

**The Bill Blackwood
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Managing Morale in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Theories of personal and group motivation that are being used in business today can be adapted for use in managing morale in law enforcement. The stress and complexity of law enforcement make it a constant challenge to maintain the kind of morale that leads to quality performance. The ideas expressed are developed through a review of literature including publications, papers, books, web articles, and journals. Research in the fields of psychology and social science has resulted in theories of human motivation and morale. Management researchers and applied social scientists have developed techniques to apply these theories of personnel management. The adaptation of many of these techniques to managing morale in law enforcement is in the early stages. A law enforcement leader that understands the implementation of these theories can create an environment that supports the type of morale that leads to consistent quality performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Morale is frequently credited as the deciding factor in victories in sports, battles, and business. With this in mind how can law enforcement leaders manage this factor that can be so important to a department's success? Fluctuations in morale are a normal occurrence in a police agency. If the general morale of a department is high these fluctuations tend to be self correcting and rarely lead to problems. It is when morale remains consistently low or dips to exceptionally low levels that the problems develop. Low morale can lead to poor performance, safety lapses, misconduct, and lack of care for equipment and supplies. A department's management must react to these situations. Unfortunately this reactive form of management is unlikely to address the source of the problem and may even exacerbate the existing low morale. This leads to the question of how can a law enforcement leader be proactive in addressing morale issues before they create these problems. The general morale of a department is easily observed. In spite of this it remains notoriously difficult to measure morale in any kind of quantifiable sense. There will also be those situations beyond a leader's ability to control that will inevitably impact a department's morale. The proactive approach for a law enforcement leader is to create an environment that fosters the kind of generally positive morale that can absorb the inevitable impacts without leading to morale related problems.

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow 1943) states that to experience fulfillment a person's needs must be met in a progressive order: basic survival, safety, belongingness, ego status, and self actualization. If a law enforcement leader can create an environment that meets these needs it should lead to the kind of generally

high morale that is desired. There are many factors involved with meeting these needs. It is the purpose of this paper to examine some of these factors that can be manipulated to achieve the kind of environment that is positive for morale. Particular attention will be paid to identify any of these factors that are of greater importance to law enforcement than the general work force. The examination of these factors will seek to answer how a law enforcement leader can manage morale in a law enforcement agency.

The research of publications, papers, books, and journals is expected to produce information that will allow the creation of a list of morale influences. Items have been selected an attempt to provide information that will allow the examination of morale influences. These influences will be selected for areas that a leader can influence. Leadership techniques that can create a nurturing environment for these morale areas will be identified. An anticipated result is that communication will be a major factor. Another will be for a leader to understand the value of personnel and establish a people oriented style of leadership. Having a cause or purpose is expected to be a greater influence on the morale of law enforcement than the general population.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is extensive literature that addresses motivation and morale as it relates to the general work force. There is surprising little literature that applies this research to the law enforcement environment. Law enforcement seems to be coming late to the table in applying motivational techniques to improve morale among police officers. Law enforcement trainer Edward Brown pointed this late development out in an article for the CALEA newsletter (Brown 1999). He concludes that much of this late adoption is born from a long time attitude in law enforcement that if you have a morale problem maybe

this is not the job for you. Most law enforcement leaders recognized the need for strong morale and believed it was good in their department. However, few were doing anything to test or develop the morale in their departments. Fortunately there is a growing trend in law enforcement leadership to recognize the importance of motivating employees to retain the best people in law enforcement. There is a ready made library of research from the general business world that law enforcement leaders can easily adapt and test in the law enforcement environment.

Two of the main theories guiding the research into motivational development are Herzberg's Theory of Motivation (Herzberg 1959) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These theories are in many ways complementary and may provide the best insight into employee motivation when considered together. Herzberg created a content theory of motivation with two categories of factors based on his research. One category was hygiene factors. These are the factors whose absence can create dissatisfaction. Their presence does not lead to motivation though. Hygiene factors include such things as company policy, interpersonal relations, working conditions and salary. The other category was motivator factors. These factors are elements that enrich a person's job experience. Herzberg identified five factors in particular that were strong determiners of job satisfaction: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. These motivator factors were associated with long term positive effects on morale and job performance. Hygiene factors must be met in order to avoid a negative effect on morale and performance. Further improvements in the hygiene factors resulted in only short term improvements in morale and performance. Maslow followed a similar line of thinking and arrived at a five tiered hierarchy of needs. He

proposed that each tier's needs had to be met in order to advance to the next. The first tier is physiological needs. Physiological needs are the very basic needs such as air, food, water, and sleep. The second tier is safety needs. These are primarily psychological needs that have to do with a sense of security and consistency. Home, family and a steady job are examples of safety needs. The third tier is love needs. This does not refer to sexual love but to the sense of belongingness and acceptance that all humans have a desire for. The fourth tier is esteem needs. There are two types of esteem needs. The first is self esteem that comes from competence or mastery of a task. The second is the esteem gained by the attention and recognition of others. The needs for power and admiration are examples of esteem needs. The fifth tier is self actualization. This is the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming. This is the point at which people have met their other needs and are capable of seeking higher goals such as knowledge, peace, and self fulfillment. As you might expect of any theory attempting to predict human motivation these work well when applied to the whole of the work force. They do not fit well to all individuals and may even break down for entire professions. Maslow noted that certain personality types consistently changed the order of his hierarchy. It stands to reason that any career that was dominated by that personality type would have a different order of motivational needs than Maslow's hierarchy would indicate. Studies conducted by Bellott and Tutor with Tennessee school teachers appear to support this assumption (Bellott & Tutor ,1990).

Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies are another source of significant insight into the field of motivational study. The studies were conducted from 1927 to 1932 at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works. Elton Mayo started the experiments to examine the

physical and environmental influences of the workplace on worker performance. He later moved into studying the impact of the psychological aspects of the workplace on performance. One outstanding result has become known as the Hawthorne effect. That is that the act of measurement itself impacts the result of the measurement. This came from the observation that when employees became aware of being studied their performance changed. The studies did show that some physical changes had some minor positive effects on morale and productivity. The greatest impact came from the attention that management gave the people involved in the study. The open communication and special attention given the workers involved as part of the study had a greater positive impact than any of the other changes attempted as part of the study. The next greatest impact was from another unintended area of the study. The six women selected for the original study became a working and socially dynamic team due to the common goal and shared working experience. This led to better productivity and fewer missed days due to the team support dynamic that developed (Gwynne, 1997). The results of this study fit well with Herzberg's theory by showing that the motivator factors produced greater results than the hygiene factors. The study also linked the achievement of esteem needs on Maslow's hierarchy to greater productivity.

Some of the most successful businesses utilize motivational techniques that have been developed from this seminal information. With the growing professional development in law enforcement the importance of creating an environment that fosters a high morale is becoming apparent. More articles on adapting the strategies private business uses to law enforcement agencies are beginning to appear in law enforcement journals. Law enforcement leaders are increasingly seeing the importance of retaining

those officers that could just get another job if they are not happy and are working to create an environment that will support that goal.

METHODOLOGY

How can a law enforcement leader manage the morale in a law enforcement agency? A leader must begin by motivating themselves. The morale of the leader will inevitably reflect on those that follow. It is critical to lead by example. Set and publish departmental goals. Goals are a basic hygiene factor that is too frequently left out or ill defined. The basic needs of your personnel must be met to avoid a negative impact on morale. Meeting these needs is comparative if you are not at least competitive with other similar positions in meeting these needs morale will deteriorate. Communication is the key factor in creating an environment that promotes a high morale. The needs for recognition, input, accountability, and instruction are met by this simple action. While individuals will vary on the factors that motivate them creating an environment that offers a broad range of opportunity will allow individuals to access the factors they need. In order to research this hypothesis books, journals, papers, web articles and publications were consulted.

FINDINGS

In conducting research for his book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," Stephen Covey studied many of the most successful companies in the world. He identified common traits among the leaders of those companies that lead to the title of the book. In the end he notes that every major religion in the world has some form of the golden rule which states "do unto other as you would have them do unto you"

(Covey, 1990). He notes that the best leaders fall well into this philosophy. If you want to create a highly motivated work force make sure you display that kind of motivation.

Maslow's hierarchy, Herzberg's theory, and the Hawthorne study provide the starting core for much of the motivational advice being used in industry today. The prevailing thought seems to be that they are working well as motivation predictors. There are some studies that show how they can be in error at times though. An example would be the study conducted by the Tennessee Career Ladder Program on school teachers. The study found that most teachers in the program placed self actualization factors above self esteem issues on the Maslow hierarchy. The study also noted that pay was acting as a motivating factor. It is probable that this is being misinterpreted as the increased pay was likely correcting a negative morale issue from failing to meet hygiene standards instead. It does point to the importance of meeting hygiene factors in creating an environment that is conducive to high morale. The advice of the experts is to eliminate all the morale sapping hygiene factors possible. Some of these can be eliminated for very little cost such as color selection, cleaning, a clear policy manual, and working conditions. One hygiene factor that deserves special mention is the setting of goals. Studies have show that that individuals and companies that set clear and attainable goals are more likely to succeed and have a higher sense of esteem and security. Involving personnel in the creation of these goals is a great step toward positive morale and moves into the motivating factor of responsibility.

There are several common threads of thought in the publications on moral and motivation. One that is even more important in law enforcement than the private sector is the management of morale as a process and not an event. There should be an

ongoing process that creates an environment where the officers can strongly motivate themselves. A leader that is constantly reacting to events will never be able to keep up. An environment that promotes motivation absorbs crisis with less effect and can correct for some demoralizing factors that may be out of your control. To maintain this environment you will need to receive regular feed back from the officers. Remember to be an effective motivator the environment must create an optimum condition to their best work each day from their point of perception and may need tailoring to individual circumstances.

There are some widely recognized principles used in creating this morale building work environment. Many of them involve simply communicating with personnel. It is easy to see how these meet the needs of Maslow's hierarchy. Recognition is a common desire among people. It boosts confidence and meets esteem needs. Celebrate successes and show appreciation as close to the event as possible. The flip side of recognition is accountability. A leader should let personnel know when they have taken a wrong turn. Discipline that is properly applied can be motivational as it moves them to the track for success or removes the offending employee from the path of others. Remember the adage to praise in public and punish in private.

Involvement gives personnel a sense of ownership in their jobs. It also gives the leader an opportunity to receive valuable feed back from the person that should know the job best. A leader should get personnel involved in planning the goals for their position, planning process or duty changes, or suggesting improvements. If there are several personnel working closely together use team building concepts to form a social

structure of involvement. It has been shown in studies that this can further improve morale by giving personnel a sense of duty to their teammates as well as the job. Initiative and creativity should be encouraged. Listen to ideas and be prepared to try them out. Accept the fact that some will not succeed and learn from them. This motivates personnel toward growth and improves moral through job expansion and greater responsibility.

Opportunities will occur to delegate responsibility. Show some trust and empower personnel with this responsibility as soon as you believe they can handle it. The Hawthorne studies indicate that the special attention alone will improve morale and you provide the opportunity for personal growth.

These steps will create an environment for morale building. You will need to meet the hygiene needs of personnel as well to prevent the demoralizing effects that failing to meet these needs can create. Feed back from personnel can help to determine if these needs are being met. There should also be a recurring process of comparing your agency to other similar agencies as the perception of hygiene factors is comparative.

CONCLUSIONS

Low morale can be very destructive to a law enforcement agency. This study seeks to identify methods used by successful business leaders and motivational experts and examine how these methods can be used in a law enforcement agency. How can a law enforcement leader manage the morale in a law enforcement agency? The techniques and ideas used by successful leaders in private business may hold the answer to this question. The morale of the leader will inevitably reflect on those that

follow. It is critical to lead by example. Set and publish departmental goals. Goals are a basic hygiene factor that is too frequently left out or ill defined. The basic needs of personnel must be met to avoid a negative impact on morale. Meeting these needs is comparative if you are not at least competitive with other similar positions in meeting these needs morale will deteriorate. Communication is the key factor in creating an environment that promotes a high morale.

Companies with highly motivated work forces tended to be under highly motivated leaders. Leading by setting an example of high morale should help to set the tone for the rest of the agency. Maslow's hierarchy does not always follow the order the tiers would suggest. However, programs designed to meet all of the hierarchy needs will not be impacted by changes in the order. Herzberg's theory states that meeting the hygiene needs of a department should eliminate the negative morale influences that create the problems for departments associated with very low morale. Studies showing that job burn out can set in for police officers as early as five years and that the average experience of officers involved in ethical violation is 7.5 years. This information indicates that law enforcement leaders need to be adding motivation factors before that time period. Herzberg suggests job enlargement, job rotation, and job enrichment. Most law enforcement agencies have ample opportunity to provide all of these. Consider rotation to special assignments, increased decision making responsibilities, greater inclusion in project/event planning, or instructor responsibilities. Growth opportunities are an important factor in maintaining high morale. The single factor that seems to lead to the most volatile changes in morale is communication. Personnel need to have communication to meet the needs in Maslow's hierarchy. This

communication needs to move both ways to allow personnel to both receive and give feed back. It is important that feed back is acted on to make the communication meaningful. Even disciplinary action can be a positive morale factor if carried out fairly and communicated properly. Law enforcement leaders face the additional challenge of developing this communication over a twenty four hour seven day a week time period. It is imperative that first line supervisors be developed to create the kind of environment that is conducive to a high morale in this situation. Even with a competent first line supervisor a leader needs to arrange to be personally present to speak with officers when possible. Remember the Hawthorne effect that just the act of observing will impact performance. The documents reviewed for this study indicate that this is also true for morale. The morale of your personnel benefits from personal attention. Think of what an easy step this is in achieving a motivated work force. To meet the higher level needs personnel need to have the opportunities to grow. Training, educational benefits, and assigned projects can all provide this opportunity. Meeting this level of needs provides for the long term motivation of the employee. In conclusion law enforcement leaders need to be proactive in planning for an environment that will create a positive morale and should monitor morale by maintaining open communication with the officers.

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