

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

**Law Enforcement Administration:
Setting the Bar with Formal Education**

**A Leadership White Paper
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to take a close look at the impact formal education has on law enforcement executives throughout the State of Texas. The strengths of law enforcement agencies, or for that matter, any organization, is the character of the personnel who work for that organization or department. The citizens of the State of Texas expect the people charged with leading the men and women of the police department to be qualified to do so. These qualifications not only include being in good physical condition but also having the skills and knowledge obtained from higher education. The administrators leading the law enforcement organizations should have a formal education.

The information contained within this paper was obtained from various articles, books, internet sites, and other presentations which will outline the need for requiring a formal education. Law enforcement has strived to show the world that it is a professional organization worthy of respect. When law enforcement is placed side by side with other professions, such as lawyers, judges, counselors, etc., the thing that places law enforcement at a disadvantage is the educational requirement mandated for the other professions. With the many professional development courses offered to executives, this should encourage the executives as well as law enforcement as a whole to provide funding and ultimately require law enforcement executives to obtain a formal education. The administrators leading the law enforcement organizations should have a formal education so they will be better equipped with the skills and tools to overcome technical advances and the ever-changing behaviors that law enforcement encounters.

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INTRODUCTION

The current economic situation has placed an increase on the demand for law enforcement administrators and executives to be better prepared for doing more with less. This has placed a huge demand on the executive's leadership abilities and the ability to develop the organization and its personnel to the fullest. As the world changes, the community that the administrators work in and for are demanding their law enforcement officials become better prepared to lead and manage the police department, which will create a better police force, to serve the public.

As law enforcement stands at a crossroads and has the ability to show that standards are set high, leaders have the knowledge to develop and be an example for their officers; standards should be improved to develop the administrator's skill set. The ability for the executive to impact the views people have on law enforcement can be accomplished through acquiring the intangible qualities found in obtaining superior knowledge awarded with a degree. It is difficult for a police executive to be successful in today's times by just counting on their long years and experience. Adequate training must lead the executive into progressively managing their officers and setting the standard for them to follow. The public must be convinced that the administrator, who was hired to direct the department, can improve the overall standard, raise the bar, and be able to put forth a quality organization. Having trained administrators will help solve the problems facing the policing industry throughout the State of Texas. While formal education shows the administrator has achieved the proper designation, the education must be in the select discipline to make the executive a better administrator. Many entry level officers are entering the departments with some form of higher education.

The chief administrator should be prepared to match skill sets with those he or she is charged with leading. This will enable the department to develop a public perception of being an organization that not only requires a lot from the officers, but also has a leader who has the tools to be successful and provide a better image for the citizens they are charged with serving.

POSITION

Law enforcement has debated the issue of higher education for several years; however, when one takes a deeper look at other professions in the criminal justice field, one will find that other professions require their leaders to have a formal education. This debate has gone on for over 20 years as a majority of police departments dating back past 1989 have given preference to college-educated applicants (Kania & Davis, 2012). It is true that police work has been labeled as just that, police work. If law enforcement is going to achieve the designation of a profession, formal education should be required for executives and other leaders within law enforcement. A college degree has been referred to by many authorities as the mark of a professional and one of the qualifications that make up that professional (Mayo, 2013). In order to be considered a professional, Webster's Dictionary provides a definition of a job that requires special skills, training, or education. Being professional also comes with credibility. Credibility is defined as the power of inspiring belief. There is no debate that a formal education produces some form of credibility in the particular field. When one takes a close look at law enforcement and the educational requirements that are required for one to become a police officer or for that matter a police executive, one will see that law enforcement as a whole is less academically prepared than that of other

criminal justice professions. The quality of policing cannot improve until educational standards and requirements are set for officers and executives (Mayo, 2012).

The professionals of the criminal justice field are comprised of judges, lawyers, and counselors, just to name a few. Law enforcement is the nucleus of criminal justice. Police officers attend a 26 week training academy and then go through a field training program and then attend in-service training every two years. The academy alone is not there preparing a highly trained policeman (Day, 2000). The in-service training that an officer receives is just a temporary fix until the educated officer raises in the ranks. However, if the officer is prepared to make decisions related to the restriction of someone's freedom, then the executive charged with leading, training, and maintaining the integrity of the police department should be qualified by education to help maintain this justice. The prosecutor who is arguing the case before the judge against the defense attorney who is defending the person charged are required to have a formal education before they can stand in a court room and argue the case or render a verdict. The lawyers and judges are required to have a law degree which comes from a bachelor's degree, at least four years of college; sometimes a master's degree, at least two additional years after obtaining a bachelor's degree and a law degree. The district attorney who is charged with overseeing his or her respected county prosecutor's office is required to have a formal degree, while the chief of police or other law enforcement executive who is charged with overseeing their respected organizations are not. Mediators who help to manage issues prior to trials have formal education, so the police executive who mediates between citizens and officers or officers and city government or

city government and state agencies should have that edge that comes with a formal education.

When one thinks about the duties that a police executive performs, one will see that the executive must make sure that all elements are met before a case is filed or a person is arrested, the executive works as a counselor by helping the officers that work under the executive as well as citizens that live within their jurisdiction. The executive is not held to a higher educational standard except those as required for a basic police officer (Slater, 2012). If the standards are not raised for the executive, the administrator will be behind in the understanding of technology, techniques, etc and therefore in turn lack the ability to move the department forward and help the agency progress through the future. The training or education that the executive receives must be in the area that will help make the administrator a better leader and manager (Day, 2000).

The person leading the law enforcement agency is fighting an uphill battle without a formal education. Many law enforcement leaders are literally thrown into the position of leading with little to no training (Morris, 2012). The world is advancing quickly and with the ever changing technology and additional information gathered and disseminated on how to better deal with and lead people, it is becoming ever increasing that the executive be prepared through education to stay on top of these changes. Leaders with an education are better equipped with the knowledge to make sound decisions (Morris, 2012). When one looks at the applicants who are applying and vying for police related jobs, one will see that many of these applicants have a formal education. The chief executive of the department must be able to compare their qualifications to that of the people who work for them. The executive who has a college

degree is better equipped to handle issues that officers deal with (O'Connor, 2012). Leadership development is ultimately needed to help the administrator prepare for the hardships of leading the department, for without qualified leaders; the law enforcement field will continue to struggle for years to come (Morris, 2012). The standards for the position of executive should be raised and when the standards are raised and the executive meets these standards, the drive for obtaining a formal education will flow downward to the officers he or she leads.

In a study conducted by North Dakota State University, the Department of Criminal Justice in 2007, Manis, Archbold, and Hassell discovered that officers with a college degree are less likely to have a complaint filed on them than those officers with a high school degree. The study further explored the aspect of officers with a four year degree compared to those with some college or even those with a two-year degree. The finding was that officers with a four year degree had significantly fewer complaints filed against them. Officers with a higher level of education take the marginal officer and helps produce a better officer as it has been proven that an officer having a college experience contributes more to the critical thinking and advanced learning that college produces.

When an officer sets goals for his or her career in law enforcement, rarely is education a goal. However, promotion is a goal. When a supervisor sets his or her goals, again rarely is education a goal, but promoting into a command staff position is. Officers who set goals tend to make the effort to obtain those goals after finding out what they must do. If education is required to become command staff material, then the officer will find a way to obtain the formal education needed to meet this goal and in the

process to obtain the skills needed to perform the duties required when the opportunity is given to that officer. The law enforcement officer who continues their education possess values and abilities that enable the college educated officer the advantage over the less educated officer. The educated officer also tends to show that he or she is more satisfied with their career and therefore lead to a lower turnover rate. Providing the employee with the ability to obtain a formal education will also enhance the employee's leadership knowledge and skills. People tend to watch, learn, and emulate what they see. When the employee sees the high level qualifications of their leader which includes a formal education, the employee will too strive to obtain those same skills in an effort to promote and advance their law enforcement career.

Law enforcement executives can no longer rely on experience alone to be a sufficient leader of the police department. The public is unwilling to pay higher salaries unless law enforcement can convince the public that officers are ready and able to provide and perform at the highest level possible for a profession within the criminal justice field (Day, 2000). A college degree will enable the executive to lead the men and women under their command and to provide an exceptional service to the citizens of the community they serve.

People look up to people and want to be led by a person who they not only respect, but know can and will make the best choices and decisions based on their educational experience, skills, and ability to move the department or organization into the future. Without the adequate education, officers feel inadequate to train anyone or lead because they lack basic management skills (Morris, 2012). The quality of

professional law enforcement is influenced by the services provided, the respect shown to the citizens and level of education obtained by the police officers.

COUNTER POSITION

With the years of law enforcement trying to prove to various industries that police work is a profession, people argue that law enforcement and the executives that lead the officers just need to have common sense to provide a basic service to the public. Law enforcement agencies have grown and provided service to the community for years without demanding the executives have a college degree or even additional management training. However, the technical advances that have been introduced into law enforcement along with the advanced degrees of the applicants, one can see that law enforcement as a whole is behind the curve when it comes to education and the needed skills to perform their job. When the chief of the law enforcement agency has little to no formal education and does not place an emphasis on education, the managers or command staff below him or her will have less excitement and lower drive to reach their full potential. The problem with law enforcement is that an officer's years of experience is viewed as they are competent to perform the job (Webb, 2008). The chief needs to lead by example and be in a position to obtain the knowledge and skill needed to lead and direct the department and the officers below him or her.

With the view of police work being a common sense job, it will be important to take a look at the duties performed by the executive. Police executives must not just lead the officers he or she is charged with, but must also know how to manage a budget, make presentations to citizen groups and government officials, conduct a needs assessment, and know how to allocate resources. These qualifications are common

skills for a manager and can be learned through experience and basic trial and error. However, the trial and error approach costs money that city governments do not have, it creates a negative public perception, and in the long run, costs the department officers who lack trust in the leaders. The executive must also know how to motivate, monitor, plan, organize, communicate, and influence people. These skills are obtained with a formal education and the knowledge gained by classroom work and then going through practical exercises to show the executive what does and does not work. The right person should be chosen based on competence and not just their years of service (Webb, 2008). The definition of common sense is the ability to behave in a reasonable way and make good decisions. With the ever increasing duties of the law enforcement executive, common sense is part of knowing how to be a leader, but being a good leader also comes with proper and formal educational training.

Law enforcement has never been a profession that pays officers a high salary and unlike some professions, educational standards are minimal for people entering the profession. Most departments do not have a substantial increase for the officers who achieve a formal education. The lack of pay to coincide with higher education can be the cause of some officers and executives to leave law enforcement and seek employment in the private sector where the starting salaries are much higher. Many fields in the private sector require a college degree in order for an employee to promote. With the possibility of losing officers and executives to private industry, law enforcement needs to raise the standards and in turn raise the pay for the officers. Critiques have argued that the value of a higher or formal education does not make one a leader, but the value of the knowledge obtained from obtaining a college degree will change the

officer's attitude, self-value, and behavior which are the core components of the law enforcement profession. The overall impact of a college degree provides a positive impact on the officer, supervisor, and executive which allows for the use of the knowledge obtained through advanced educational opportunities. In Texas, a peace officer is eligible to obtain a free education from a State supported University or College. There are also several programs that provide grants and scholarships for Texas Peace Officers to attend college, one of which is the 100 Club. The State of Texas also provides funding for executives to attend leadership training such as the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT).

When one looks at the available options for Texas Peace Officers to obtain a higher education, there leaves little to no excuses for not taking advantage of the free financial support and obtain a college education. Managers falter and fail because they neglect to spend time and money developing their skills and themselves (Bolman & Deal, 2008)

RECOMMENDATION

The ability to obtain a higher education by Texas Peace Officers through state funded programs provides little to no excuses for officers not obtaining a college degree. Law enforcement executives should continue to strive to obtain a college education and law enforcement agencies should require a formal education in the executives that lead the department. The creation of many Legislative bills that have been passed by the State of Texas provides various options for Texas Peace Officers to obtain their education through state supported colleges and universities. The Texas legislators have also passed legislation that provides funding for law enforcement

executives to obtain free leadership training through programs through LEMIT in conjunction with Sam Houston State University.

Many law enforcement executive vacancy postings require the applicant to have some form of leadership training such as LEMIT or the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy and further prefer a college degree, at least that of a bachelors. With many organizations requiring such high qualifications for the executive, one can see a change in the thinking of how law enforcement is viewed by the public. The idea of common sense or having years of experience has started to become a thing of the past. The turn in the public's idea of the police executive has provided Texas with the opportunity to become a leader among law enforcement agencies throughout the United States by requiring a college degree and providing the means for the officer to acquire the degree and leadership training. The more executives who have a formal education, the more the profession will be viewed as credible and professional. The citizens who the police serve daily will have more respect and are more apt and willing to increase the pay for the officers if a mandate is put into effect requiring executive officers to obtain a college degree and attend leadership and management training, which will, in turn, provide a model that can be viewed by agencies throughout the United States.

The criminal justice executive must make an assessment of the requirements for the job and be aware of what level of education will likely provide the skills to help the executive meet the requirements (Kania & Davis, 2012). A college education will provide the needed skills and knowledge that one with years of experience will not possess. Sustained efforts to improve policing must include the requirement of a formal education among the police executives.

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