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Positive Organizational Culture

A Practical Approach

By
RANDALL ARAGON, M.A.

One of the most difficult leadership tasks that police administrators face is creating an appropriate culture for their agencies. By developing a healthy culture—which includes values, beliefs, and behaviors—effective leaders build a solid foundation that enables them to foster truly committed employees with high morale, and in turn, enhanced departmental performance and genuinely satisfied citizens.

These triumphs do not materialize by accident. In fact, most police executives find that conditions deteriorate unless they initiate deliberate steps to create a positive culture for their agencies.

An effective formula for accomplishing this goal involves combining the core principles of several leadership techniques and modifying them to suit a police environment. The recommended process, which this article outlines, involves examining the dynamics of performance, developing an understanding of Total Quality Management (TQM), employing empowerment techniques, and finally, instituting a system to monitor the agency's progress.

Performance

An agency's level of performance plays an important role in developing a positive organiza-



tional culture. Therefore, police managers should fully understand the dynamics of performance.

A simple equation, $P = A \times M$, illustrates the elements of performance. In this equation, "P"

represents performance; "A," ability; and "M," motivation. Performance constitutes the effort directed toward achieving the department's goals. Ability may be subdivided into the components

that affect it—experience and training. Motivation involves employees' willingness to expend effort to accomplish tasks. Accordingly, if employees lack either the ability or the will to complete their assigned tasks (A or M = 0), performance will suffer (P = 0).

Leaders can almost guarantee acceptable employee performance by employing a process known as PRICE.¹ The acronym PRICE stands for pinpoint, record, involve, coach, and evaluate.

First, the leader must *pinpoint* or determine the area of performance that needs attention. This might affect one or more employees. For example, business owners may complain to the department that officers are not enforcing parking regulations in their district. This may signal insufficient patrols in that area.

Next, the leader *records*, or quantifies and graphs, the current performance level of employees. In the case of deficient patrols, the chief would review patrol records to see how often officers checked this area. Graphing the results, if possible, helps to simplify and emphasize them.

Armed with this information, the leader *involves* employees by showing them the data. Together, they determine the best way for the department to achieve its goal of increased patrols. The officers also decide on a *coaching* strategy, that is, how their supervisor should monitor their progress and what rewards or punishments they should receive for success or failure. In this way, the officers make a firm commitment to accomplish the goals that they have set for themselves.



Chief Aragon heads the Whiteville, North Carolina, Police Department.

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Next, the leader implements the chosen coaching method by observing performance and providing advice, encouragement, and positive reinforcement whenever possible. Finally, the leader *evaluates* the employees' performance. If the officers have achieved their goals of increased patrols, effective parking enforcement, and satisfied citizens, the leader should reward them.

However, if performance did not attain the agreed upon level, the leader needs to determine the cause. The officers may need to re-define their goals. Or, they may need further assistance to achieve them. For example, an employee who *cannot* perform may require additional training or experience, while an employee who *will not* perform may require motivation.

Police leaders can easily control the amount of training employees receive. And, experience, of course, grows with time. However, leaders may find it difficult to motivate their employees. One highly effective system for developing motivation is Total Quality Management.

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management is an invaluable leadership technique that assists in developing a positive, customer-oriented culture and a genuine level of employee commitment that pervades the entire work environment. TQM techniques result in employees' contributing to attain the department's objectives without a pushing or shoving style of leadership. The technique takes time to institute, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

TQM relies on the capabilities of both labor and management, working as a team, to continually improve quality and productivity.² Because TQM provides employees with opportunities for participation, problem solving, and teamwork, it creates a tremendous level of motivation within each employee. In fact, employees are more than motivated—they are *empowered*.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a force that energizes employees to perform. Empowered employees take a personal interest and responsibility in

setting and achieving the department's goals. Because they know they have a say in how tasks are accomplished, they feel a sense of pride and ownership in their work.³ In addition, empowered employees improve the overall performance of the agency, which results in higher levels of morale. Developing empowered employees is a key element in the formulation of a positive departmental culture, and today's leaders should be skilled in it.

Empowerment Techniques

Leaders can empower employees by applying four basic, yet highly effective, principles. To begin, leaders should strive to maintain employees' self-esteem. To accomplish this, leaders should let employees know that they are important to the organization and *sincerely* praise them for good performance. A simple "good job" can go a long way with subordinates.

In addition, leaders should *actively* listen to their employees and respond with empathy. Active listening involves rephrasing and restating the employees' concerns back to them. This technique will ensure not only that leaders fully understand their employees' concerns but also that employees *feel* understood.

Employees are also empowered when leaders ask for their assistance in solving department/community problems. Employees feel committed to the department when leaders include them in the decisionmaking process. Therefore, leaders should seek input from employees by either approaching individuals directly or by forming employee groups, such as advisory councils.

Further, empowered employees welcome responsibility. For example, they might be put in charge of a new community project, asked to head a task force, or assigned a department problem in need of a solution. However, they may need assistance in carrying out these additional duties. And, while leaders should offer employees help in completing tasks, they should be careful not to take over these projects.⁴

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These four techniques increase employee commitment to the organization, as they begin to realize that they will help decide how the agency will achieve its goals. Leaders who strive to apply these principles will discover that empowered employees generate their own praise and rewards, a phenomenon known as self-motivation.

Self-Motivation

Employees who become genuinely committed to their work and the department's goals reach a high level of readiness—that is, a high state of ability and motivation. Their pride in their work, feelings of self-worth, and morale are self-

maintained, and they do not require continual praise and rewards from their leaders. Leaders must respond to these employees by delegating greater responsibility to them.

Furthermore, leaders should implement strategies that allow *all* employees to assume more responsibility and/or authority for decisionmaking in their normal working environment. To do this, leaders can focus attention on employees who possess demonstrated, but untapped, ability. These may be employees who have proven themselves in the past, or merely those who show the potential to accept responsibility. Even employees who seem to shy away from responsibility may only need a few words of encouragement to accept a leadership position and perform admirably in it.

Monitoring Progress

Police administrators cannot simply implement leadership strategies and hope for the best. They also need to monitor the effects of these techniques. An effective method, and a hallmark of the TQM approach, involves implementing teams of employees called department advisory councils, process action teams, or quality circles. These teams continually analyze all facets of the agency's efficiency and effectiveness.

Each major division within a department should establish a quality circle (QC) of line employees. While a small department might have one QC with 3 to 5 members, a large department might have several, each with 7 to 10 members. More important, the number of employees should reflect

a cross-section of the department itself. For example, a QC with six members might include two mid-level managers, two line officers, and two civilian employees.

A trained facilitator—a leader from the division with no voting rights—should attend the meetings to assist the group. The facilitator keeps the group focused on the issues and helps to ensure objective and complete discussions. Because the facilitator may be the key to a successful QC, the chief may want to act in that capacity.

Department employees choose the issues they wish to discuss. For example, the officers might want to change their uniforms or adjust their workhours. Once the QC researches and narrows the issue, all department employees vote. QC members tally the votes and report the outcome to the chief.

The chief may not decide every issue. Departments should determine what majority of the vote an issue must obtain in order for the chief to act on it. That may be a simple majority of 51 percent or a clear mandate of, for example, 75 percent. In addition, the chief may not have the authority to approve issues that are budgetary, legal, or politically sensitive in nature. In this case, the city's governing body would have to make the final decision.

And, while the chief has the power to reject the QC's recommendation, approving it greatly enhances the integrity of the group and the process itself. In this way, the QC ensures that the entire organization operates on a system of checks and balances.⁵

Conclusion

Police leaders may erroneously believe that all is well when their departments appear stable and free of internal problems. As a result, they may be surprised to find their positions in jeopardy due to a negative vote of confidence from their employees, their superiors, the community, or a combination of these. Those leaders that opt for a "watchman"—or reactive—style of leadership are not being sensitive to the needs of a department's internal or external environment.

Today's modern law enforcement leaders must be proactive and develop an organizational culture that creates genuinely committed employees who enthusiastically contribute to achieving the department's goals. While developing a positive culture can be an arduous task that involves implementing numerous techniques, the entire agency benefits. By adopting the leadership strategies outlined in this article, police leaders can develop an organizational culture comprised of truly dedicated employees who are capable of positively satisfying the citizens they serve. ♦

Endnotes

¹ K. Blanchard and K. Lorber, *Putting the One Minute Manager to Work* (New York, New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1984), 58.

² J.R. Jablonski, *Implementing TQM* (San Diego, California: Pfeiffer & Co., 1992), 21.

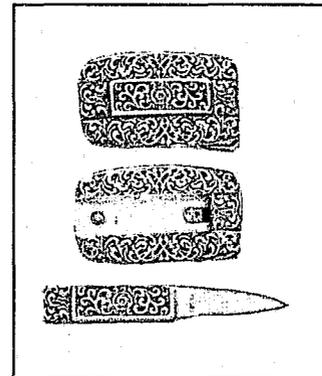
³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴ W.C. Byham and J. Cox, *Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment* (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 90.

⁵ *Supra* note 2, 90.

Unusual Weapon

Buckle Knife



This brass belt buckle quickly converts into a weapon. The blade measures 1 3/4 inches in length and is completely concealable within the buckle housing. Unlike other buckle knives, the buckle stays in place—only the knife clicks free, making the weapon especially dangerous to law enforcement and corrections personnel. The belt buckleknife is available through mail order catalogues and comes with a set of four changeable blades. ♦

Submitted by Neil B. Hammermann, Daly City, California, Police Department (ret).