



**Effective Leadership Practices in
Public Safety Organizations**

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Abstract

This research paper is centered on leadership, and is written in the eyes of a civilian, not a police officer. The various leadership techniques discussed in this paper can be applied in various public safety organizations. Additionally, this paper illustrates the importance of public safety training and education, and also poses the question of what being a leader really entails, and what responsibilities and pressures a leader faces. Moreover, the interviews conducted in this paper, are from retired, as well as working public safety professionals. While there are many different leadership styles that are discussed in this paper, the main thesis of this paper, is understanding the difference between leadership and management, as well as knowing how to organize and run a public safety organization, not just by managing other people, but by using the art of leadership to teach and inspire, rather than just give orders.

Mary Lou Anderson once said, “Leaders are called to stand in that lonely place between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet,’ and intentionally make decisions that will bind, forge, move and create history” (Forck, 2012, p.34). This quote holds true, because when examining leadership, one must first know that managers and leaders wear “different hats”, so to speak. However, a manager can become a leader. Leadership by definition has been defined many ways, although in a general sense, leadership was originally defined as “a capacity to move a group and/or organization through a process of change” (Schafer, 2010, p. 741). Management however is defined more as a “represented technical proficiency at a more finite set of tasks” (Schafer, 2010, p. 741). Moreover, to a truly effective leader, one must know how to lead and manage, especially in a public safety organization (Schafer, 2010, pp. 741-742).

However, when discussing leadership in public safety organizations, leadership can be considered a controversial somewhat involved subject. One of the main reasons for this thinking is because leadership and management are often thrown together. This however is not true. What makes leadership and management different is the fact that, “Leaders are people who do the right thing, managers do things right” (Thiel & Jennings, 2012, p.189). Moreover, having a formal education in a public sector related study or organizational leadership education are vital factors that produce strong leaders in a public sector employment. However, before a leader can change the way a public safety organization works, a leader must begin a change culture by first correcting his/her own false assumptions, as well as create opportunities for others to follow (Carrillo, 2010, p. 49).

Additionally, if a change culture is going to be effective, it must first carefully evaluate what is currently working, and what is not working. Just because a program works in one department, does not mean it works in the other department effectively. For long-term growth of the organization, there is a critical need to scrutinize the existing culture for elements that are working, as well as bring value, as it is to determine elements that are not adding value. An effective change culture consists of time, political capital, competence, as well as financial resources (Thiel & Jennings, 2012, pp. 212-213).

Moreover, effective leadership skills also encompass the power to understand, work with, ask for advice, and listen to other people, which are taught through practical experience, a formal education, beliefs, organizational learning and leadership classes, as well as professional association that teach courses, and publish articles and books on leadership. Effective leadership is also taught through communication skills, which are integral parts of being an effective leader. Moreover, a leader must know when to correct their mistakes, and make apologies along the

way, which maintains the trust of the leader in the eyes of their subordinates (Carillo, 2010, p. 52).

When it comes to education, the MC/MPA Mid-Career Master of Public Administration degree program from Harvard University, which is designed for many government officials' executive officials has attracted many executive police officers from the New York Police Department (NYPD), who have graduated from this prestigious program. Deputy Chief Steven Bonano says that the most important lesson he learned was to sit back and listen, and hear people speak (Abrams, 2011). Moreover, he states, "I've learned that when someone voices their opinion about something, don't just discount it as if they don't know what they are talking about" (Abrams, 2011). People have a working filter that explains what a speaker is saying according to their own experience (Carrillo, 2010, p.51).

Even though Harvard has one of the best Public Administration programs in the United States, Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida, also has an excellent Public Administration program, which is very friendly to public safety employees. West Miami Police Chief Nelson Andreu says, "Although I was in other leadership positions, such as Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain of police before I completed my degree, the skills and training I gained during both my undergraduate and master's class have played a very important role in my current position as Chief. I routinely revert back to what I learned at Barry when making decisions and/or formulating new ideas for the future of the police department" (2013).

Additionally, Occupational Health Teacher and past EMT and Firefighter, Frank Mancuso says that he has learned, "How not to do things and have also learned the ways to do things and build a team, many times by example" (Mancuso, 2013). Moreover, Mancuso also stated, "I have taken many different leadership classes, seminars, and workshops. The best way is to build it slow, be relational, and think of what fellow workers needs are" (2013).

Education however, is just one part of leadership. Even though a public administration education will enrich an individuals' knowledge of how the public sector works, "Public Administration has not fully embraced leadership as a fundamental element of successful practice" (Kellis & Ran, 2013, p. 130). In addition to a formal education, nothing beats real life public safety experience. Moreover; one's experiential experiences can be the deciding factor of whether the individual becomes an effective leader.

West Miami Police Chief Nelson Andreu states, "No one goes from being a police officer or police sergeant to becoming the police chief. It is a progressively increasing set or responsibilities, training, and experiences" (2013). Additionally, Williamstown, South Carolina Police Captain Kevin Marsee says that, "Leaders have to be managers, and must know how to run agencies" (2013). Captain Marsee also states that, "Leadership is made up of three parts, supervising, training, and disciplining" (2013). A good leader must also provide guidance and inspire others, while achieving the goals of the organization (Domonoske, 2013). If an effective leader can perform these functions successfully, as well as provide credible value to his or her leadership style, then the organization can operate while the leader is away from the organization (Domonoske, 2013).

Likewise, transformational leadership also sets high a standard of gaining trust, respect and confidence of others, question the status quo and continuously innovate; even at the peak of success, as well as energize people to reach their full potential and performance (Morreale & Ortmeier, 2004). Safety professional James "Skipper" Kendrick states that transformational leadership may be defined "as a leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems" (Kendrick, 2011, p.14). There are four factors that make up transformational

leadership. **Idealized influence** is founded on trust, **inspirational motivation** is the ability to help followers see clearly what is the right thing to do, **intellectual stimulation** also challenges the follower to question basic assumptions and to generate a more creative solution to problems, and **individual consideration** treats each follower as a unique contributor and provides coaching, mentoring, feedback and growth opportunities (Kendrick, 2011, p.14).

Moreover, in post September 11th world where fear is heightened, as a result of the constant threat of terrorism in the news media, as well as in print, there is a greater need for outstanding leadership in emergency situations. An example would be people faced by military combat units, police patrols, and fire-fighting units. These organizations will need to use effective transformational leadership skills, which are shaped by variables such as group cohesiveness and self-efficacy (Pillai & Williams, 2004, p.154).

Similar to transformational leadership techniques, as well as the sociological and practical factors that exist in leadership development, is a skill that is also learned from academia, as well as experience on the job, which is writing, and it is one of the biggest components of policing and public safety. Just as (Morreale & Ortmeier, 2004) call artful problem solving a necessary leadership skill, writing is an art, just as leadership is. In his article *Behind the Blue Wall of Silence*, Retired Boston Police Lieutenant Thomas Nolan discusses his role as a supervisor, and how he taught police officers how to write well and correctly. He states, "As a police lieutenant, I was expected to educate inexperienced (and even veteran) officers in the fine art of creative report writing so that the truth was never allowed to get in the way of a rendition designed to conceal missteps or wrongdoings (a role, incidentally, which I played in a manner considered "legendary")" (Nolan, 2009, p. 251).

There is however the fact that public safety employment goes beyond the standard day-to-day aspect of policing, Fire/EMS emergency management skills. There is humanistic approach that not everyone can accept or adapt. It is an approach to leadership that stems from true integrity, heart, and caring for the job. As Rochester, New York Police Sergeant Rich Martin states, "In working toward the goals of a department, the top executives play a primary role in forming the organizational climate" (Martin, 2011, p.12). Moreover, Sergeant Martin help leadership roles in the US Army reserves stated that there was "A transition which involves a steep learning curve on particulars of the job" (Martin, 2013). Although, Sergeant Martin states that the Army's credo "BE, KNOW, DO" help him transition the role between drill sergeant and police sergeant (Martin, 2013).

Moreover, Chief of the Boston Fire Department Steve Abaira, says that a good leader gets to sit down to know people, has the ability to make good judgment calls, keeps egos in check, facilitates various processes of the organization, as well as delegates the budget and financial matters of the organization. Additionally, the leader must also have the ability to manage people, and treat people with fairness (2013). This is also backed up by Pillai and Williams who state that a leader who shows consideration and thought for their followers cause them to be held in high-regard within the group (2004, p. 146).

Additionally, the policy of the organization must be clear as well. As West Miami Police Chief Nelson Andreu says, "*Our department had not had a review of this manual for nearly 20 years. All the former chiefs kept putting it off and would simply write amendments or changes to the existing (type-written) manual*" (2013). The former chief of West Miami Police Department and current Chief Andreu, worked on the new manual, and formulated the new policy, by basing them on principles from larger departments (2013). It was this collaborative effort that allows Chief Andreu to upgrade the new policy with modifications at least once a month (2013).

In addition to being able to write effective policy, an effective leader must also implement clear articulated goals within their department, including a working knowledge of discretionary decision-making (Domonoske, 2013). The goal of the organization must be clear. If the goal of the organization is not clear, the organization will not function. When examining policy, the leader must be able to achieve the end goal of the organization. However, when unclear policies exist, there is no relationship between the organization's goal, which affects administrators and managers. This mix-up becomes problematic.

The ability of public safety leaders using organizational leadership methods has been used to keep the organization in order, as well as structured so that the organization can be effective. Organizational Leadership comes from the administrator of the organization (Domonoske, 2013). Organizational Leadership always begins with administration, "So that each member of the organization can when confronted with a goal from a manager know what to do, where to go, and who to follow" (Domonoske, 2013). Effective Organizational Leadership is not ever a managerial skill; it is developed from the administration, and will always stem from the leaders or administration of the organization (Domonoske, 2013).

When teaching organizational leadership, a new manager or supervisor must first have some classroom instruction in leadership, as well as how to perform their job effectively. Williamstown, South Carolina Police Captain Kevin Marsee, says that police officers must take what they learn from leadership classes in order to be effective in the field (2013). Additionally, Geller and Stephens also state that police departments need a foundation in rapid learning and teaching, if leadership is going to become one of their core values (2003). However, there are times when new supervisors who are taught their job duties and procedures associated with their jobs, are not trained or instructed with any if at all interpersonal dynamics that could be associated with being an effective leader (Schafer, 2010, p. 655). Moreover, the problem with training new effective leaders is the low budget that municipalities have. This budget restraint is a challenge within the policing profession (Schafer, 2010, p. 655).

Although budgets are tight, the NYPD still sends its executive officers to Harvard University, the study in the MC/MPA program. NYPD Police Commissioner Ray Kelly states, "We want to take our managers and future leaders out of the realm of everyday policing and expose them beyond the police department. It develops them for future assignments" (Abrams, 2011). According to Kennedy School lecturer Frank Hartman, the police officers that attend Harvard in the MC/MPA program have a unique balance of reality and aspiration, as well as inspire other students (Abrams, 2011). In some ways, these officers could be thought of as change agents, because of their aspiration to pursue higher education in a prestigious school such as Harvard, and after they finish their education, apply those leadership skills to the department. A change agent is more times than not a new chief of police or sheriff who is hired to "clean house", or get the department in order (Geller & Stephens, 2003, p.71). At the same time that these officers are enhancing their skillset, they are also setting the standard for what a police officer should know academically, as well as the knowledge that an effective leader should know when working with people, just as these officers do on a daily basis.

Consequently, both the public safety, as well as the industrial safety fields revolve around the motto, "make it home by the end of the day." In policing, there is a saying that is usually said during a bank robbery. "As adrenaline shoots through your veins, tactics fly out the window" (Grossi, 2007). This all theory and no practice mindset is sadly true even for the people in the safety, health, and engineering industries. In his article, *Leadership & Safety Excellence*, author Dan Peterson discusses major man-made catastrophes, such as Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

The goal of his study was to examine the leadership and management styles present at the time of these disasters, and his findings were not so pleasant. Among some of these findings was the fact that emergency procedures, plans, training and regular drills for severe events were found to be lacking, there was the mentality that success is something that is routine with neglect that severe risks are present, the safety analysis and responses were subordinate to other performance goals in operating procedures, and the fact that there was rule compliance, which was thought to be enough to ensure safety (2004, p. 32).

The findings of the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl catastrophes are staggering. This is why, when during a bank robbery, Grossi stated, "When adrenaline hits, don't toss your tactics out the window" (2007). Similarly, when working in a power plant, or in law enforcement, never assume anything! Always double check; because an effective leader will always triple check everything to avoid catastrophes and human casualties. Additionally, Boston Fire Chief Steve Abaira stated that a leader must be at the top of their game when running an organization. A leader must be sharp and knowledgeable in their profession, because their skills will be tested; when subordinates think that they can push the leader around (2013).

Moreover, Geller and Stephens have stated that even though the chief remains as the ultimate role model, the majority of the responsibility for modeling and reinforcing leadership. However, change management behavior rests in the hands of midlevel managers and first-line supervisors. Police departments also need to develop a rapid form of learning and leadership skills as a genetic code, which acts as a tool for survival and growth. Moreover, there are times when leaders are willing risk their reputations, for the future benefit of the department (2003, p.83). Pillai and Williams also state that in a military combat situation and firefighting situations that the leader set an example by personal risk-taking was judged to be most effective (2004, p. 146).

There are however, questions about the future of leaders in local government management. The most important question of all is, "Will professional managers be the reformers or are they to be reformed" (O'Neill, 2013). The leadership capacity of both elected and appointed local officials will be tested when it comes to complex public policy issues. Additionally, if local government and appointed leaders want to tackle these subjects, they will have to look at the standard limits of local government organization and various political limits of the jurisdiction, by (1) matching the geography and scale of significant issues, and (2) reaching all of the sectors and disciplines necessary to make meaningful change (O'Neill, 2013). The other challenge is local governments will need to keep their own sense of "place" and what enhances their community and makes it special, all at the same time of making different community changes (O'Neill, 2013). Local and appointed government officials really have a huge challenge ahead of them.

Moreover, the challenges only get harder when public safety officials need to make changes to their departmental organization as well. Additionally, when discussing local government relations, there is still a lack of leadership roles, which develops in a public administration base. There is also a gap between the level of progression between general and public leadership theories (Kellis & Ran, 2013, p. 131).

All in all, a police agency must not divert from the community. Police agencies must always try to keep a good community relationship (Domonoske, 2013). Both Domonoske (2013), and Peterson (2004) describe the need for an end goal. Domonoske says, that the organization must have a clear goal in place in order to operate efficiently (2013). Additionally, Peterson gives three steps in the leadership process that are not only logical, but also applicable to public

safety organizations. (1) Determine where we are now, (2) determine where we want to be, and (3) define how we will get there (2004, p.31).

Even with clearly defined goals, leaders still might fall into another dilemma, because of the vast amount of work that needs to be done within the organization. Williamstown, South Carolina Police Captain Kevin Marsee has a logical and applicable organizational method that he uses many times during the day. The organizational method is called WIN. It stands for *What's Important Now?* Since public safety leaders and executives cannot do everything, or be everywhere at once. This handy organizational tool gives Captain Marsee the ease of planning out what is important at what time, during a busy workday (2013).

Captain Marsee also poses the question, "Do you really want to be a leader?" (2013), because a leader has to make the tough calls at times, as well as be under fire for the decisions that he or she makes (2013). An effective leader will possess clarity and understanding when it comes to their personal values, and ethical reasoning, which are inclined to foster positive psychological states (Kellis & Ran, 2013, p. 132). Authentic leaders are known for their integrity, including the fact that they are considered moral change agents who "take ownership and responsibility for the end results of their moral actions and the actions of their followers" (Kellis & Ran, 2013, p. 132).

Even though leadership might sound like an excited thing, the reality is, any leader of any public safety organization is the one that gets the brunt of complaints from citizens, as well as politicians. No matter how effective a leader is they will still not be able to satisfy everyone, and in a public safety organizations, the effective leader will have to constantly listen in on the police radio in his or her office, write policy, organize subordinates, as well as do the most dreaded job in policing; talking to the press. Basically, when in charge of a police department, a police administrator must be a "jack-of-all-trades."

There is however something to remember when in an important role of leadership in a public safety organization, and that is keeping your head in times of turbulence. As safety professional Mark D. Hansen states, "As leaders go, so goes the organization. If leadership is poor, the end is near. If leadership is strong, then much can be achieved" (2011, p. 41). Hansen also states that followers or employees will look up to leaders if that leader can handle a crisis well, and not become beaten down by crises that arise. Moreover, subordinates also test leaders, when the leader makes a decision that is not popular among the subordinates. It is the tough decision, and not the popular decision made by the leader that proves their responses to these challenges. A leader does what is right for the organization, and not what is popular. "Make sure you are willing to do what you ask of others" (Hansen, 2011, p. 41).

Conclusion

Again, this research paper centered on the topic of leadership is written in the eyes of a civilian, not a police officer. The various leadership techniques discussed in this paper can be applied in various public safety organizations. Additionally, this paper illustrates the importance of public safety training and education, and also poses the question of what being a leader really entails, and what responsibilities and pressures a leader faces.

As stated, this paper was not written in the eyes of a police officer. It was written by a civilian, an observer, a student. As Anthony Hopkins said in *Red Dragon* (2002), "We live in a primitive time, neither savage nor wise." How true, we do live in a primitive time. Even with the good that public safety agencies do, they still get bashed in the media, they still investigate corrupt and unethical officers, and still have departmental mismanagement to deal with. This

occupational stress could really make a public safety leader feel as if they have the world on their shoulders, and some leaders may crack under pressure. However, this paper is left with an excerpt from a poem is inspirational to any leader when they feel overworked and under-appreciated from the people that surround them.

“If you can keep your head while all about you/Are losing theirs and blaming it on you; If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you/But make allowance for their doubting too; If can meet with triumph and disaster/And treat those imposters just the same; Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it” –Excerpted from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If” (Hansen, 2011, p.41).

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