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# FBI Law Enforcement

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# Leaders vs. Managers

## The Law Enforcement Formula

By  
CARL DOBBS  
and  
MARK W. FIELD, M.A.



**S**cholars continue to debate the true origin of leadership qualities. Whereas some scholars believe many individuals are born with the ability to lead, others argue that people can learn to lead. The truth, however, may lie somewhere in the middle. While a leader must possess certain inherent leadership qualities, raw charisma alone does not ensure success. This holds true for law enforcement leaders as well.

Born or bred, law enforcement leaders must not only successfully manage the day-to-day operations of their departments but they must also determine the long-term goals of the agency and enlist the whole-

hearted cooperation of their subordinates to accomplish these goals. In this way, police leaders differ from police managers.

This article underscores the necessity for police administrators to be more than just competent managers—they must also be effective leaders. To become effective leaders, law enforcement administrators must be aware of the tasks facing them and the importance of consistency to gain the trust and respect of the people they lead.

### LEADERSHIP TASKS

The main tasks of leaders fall into three distinct categories. Leaders must envision the future, gain

the cooperation of others, and alter the way others think about things.

In law enforcement, leaders must begin by forming an organizational vision and making a commitment to it. Their passion for excellence and their visions for themselves and their officers greatly test their abilities as leaders. Committing to a vision also calls on a leader's capacity to take risks—literally, to suffer change.

After developing a vision for the department, police leaders must gain the cooperation of their officers to work toward that vision. Effective law enforcement leaders' achieve cooperation through motivation. President Harry S. Truman

said that leadership is "...that quality which can make other men do what they do not want to do and like it."<sup>1</sup> A leader's officers take pride in every task they perform—from investigating a major crime to directing traffic in subzero temperatures.

Finally, all employees must have the same values and goals. Therefore, police leaders must develop high standards and instill these ideals in their staff members.

How do police leaders accomplish these goals? The formula is simple—by knowing their business, knowing themselves, and knowing their people.<sup>2</sup>

### Occupational Knowledge

Effective law enforcement leaders must first develop occupational expertise. This can come from advanced education, training, or job experience. Strong professional knowledge, whether in handling a crisis management situation, supervising a major case investigation, or completing an indepth staff study, helps leaders to earn the respect and admiration of their subordinates. Indeed, those who have faith in their superiors' knowledge and abilities follow those individuals with greater confidence. In addition, skilled and knowledgeable individuals usually receive first consideration for leadership positions. However, the most tactically proficient person may not make the best leader. Rather, a combination of proven expertise and strong personality traits enables leaders to convince followers of their ability to succeed.

### Self-Knowledge

While law enforcement leaders may find it relatively easy to know

their business, they may find it difficult to know themselves. Nevertheless, in order to develop an effective leadership style that emphasizes their strengths and deemphasizes their weaknesses, police leaders must first know themselves.

In fact, police leaders who *know* themselves adopt a leadership style that fits their personality. For example, although many individuals consider a good sense of humor a desired trait, those who go against their nature in an attempt to be humorous appear awkward and unnatural and cannot lead effectively. On the other hand, leaders who know themselves can gain power by enhancing their strengths, while they strive to overcome weaknesses.

Leaders with self-knowledge exhibit self-confidence. Former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson once described General George Marshall by saying, "Everyone felt his presence. It was a striking and communicated force. His figure conveyed intensity, which his voice, low, staccato, and incisive,

reinforced. It compelled respect. It spread a sense of authority and calm."<sup>3</sup>

General Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff throughout World War II, was the driving force behind Europe's reconstruction under the Marshall plan. Tested many times, under stressful and arduous conditions, Marshall continued to triumph. Because he believed in himself, he possessed an inner strength others could sense. Potential law enforcement leaders must determine their own strengths and weaknesses so that in times of crisis, they, too, can react with "authority and calm."

### Knowledge of Subordinates

Law enforcement leaders must also know their subordinates in order to motivate them—a key component in leadership. They must take an active role in the lives of their employees—to offer a kind word to the employee with a parent in the hospital or congratulations to the officer with a child graduating



Chief Dobbs



Deputy Chief Field

Chief Dobbs and Deputy Chief Field serve with the Wheaton, Illinois, Police Department.

from high school. Police leaders with an awareness of the give-and-take involved in any leader-follower relationship take cues from their employees as to the best way to motivate them in both individual and team situations.

Although they realize the importance of establishing a reciprocal relationship with employees, some police leaders may find this difficult to achieve because they must lead people who may or may not share their ideals. Therefore, they must work to understand and develop an alliance with all of their employees, no matter what their ideals.

Reciprocal relationships rely heavily on mutual trust. Delegating work to one's subordinates that challenges their abilities and their intellects demonstrates mutual trust. Law enforcement leaders should allow senior patrol officers to draft evaluations, give budding officers an opportunity to assume the duties of a patrol supervisor for a day, and ensure that firstline supervisors delegate responsibility to and improve the training of new officers.

Further, stimulated employees increase morale in the organization. Because many facets of law enforcement require great personal sacrifice, morale can easily plummet. Therefore, police leaders must be sensitive to their employees' level of job satisfaction and to what motivates them to do their jobs well. For example, small, seemingly insignificant acts can motivate officers—group recognition in roll call of an extraordinary arrest, "Officer of the Year" awards, and verbal praise, to name a few. Police leaders must

strive to discover other creative practices to motivate their people.

### CONSISTENCY

Effective leadership requires congruence between ideals and actions—establishing a standard, then setting a credible example. For instance, police leaders who admonish subordinates for shoddy uniforms when their own uniforms do not conform to department standards have not attained congruence between ideals and actions and have little chance of earning the respect of subordinates.

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***... a combination of proven expertise and strong personality traits enables leaders to convince followers of their ability to succeed.***

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In short, law enforcement leaders must first demand of themselves what they expect from their officers. They must exemplify those ideals and principles that they wish to instill in their employees. If leaders' actions support their personal ideals, their subordinates will likely follow their lead.

When police leaders show consistency, their subordinates trust them. True leaders do not make impulsive decisions, waver or agonize over political outcomes, or depart from convention merely for the sake

of personal convenience. They possess character and a spirit of fairness that dictate each decision.

### LEADERSHIP VERSUS MANAGEMENT

Many police leaders are effective managers, in that their subordinates produce bottom-line results—the supervisor whose team has the greatest number of arrests per month, the team leader who logs more citizen contacts than any other officer, or the division commander who always meets budget. These results are unquestionably desirable, but leaders with a bottom-line attitude may lose sight of the bigger picture—the ideals that maintain department cohesiveness during more stressful times.

Furthermore, management that pays undue attention to the bottom line can create tension between labor and management. To avoid this, law enforcement must encourage its administrators to be leaders, not managers. Administrators must realize that some day, they will need to lead their people in a critical situation. Therefore, they must inspire a sense of ownership, pride, and commitment that makes all subordinates eager to fulfill their duties. Instilling such ideals is the job of a leader, not merely a manager.

When analyzing the dichotomy between leadership and management, management could be simply termed as “doing the thing right,” whereas leadership could be described as “doing the right thing.”<sup>4</sup> Management entails completing the technical, more mechanical, aspects of the every day tasks, while conforming closely to department

policy, procedure, rules, and regulations. Leadership, in sharp contrast, encompasses the spirit, vision, and ethical considerations that accompany the decisionmaking process.

Leaders find doing the right thing very satisfying. They determine and implement the right course of action, do what they say they will do, and set standards for themselves that go beyond normal job requirements. They exercise objectivity to control biases and see persons and events with minimized prejudice.

In contrast, how often do managers consider the importance of "doing the right thing"? Do they apply ethical standards to everything they do? These standards must not only apply to tactical, operational, and policy decisionmaking but must also permeate every organizational decision involving matters of public policy, personnel, and community interaction.

Leaders clearly delineate acceptable and unacceptable behavior by rewarding positive behavior and punishing negative behavior. They recognize their perpetual obligation to the community and the government not to dismiss borderline behavior. They also realize that this type of behavior, if left unchecked, will permeate the organization and subtly establish a lower level of acceptable performance as the norm.

During times of crisis, officers need high principles and ideals to help them rise above seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They must believe that they serve the community for a noble and just cause. If law enforcement leaders can impart a sense of duty and a feeling

of honor in their subordinates, they will have a team prepared to meet every challenge.

## CONCLUSION

It is impossible to tell how any individual will react in a leadership role, but the quality and intensity of training in law enforcement today will determine whether future leaders can meet the challenges of tomorrow. Training that simulates actual supervision better prepares people to lead.



In the field, leaders must show courage or risk losing the respect of their subordinates. Therefore, law enforcement must focus on developing leaders, not managers. Leadership development must begin during recruitment and selection, with each candidate acknowledged as a potential leader who may chart future courses for the organization, as well as for the law enforcement profession.

Perhaps law enforcement leaders can learn a valuable lesson from a Marine master gunnery sergeant, who has continuously challenged future naval aviators and officers

through the years to seek the blend of expertise, sense of self, and knowledge of subordinates that characterize effective leadership. This sergeant, stationed at the U.S. Navy Aviation Officer Candidate School, believes that naval officers can be divided into two classes—contenders and pretenders. Contenders demand the most from themselves. They grasp the essence of leadership because they believe in total dedication and complete personal sacrifice. In contrast, the words "dedication" and "sacrifice" mean nothing to pretenders.<sup>5</sup>

Every day, contenders refine their expertise, challenge their personal ideals, and master new techniques to motivate their people. Contenders are true leaders, for they reach the high ideals of leadership and integrate them into the realities of day-to-day existence.

The law enforcement profession cannot afford to fill its leadership ranks with pretenders. It needs leaders who are contenders. Therefore, law enforcement administrators must ask themselves which they would rather be—pretenders or contenders? Managers or leaders? ♦

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Karel Montor, et al., *Naval Leadership: Voices of Experience* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm E. Wolfe, *Fundamentals of Naval Leadership*, 3d ed. (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 390.

<sup>4</sup>William Westfall, *Institute for Liability Management: Police Supervisory and Liability Management Seminar*, 5 February 1992.

<sup>5</sup>D.W. Bearup, discussion with Mark W. Field, 15 March 1986, U.S. Navy Aviation Officer Candidate School, Pensacola, Florida.