a leadership position for trusted advice, may feel they were treated unfairly by a departmental process. Stogner et al. (2020) stated support programs that increase fairness should have positive effects on job satisfaction and mental health.

A program in place before officers' experience much of the stressors that come with the beginning stages of a police career have proven beneficial in preventing maladaptive behaviors associated with the profession (Arble et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and civil rights protests of 2020 likely placed additional stress on new and old officers in the field (Stogner et al., 2020). If an agency did not have a program in place that could have focused efforts on preparing officers on how to cope with these additional stressors, then it should be implemented in some fashion. However, these events will not be the final unforeseen job-stressors that arise in the profession of law enforcement, and implementation of a professional development after the fact is not an opportunity lost.

One avenue of training and support should include the basics of financial literacy so officers can avoid the pitfalls of those officers that have come before them. Bolognesi et al., (2020) linked financial literacy to positive financial outcomes, and suggested financial education provided at the workplace could increase financial literacy for the millennial generation that comprise the 18-37-year-old age bracket. Only sixteen

percent of surveyed millennials correctly answered three basic questions assessing fundamental concepts (interest, inflation, and risk diversification) indicating financial literacy (Bolognesi et al., 2020).

Jim Kalinowski is a lieutenant with the Houston Police Department as well as a financial advisor that teaches a voluntary in-service training class titled the same as his book *Balancing the Badge to Make a Difference*. The average age of retirement for HPD officers was 53.3 years of age along with the average years of service being 26.8 years (Kalinowski, 2018). A professional development program, including financial literacy topics, at the beginning of the average 26-year-career should benefit officers that are beginning their careers and their personal lives. Poor financial decisions could compound quickly and take years to recover from if a strategic plan were in place. The inability to delay gratification is one of the reasons police officers will find themselves in debt (Kalinowski, 2018). The professional development program should teach the principles that should go into establishing a strategic plan for financial well-being. The number one trait of retirees living with purpose is knowing where they want to go in life and knowing how to get there according to Dave Ramsey (as cited in Kalinowski, 2018). Kalinowski (2018) equated the lack of financial planning to going over a waterfall into a black hole, unable to fulfill your hierarchy of needs, and miserable with yourself and those around you. The professional development program would aid in expanding the vision and broadening a perspective (Kalinowski, 2018). A strategic plan put in place at a professional development should set up new officers with a baseline of knowledge to work with.

Academy and field training will cover a multitude of policies and procedures for a new officer's department but reading a policy regarding the disciplinary process can be like reading a different language. New officers may find themselves involved in disciplinary investigation and be overwhelmed by the processes of an investigation that was not covered in a policy manual. Discipline plays a role in helping officers stay within the boundaries of accepted behavioral and performance standards (Field & Meloni, 1999). Law enforcement agencies can send the message that they want the best for their officers when leaders and supervisors provide supportive controls early in an employee's career (Field & Meloni, 1999). Field & Meloni (1999) stated leaders that will sit down with an officer to discuss discipline will create positive discipline models that also develop deeper relationships. One area of focus to a professional development program could be going into greater depth about the disciplinary process. This exposure to how the department investigates misconduct would provide more understanding, meaningful conversations, and expectations when an officer is the target of an Internal Affairs investigation. Attaining a greater understanding of that process before their first complaint would limit an officer's feeling that their agency treated them unfairly. Unclear messaging or lack of understanding will lead to feelings that the system was unfair, and the agency is responsible for delivering the message in a way officers can comprehend and digest (Field & Meloni, 1999). Having meaningful discussions about the disciplinary process during professional development would promote a positive organizational culture and provide modeling for proper conduct. Modeling that proper conduct would lead to new officers being more engaged in their work (Traylor, 2021).

Another topic during the professional development program should be career trajectory and the best practices for how to obtain those goals. New officers may have their own expectations of an entry-level patrol officer based on the glamorized versions found in film and television. Then the years extend and the realities of what the next logical step in their career is may be missing. Being satisfied at work can rely on what is expected from the work environment (Carlan, 2007). Therefore, it can be presumed that officers job satisfaction will decline if they have no expectations of work environment as their time with the agency progresses. Carlan (2007) stated departments must have systems in place to augment officer development to combat low job satisfaction. Having a professional development program that covers the different non-patrol options for assignment and how to build a work history to get an officer to the desired next assignment should eliminate the dip in job satisfaction that comes with unrealistic work expectations.

The Stockton Police Department (SPD) serves as a model for an agency that developed a similar program focused on holistic approaches to officer wellness in 2014 (Rego, 2020). SPD's program emphasized wellness, training, peer support, financial counseling, and family counseling (Rego, 2020). Professional development spreads to and benefits more than just the individual officer. SPD's wellness program resulted in more engagement with the department from officers and their families as well as proactively pursuing support services (Rego, 2020). Professional development that promotes genuine care for personnel could help in retaining their active workforce, even when other agencies offer higher salaries. Rego (2020) stated that some officers

returned to SPD after leaving for higher paying positions because they missed the support, commitment, and family atmosphere at SPD.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Some believe that professional development lies with each individual instead of relying on a department or organization. DeMuth (2020) found that different agencies offered different opportunities, but the responsibility for growth lies with the individual officer and is not the responsibility of their department. DeMuth (2020) stated the officers that take that proactive approach will enjoy many benefits beyond retirement such as a second occupation. Finding their own training, and when necessary, paying for their own training opportunities may be necessary as is common with other professions (DeMuth, 2020).

However, DeMuth (2020) concludes that complementing the proactive training strategy with a large professional network would lay the foundation for the short-term and long-term career objectives. Meeting other professionals and networking within the law enforcement career would greatly benefit with early involvement from a professional development program led by senior leadership. Furthermore, research showed that the most important factors for job satisfaction were social contribution, pay, advancement/excitement, autonomy, peer respect, and job security (Carlan 2007). In fact, Carlan (2007) continued, "With just a small commitment from police management, these satisfiers are easily attainable (with the exception of increased pay), and the societal benefits thereupon derived momentous" (p. 83). Rego (2020) recommended that leaders from police departments need to care for their personnel and continually evaluate the effectiveness of their established wellness programs.

Some skeptics also believed that a professional development program pushed by a law enforcement agency will fail if the wrong leaders are selected or if officers that are trying to be reached question the credibility of the leaders. Perry (2018) stated those who have climbed the leadership ranks are not always good examples to learn from, and some may have cashed in their values for narcissistic pursuits. However, poor leadership can also serve as a lesson for those current and future leaders providing opportunities to apply what they could do differently in the same situation (Perry, 2018). Rego (2020) detailed how SPD had credibility with their officer wellness program due to poor communication skills or questionable motives. A comprehensive selection process including interviews, peer credibility metrics, purity of intent, and a long-term commitment to the program helped revamp the program to regain their credibility (Rego, 2020).

Organizations may point to the role of a direct supervisor to provide guidance to help new employees succeed, whether there is a formal program or not (Evans, 2019). However, direct supervisors may lack the time or the tools to serve in capacity to professionally develop their subordinates as well as supervise them (Perry, 2018). Additionally, the direct supervisor needs to ensure they maintain the supervisor/direct report relationship that could be blurred by a mentoring relationship (Evans, 2019).

The defunding of the police movement in 2020 campaigned the cutting of department budgets that would leave no resources to be allocated towards professional development programs if there is enough momentum to redirect law enforcement funding (Covert, 2020). However, the SPD wellness program demonstrated a successful program built with minimal to no budgetary encumbrances (Rego, 2020).

RECOMMENDATION

A professional development program could be referred to in many different names or buzzwords to generate excitement. What they all have in common is a baseline of caring for the employees by the formal and informal leadership of an organization. Developing a professional development that focuses on the newest officers in a law enforcement organization is paramount to long-term success.

The profession of law-enforcement carries with it large amounts of job-related stress that are known before going into work each day. It is the unexpected additional stressors with events such as terroristic attacks and pandemics from novel viruses that can compound stress and deplete mental reserves that aid job focus (Stogner et al., 2020). Involvement of leadership with a professional development program would promote fairness and trust, which would have positive effects on job satisfaction and mental health (Stogner et al., 2020). Additionally, establishing a development program before the high-stressor events such as the COVID-19 pandemic would aid in preventing maladaptive behaviors associated with the profession (Arble et al., 2017).

Financial literacy training should be a part of the professional development program for the newest officers as demonstrated by research that showed only sixteen percent of millennials aged 18-to-37 could correctly answer basic questions assessing financial concepts (Bolognesi et al., 2020). Financial literacy from qualified leaders would aid in broadening the perspective of new officers (Kalinowski, 2018).

The disciplinary process for law enforcement agencies can lead to feelings of being treated unfairly and being a pariah through the process. A professional development program that taught how the process worked and what to expect during an

investigation would promote a positive organizational culture and modeling of proper conduct (Traylor, 2021). Finally, law enforcement agencies should look to success stories such as the wellness program instituted by the Stockton Police Department. Their low-cost program promoted genuine care for personnel that led to positive impacts on family life and officer retention (Rego, 2020).

Growth comes from the inside, and officers taking sole ownership of their development would lead to positive results. However, Carlan (2007) demonstrated even just a small level of support from police management would increase job satisfaction. Direct supervisors take on the role to professionally develop their direct reports, but many direct supervisors lack the time and tools required to fulfill that additional function (Perry, 2018). Placing the wrong leadership in front of new officers would lead to credibility issues with the program. However, there are lessons to be learned on how not to act from leaders that demonstrate the wrong behaviors (Perry, 2018). Additionally, SPD recognized the wrong personnel were in place and refocused their selection criteria while revamping their wellness program with progressive results (Rego, 2020).

The cost of instituting a development program in the face of a defunding movement for a law enforcement agency could present challenges for implementation (Covert, 2020). The SPD wellness program represented a successful model with little to no budgetary impacts (Rego, 2020). Additionally, some of the officers that left SPD for higher salaries eventually returned to SPD because they missed the support system in place (Rego, 2020).

The most important action required for a successful professional development program would be to buy-in from the head of the law enforcement organization. If the head of the organization believes in the mission of the program, then the leadership entrusted with teaching the program can feel trusted and empowered in shaping young officers. The next item would be to identify the correct leadership that models the correct behaviors and has the requisite knowledge to teach those new officers in the identified topics. The third item would be to allow for these new officers to conduct the training with their classmates from the academy for a collaborative working environment with a group they have already grown comfortable with from their initial cadet training. Ideally, this training would take place after they have completed their probationary periods, and before they reach their second year of service. This would allow them to gain some work/life experience to share, allow breathing room from the long first year of training/field training, and still allow for early intervention to apply the best practices from what they will be taught. Large agencies could prove difficult in bringing together an entire academy class for instruction. A recommendation to scale down and have patrol division leadership instruct those academy class members assigned to their division could be used in lieu of the entire academy class together.

Professional development programs are referred to by many names, but the core function of all those programs is to set up the employee for growth and success. Organizations that fail to invest in their most valuable assets will miss an opportunity to recruit, train, and retain a viable workforce.

REFERENCES

- Arble, E., Lumley, M. A., Pole, N., Blessman, J., & Arnetz, B. B. (2017). Refinement and Preliminary Testing of an Imagery-Based Program to Improve Coping and Performance and Prevent Trauma among Urban Police Officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 32(1), 1-10.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.shsu.edu/10.1007/s11896-016-9191-z>
- Bolognesi, A., Hasler, A., & Lusardi, A. (2020). Millennials and money: The state of their financial management and how workplaces can help them. *TTIA institute, Trends and Issues, February 2020*. Retrieved from:
https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2020-02/TIAA%20Institute_Millennials%20and%20Money_T%26L_Lusardi_02%2020.pdf
- Carlan, P. E. (2007). The search for job satisfaction: A survey of Alabama policing. *American Journal of Criminal Justice : AJCJ*, 32(1), 74-86,129.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.shsu.edu/10.1007/s12103-007-9014-y>
- Covert, B. (2020). How to Make: Defund the Police a Reality. *Nation*, 311(1), 12–15.
- DeMuth A. A. (2020, February) Proactive Professional Development. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, February 2020*.
<https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/perspective/perspective-proactive-professional-development>
- Evans, L. (2019). Supervisors as mentors. *College & Research Libraries News*, 7, 403.

- Field, M. W., & Meloni, T. E. (1999). Constructive police discipline: Resurrecting the police spirit. *Law & Order*, 47(5), 85-91. Retrieved from <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.shsu.edu/trade-journals/constructive-police-discipline-resurrecting/docview/197212776/se-2?accountid=7065>
- Houston Police Department. (n.d.). *Academy*. HPDCareer.com. Retrieved August 10, 2021 from <https://www.hpdcareer.com/academy.html>
- Houston Police Department. (November 15, 2019). *Program Length* (Field Training Procedure Number 100/7.02)
- Kalinowski, J. (2018). *Balancing the Badge to Make a Difference*. Balancing the Badge, LLC.
- Perry, M. (2018). Choose Wisely: The Dark Side of Mentoring. *College & University*, 93(2), 43–44.
- Rego, R. W. (2020, March) Building a Successful Officer Wellness Program. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, March 2020. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/building-a-successful-officer-wellness-program>
- Stogner, J., Miller, B. L., & McLean, K. (2020). Police stress, mental health, and resiliency during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Journal of Criminal Justice: AJCJ*, 45(4), 718-730. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.shsu.edu/10.1007/s12103-020-09548-y>

Texas Commission on Law Enforcement. (December 22, 2020). *Basic Peace Officer Proficiency Certification Requirements Chart*. Tcole.texas.gov. Retrieved August 10, 2021 from CRT 01.003 Basic Peace Officer Proficiency Certification Chart 12.22.2020.pdf (texas.gov)

Traylor, J. M. (2021, April) Motivating and Retaining Today's Officers. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 2021*. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/motivating-and-retaining-todays-officers>