The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

―――――――――

Purposeful Adoption of Positive-Based Discipline Model Due to Generational Differences and Social Climate

―――――――――

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

―――――――――

By
Louis Sanchez

Amarillo Police Department
Amarillo, Texas
June 2022

ABSTRACT

Discipline, in all accepted forms of its meaning, holds a crucial underlying tenet in human behavior. It controls society's everyday interaction, it is what allows governments to flourish, and it is what keeps order in a world that can only survive with order. Police management of personnel, coupled with current events and social outlook on policing, necessitates examining how police management disciplines personnel.

This examination, however, is not enough. Examining how discipline is viewed and practiced needs to start before the concept of negative discipline is needed or ever takes hold. The idea of "positive discipline" addresses this need, and law enforcement managers need to adopt it for several reasons. Policing in the early 2020's employs a range of generations in the workforce not seen in history (Glass, 2007). Generational values, the social climate, and modern policing progression require a universal change in discipline-thought to address underlying issues that could negatively affect policing in the future. Positive discipline can accomplish this, along with meeting the value needs of younger generation police officers. Positive discipline can help maintain retention in a field that sees the effects of a diminishing police workforce, increase police officers' knowledge base, and bridge the gap between supervisors and subordinates that is all too common in policing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract

INTRODUCTION

In policing, discipline and its approach are not at the forethought of policymakers in law enforcement. The process frequently causes frustration for the individuals administering the discipline and any other involved party (Stephens, 2011). A progressive model of discipline is the predominant model used in the law enforcement workforce today, and well suited in policing, simply because of policing's para-militaristic nature and way of doing business. It also allows for ease of documentation when faced with a problem employee who progresses beyond the scope of being savable as a productive employee. Progressive discipline is, however, not well suited to the trending human development methods of supervision, whereas a positive discipline model is. Organizations employ a never-before-seen diversity of generations in the workforce (Glass, 2007). With the shortage of officers, the range of generations in policing, and what they value, police management needs to examine how they will proceed in the area of discipline within their organization.

Progressive discipline is a common method by which police departments manage their discipline issues. A simple definition of progressive discipline is incrementally more severe sanctions for employee performance problems (Johnson, 2000). Police managers all understand punishment is not the only component of a discipline process. Correction and education are also needed but not usually entwined in many police departments' operations or training. There are many disadvantages of a progressive discipline model, which include a constant focus on problem employees at the expense of well-performing ones; a tendency to punish every problem encountered; feelings of inferiority by the employee; a focus on past mistakes, rather than future

performance; and the creation of an adversarial role for some managers who may be more tolerable to others (Guffey & Helms, 2001). This model's advantages include a step process for employees' punishment, employees' understanding of continued problems' seriousness, and similar discipline amongst employees for similar issues (Guffey & Helms, 2001).

A positive discipline model addresses some of these issues. Although positive discipline is put into practice in many forms, it does have one common aspect. It gets away from seeing and administering strictly punishment for wrongdoing and focuses on management coaching and improvement in performance (Sherman & Lucia, 1992). There are many definitions of positive discipline; however, when you contrast it with progressive discipline, its meaning becomes clear. It focuses on changing behavior through supervisory intervention rather than progressively more severe punishment each time a problem arises (Sherman & Lucia, 1992). Law enforcement officers make minor errors regularly. Discipline progression through supervisory intervention can stop discipline progression before these errors become significant problems. Many police managers, especially astute first-line supervisors, utilize this discipline method; however, supervisory staff at police departments may not be held accountable by command-level management to use this type of discipline. Command-level administration can only succeed in this discipline model by training, teaching, or holding first-line supervisors accountable. In its true defined form, positive discipline follows a pattern of oral warning, written warning, then a suspension of sorts (Osigweh & Hutchinson, 1989). Although this is similar to some models of a progressive discipline system, the underlying premise and beliefs of the positive discipline model are the

concern in this paper. Discipline models can be altered and adopted to meet the needs of the law enforcement organization.

In the early 2020's policing world, there is a marketable difference between newer police officers and their supervisors. These differences include values, needs, education, goals, and expectations (Macky, et al., 2008). Proper supervision and effectively-being supervised need examining to maintain a productive workforce due to these differences (Macky, et al., 2008). This need is not only in policing but in the entire workforce of our country. Definitions of generations usually include their upbringing and events that occur during a specific time-period (Macky, et al., 2008). These experiences define their development, causing a shared value system among the same age group (Macky, et al., 2008). A younger generation of officers entered the policing profession in the last decade. These generations do have different values than those who entered policing just ten or more years earlier. There is a necessity to understand these differences and how they relate to performance, motivation, needs, and outlook on policing to discipline and retain these officers properly. Right or wrong of different value systems is not the issue in policing. Still, the gap between them and how the differences relate to the best possible discipline method is.

Into the 2030's, law enforcement will be entirely in the hands of younger generations. A focus on retaining the current generations of recruits is needed and becoming a common topic among law enforcement agencies (Wilson & Heinonen, 2011). Although there are many themes related to police and non-police retention, some seem common among all American workforce professions regarding younger generations. Training, interest in the job, and relationship amongst the team are some

of these themes and are directly related to discipline methods used in an organization (Naim & Lenka, 2018; Monk-Turner, et al., 2010). Leadership also plays a vital role in the retention of the younger generation. Leadership requires understanding the values of the constituents being lead, and unless those values are recognized, understood, and incorporated in the organization, it will lead to dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Leadership is necessary for policing in the world. A discipline model that leads to effective leadership is a positive discipline model purposefully integrated into the organization. A police organization's discipline method plays a role more significant than the police organizations' strict risk management outlook that progressive discipline alone provides. All law enforcement agencies should adopt a predominantly positive discipline model due to modern generational differences and social climate. With the scrutiny and calls for social reform, there has never been a time more important than now to incorporate generational values into the policing organization. There is a critical need for training and improvement in how the police respond to the public. However, just as essential is the need for the officers' discipline to be the best possible and unimpeachable. As discipline is directly related to performance, a strictly progressive model will not succeed in maintaining officers' discipline in the future.

POSITION

Law enforcement agencies need to commit to better trained and more knowledgeable officers by implementing a discipline model based on positive discipline. A behavior change, not strictly punishment, is what policing needs in a discipline system (Stephens, 2011). When asked, most law enforcement employees will equate discipline to negative punishment and not positively impacting the officer's career. To be

genuinely effective in discipline, a version of progressive discipline will always remain; however, with the commitment to a positive discipline model, the need for stepped-based discipline will decrease due to the effects of positive discipline. The commitment to this method is necessary as "positive discipline is based on sound planning, training, and support" (Sherman & Lucia, 1992, pg. 56). Without these requirements, the result is similar to progressive discipline with some training mixed in (Sherman & Lucia, 1992).

Although discipline is simply a way to fix, monitor, or increase an employee's performance, it has a connotation of punishment, not education, training, or improving the employee's performance (Johnson, 2000). By purposefully integrating a positive discipline model, a police organization shows a commitment to its employees' increased performance. The effect of this is more job satisfaction and purpose on the part of the employee. A significant aspect of positive discipline is the concept of training (Gourley, 1950), which is necessary to increase the officer's knowledge, performance, and satisfaction in the job. It is also well known that one of the critical aspects of supervision is the supervisor's role as a trainer. Policing, its role in society, laws, and the community is constantly changing. The only way to keep up with these changes and progression is to regularly pass information from the supervisor to the officer. This constant state of increasing knowledge is an essential aspect of positive discipline.

With the generational diversity in law enforcement, a positive discipline model is needed to meet younger generations' values and needs and retain them in the workforce. Research indicates many differences in how work is viewed by younger generations today than just a decade ago. They tend not to see a traditional career path, and they crave challenges (Randall, 2010). They tend to define their success in

terms of the quality of the work they engage in, not the pay (Randall, 2010). The

relevance of what they are doing and why they are doing it are important aspects to

younger generations. By utilizing coaching, training, and counseling, usually associated

with positive discipline, the generation gap subsides. The strict punishment of

progressive only discipline, without the coaching or training associated with a positive

discipline method, is counterproductive to the job satisfaction aspect for younger

generations. They tend to find the work's quality more important than the satisfaction

older generations have from simply having a career.

What motivates different generations is as diverse as the number of generations

that currently occupy the police workforce. Younger workers are results-oriented, like

and expect feedback, and work well with precise instruction. It is commonly known that

newer recruits into the law enforcement career tend to need motivation through means

related to recognition or awards. Through discipline correctly administered, it can be

rewarding and have the same effect of recognizing a good work habit (Guffey & Helms,

2001). To bridge the gap between the older workforce and the younger generations, the

police organization needs to incorporate policies or procedures involving the younger

generation in making decisions, providing good communication, and offering things that

help the younger generation better themselves for advancement (Glass, 2007). Positive

discipline fits in with the needs of the younger generations in these respects. Younger

officers will become the police organization's leaders in the future, and steps to facilitate

this is needed.

Social reform calls will require police organizations to review internal practices,

such as their discipline process, which includes the amount and type of training officers

receive. The social climate involves scrutiny of officer's discipline while on the job. Prosecutor's offices are increasingly bringing in the discipline of officers into every case, examining credibility. In favor of social reform and concerning activities by police departments engaging in positive discipline tenets, those calling for reform stated, "this process demonstrates a commitment among the command to play a vital role in setting behavioral expectations and serves as a way to intervene with minor issues before they ever develop into major behavior concerns" (Wilson & Wilson, 2020, pg. 5). Implementation of a positive discipline model, by practice alone, will not be enough. A formal change will be necessary. With the younger generations filling the lower ranks of law enforcement organizations and their values coinciding with the tenets of positive discipline, now is the time for that change. Expectations regarding the behaviors of officers are coming to the forefront of social reform.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Police organizations frequently encounter situations where the severity of wrongdoing would not allow a positive discipline approach (Coleman, 2003). In such a case, neither the progressive nor positive discipline model is necessary if retaining the employee is in question. In situations where the severity results from noticeable progression, a positive discipline approach is beneficial. The most significant advantage of a positive discipline method is that supervisors find issues early, allowing the issue to be corrected before it becomes a severe problem (Guffey & Helms, 2001).

Toleration of a problem employee, who may progress to the point that the severity of the offense is beyond a positive approach, is another problem frequently found in law enforcement. Through a formal adoption of positive discipline, which

includes accountability on supervisors, this toleration would subside. Supervisors under a progressive approach tend to avoid being confrontational in addressing discipline; however, supervisors are more willing to participate in the discipline process by adopting a positive discipline system (Guffey & Helms, 2001). The relationship between the officer and the supervisor is necessary for correcting any behavior that needs correction (Guffey & Helms, 2001).

Officers may see supervisor's and management's actions as micromanagement in the early stages of implementing a positive discipline system. Traditionally in policing, it was not common for supervisors to frequently communicate with officers. Supervisors, under a positive discipline model, will inevitably spend more time with officers and take more interest in the officer's activities. It is inevitable that increased supervisory attention can cause uneasiness and could lead to beliefs of being micromanaged. As long as the supervisors adhere to positive discipline tenets, the officers' views should change. A critical principle that counters the micromanagement argument is that the employee side of this method involves increasing the employee knowledge and ability to correct their behavior by giving them the tools to do so (Johnson, 2000). The employee, in a discipline model with positive discipline tenets, is ultimately responsible for changing their behavior (Johnson, 2000). By training and coaching, instead of controlling behavior, management can avoid the perception of micromanagement at all levels.

Disparity and discrimination are also a real danger in implementing a positive discipline model (Coleman, 2003). Without supervisory understanding, buy-in, and careful administration of positive discipline, many supervisors will favor certain discipline

forms when dealing with some officers and not others (Coleman, 2003). One value significant in the workplace, which goes beyond generational differences or any other difference in the workforce's makeup, is organizational justice. The value of "organizational justice" is the "employees perceptions of fairness in the workplace" (Rupp Thornton-Lugo, 2011, pg. 1). Positive discipline provides a management tool that ensures organizational justice will be present and show uniformity in the officers' treatment. The system focuses not only on employees who need help but also on recognizing and awarding good work by most of the workforce (Osigweh & Hutchinson 1989).

RECOMMENDATION

The onus of discipline upon management in law enforcement agencies is unmistakable in society. Policing organizations need to purposefully and with priority implement a positive discipline type system. With the current push for social reform, diversity of generational values in policing, and retention of younger generations, this push is more important than ever before.

The police mission's effectiveness is strictly dependent upon officers having the ability and means to maintain direction. To accomplish the police mission, supervisory planning, increased training, and support of the supervisor and organization are necessary (Sherman & Lucia, 1992). A positive discipline-based adoption, not only on paper but also in practice and frequent review, can help police managers' important mission adherence goals. Training and advancing the police workforce is a priority of police managers. Positive discipline is a tool to assist in that goal.

The workforce is more diverse, by age and values, now more than ever before (Glass, 2007). Police administrators need to bridge the gap between the generations and prepare younger officers for the future of law enforcement. A discipline model based on positive discipline is also a tool that could assist in that goal. Positive discipline is not a new concept; however, the premise and tenets of it play well now towards younger generation officers' values and goals. Fairness in the workplace is a necessary element in the realm of proper organizational discipline. Rightly implemented discipline focuses on correcting behavior and awarding those who deserve recognition (Osigweh & Hutchinson, 1989).

Policing is under the social microscope at an unprecedented level in modern times, and the internal practices, including training and discipline, will continue to be scrutinized. Police departments across the country will be required to utilize everything available to them in these administration aspects, including how they approach and administer discipline. A formal review and update to every police organization's discipline system is necessary and should be at every police administrator's forethought.

Sometimes the "act" by officers does not allow for utilization of a positive discipline system and advocates for immediate "negative" discipline. Discipline acts of this nature are inevitable. However, early detection and correction of problems beforehand can prevent this from happening as often through a positive discipline system. The supervisor's role is most important in this respect. The relationship between the officer and the supervisor is necessary to achieve prevention in the discipline realm. This relationship is the basis for positive discipline system acceptance

regarding understanding it is not a form of micromanagement. This method can benefit the police organization through thorough implementation and follow-up, feedback, measuring results, and continued supervisory skills training (Osigweh & Hutchinson, 1989).

Implementation of a positive discipline system in a police organization will need to be a predominantly positive system with elements of a progressive one. Some aspects that will need to be incorporated, but not an exhausted list, are: a model that advocates for early intervention, contains fairness and consistency, focuses on behavior, includes a level of transparency, and administers discipline, positive or negative, promptly (Stephens, 2011). Documentation and step discipline are still needed, especially in the police organization. Police organizations are as diverse as the generations that fill them regarding how they operate. Civil service, unions, etc., influence how police organizations will manage discipline; therefore, changing how discipline is handled will be a challenging but worthy task. Writing policy is not enough in a positive discipline system. A genuine commitment is necessary, with continued training, feedback, measurement, and evaluation. This commitment needs to start with police administrators. Without the commitment and accountability from above, there will be none from below. Therefore, all law enforcement agencies should adopt a predominantly positive discipline model due to modern generational differences and social climate.

REFERENCES

Coleman, S. (2003). The place of positive discipline. *Criminal Justice Ethics, 22*(2), 50–53.

Glass, A. (2007). *Understanding generational differences for competitive success*. Industrial and commercial training. 39(2), 98-103.

Gourley, G. D. (1950). Police discipline. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 41*(1), 85–100.

Guffey, C. J., & Helms, M. M. (2001). Effective employee discipline: A case of the Internal Revenue Service. *Public Personnel Management, 30*(1), 111-127.

Johnson, K. (2000). Employee discipline is not just for punishment anymore. *Journal of Health Care Compliance, 2*(4), 19.

Macky, K., Gardner, D., Forsyth, S., Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, S. M. (2008). Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 862-877.

Monk-Turner, E., O'Leary, D., & Sumter, M. (2010). Factors shaping police retention: Does Herzberg's theory of satisfaction hold? *Police Journal, 83*(2), 164–180.

Naim, M. F. & Lenka, U. (2018). Development and retention of generation Y employees: A conceptual framework. *Employee Relations, 40*. doi: 10.1108/ER-09-2016-0172.

Osigweh Yg., C. A. B., & Hutchison, W. R. (1989). Positive discipline. *Human Resource Management, 28*(3), 367–383.

Randall, S. (2010). Managing the millenials. *Accounting Today, 24*(13), 46.

Rupp, D., Thornton-Lugo, M. (2011). Organizational justice. *Oxford Bibliographies*. doi:
    10.1093/obo/9780199828340-0044

Sherman, M., & Lucia, A. (1992). Positive discipline and labor arbitration. *Arbitration
    Journal, 47*(2), 56–58.

Stephens, D. (2011). Police discipline: A case for change. *Journal of Current Issues In
    Crime, Law and Law Enforcement*, 7(2), 275-297.

Wilson, J. M., & Heinonen, J. A. (2011). Advancing a police science: Implications frorem
    a national survey of police staffing. *Police Quarterly, 14*(3), 277–297.

Wilson, A., Wilson, M. (2020). *Reimagining policing: Strategies for community
    reinvestment.* NASW Social Justice Brief. Retrieved from
    https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=GjXjr6rDzss%3D&portali
    d=0