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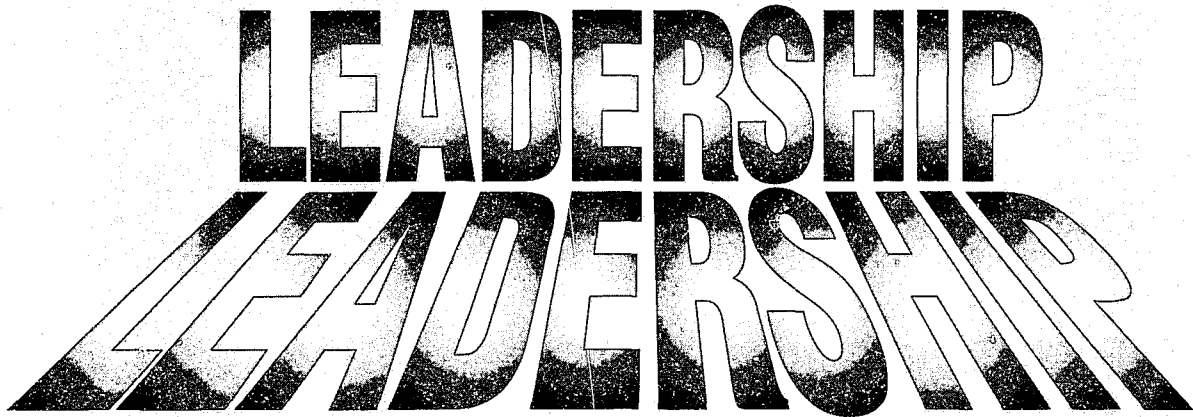
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149704

Reflections on Leadership

By
PAUL J. MENDOFIK



Philosophy of purpose does not come out of a book. Nor does it come instantly. Rather, it stems from observing admirable examples demonstrated by dedicated individuals who believe in their mission and the responsibility entrusted to them.

When I was in the Marine Corps, I had the good fortune to serve with an exceptional group of individuals. Two of these Marines possessed such strength of character that they became enduring role models of leadership to me. Their conduct and commitment shaped my views of leadership long after I

left the military and joined the law enforcement profession.

My senior drill instructor was a career Marine who constantly displayed a dedication to duty and to the honor of the Corps. He possessed a clear understanding of his mission and literally molded his troops into Marines. He gave his subordinates an example to follow and did not allow them to perform below that standard.

In the unit to which I was later assigned, a senior noncommissioned officer further impressed upon me the strong relationship between personal character and

effective leadership. Every day, this gunnery sergeant lived the spirit of the Marine Corps. He also understood the distinction between his troops' personal and professional lives and knew where to draw the line. He constantly strived to improve his own performance and often worked side-by-side with subordinates to improve theirs.

Because law enforcement falls somewhere between the military and a civilian profession, neither occupational doctrine of leadership solely applies. In fact, as I progressed to my current rank in the Pennsylvania State Police

Department, I came to understand that effective law enforcement requires a unique mixture of leadership skills. In developing these skills, I called upon my Marine background and also looked to the admirable superiors thus far encountered in my law enforcement career.

I have found that most of the truly pivotal elements affecting leadership ability come down to decidedly practical factors. To a large extent, the way in which supervisors meet the challenges of these elements will determine their ability to truly lead, rather than merely manage others.

Appearance

It may be an adage as old as human sociality: First impressions are lasting. Psychological studies confirm that the visual presence of an individual has a dramatic effect on the perceptions of others.

Law enforcement personnel essentially must consider the impression that they make on two groups. The first group is made up of the public—both the criminal element and victims or witnesses of crime.

Members of the public perceive officers' appearance as an expression of their ability to perform the next step in their "relationship." If that step is an arrest, their perception may be the difference between resistance or compliance. During an investigation, an officer's appearance may make a difference in the level of cooperation received from a victim or witness.

The second group consists of others in the law enforcement

profession. During encounters with other officers, I often find the level of respect and confidence that I afford individuals at an initial meeting depends on the first visual perception of them. Do they look clean and orderly? Are they overweight? Do they stand erect and look alert?

Police supervisors should be conscious of these thoughts. Peers, citizens, subordinates, and superiors have them. To get off on the right foot with all of these groups, it is important to present the right package. For better or worse, another age-old adage may often prove true: Appearance is everything.

Communication Skills

Communication is the key ingredient in accomplishing a task. Through such experiences as speaking to victims, testifying in court, and interviewing suspects, I have come to understand that effective communication simply is delivering

a well-formulated message in verbal terms.

Neither elaborate verbiage nor profanity are mandates of police communication. Such theatrics work great for television, crime books, and movies, but rarely in real life.

To be truly effective, supervisors should understand their subordinates and speak on their level, *without* such distractions as profanity or unnecessary volume. After giving a message, supervisors should ask a question to ensure comprehension. This tells subordinates that supervisors are concerned about the possibility of a misunderstanding. It also provides a chance for supervisors to determine if their message is being delivered in a comprehensible manner.

When dealing with all people, supervisors should avoid obscene language and bursts of rage. Effective leaders use language for one reason—to communicate.

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...true leadership is both a challenge and a responsibility.

”



Sergeant Mendofik serves with the Pennsylvania State Police in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania.

Technical Skills

Supervisors should be proficient in any task required of their subordinates. Some agencies field a limited force of officers with broad-based skills. Other agencies field a large force of officers, each with a specialized skill. Yet, regardless of the type of subordinate population, supervisors should possess a thorough working knowledge of the skills of their employees. This allows supervisors to deal with subordinates from a perspective of experience, gives supervisors a basis from which to identify problem areas, and establishes supervisors' credibility during corrective counseling. In short, subordinates have greater confidence in the decision-making abilities of a supervisor who understands their jobs.

Training

Every supervisor also should be a trainer. This requires that they apply effective techniques to instruct subordinates in new tasks. It doesn't mean that supervisors "do" while subordinates "watch." Rather, effective supervisors act as mentors when it comes to training.

Supervisors direct the efforts of subordinates, providing guidance, correction, and support. They then should follow up with queries to determine that the skill has been fully assimilated into the employees' "performance ability menu." Supervisors should remember that practice does not make perfect—it makes permanent. Only *proper* practice makes perfect.

However, for supervisors, training should not be a one-way experience. While they have an obligation

to remain proficient in the skills they are passing on, supervisors also must seek to elevate their own personal level of proficiency. Accordingly, supervisors should remain abreast of changes and improve themselves so that they may, in turn, improve the training level of their subordinates.

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Effective leadership in law enforcement is an ongoing process.

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Demonstration

Few images speak louder than the one of George Washington crossing the Delaware River with his troops or the Marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima. These leaders believed in their mission, knew the importance of their presence to those around them, and took the initiative to be present when events required them.

A supervisor can lecture continuously about effectiveness, but when subordinates see that person side-by-side with them calmly and professionally facing a disorderly crowd or writing the paperwork for a child sex offense, they truly begin to understand. Yet another time-proven adage applies here: Actions really do speak louder than words.

Law enforcement officers traditionally possess abundant levels of skepticism. Therefore, supervisors

must command the confidence and respect that comes from experience if they hope to lead others.

Equitable Treatment

The public expects police officers to be neutral in dealing with citizens. Yet, a complaint common to many law enforcement agencies is that a select few officers who know how to win favor receive preferential treatment from supervisors.

Effective supervisors must be fair to everyone. There is no room for preferential treatment for fishing buddies or academy classmates. Subordinates appropriately expect supervisors to treat all employees in the same way. Showing favoritism quickly results in deteriorating morale throughout an agency.

As a rule, supervisors should treat subordinates as the adults they are. Effective supervisors should not allow any employee to demean others—be they peers, subordinates, or superiors. Law enforcement is a highly responsible occupation, one of the very few that allows individuals to take a human life. With that authority comes a great responsibility. Such responsibility is given to adults, not children. Officers should be treated that way.

Punishment and Praise

When necessary, punitive measures should be taken for corrective purposes only. Supervisors should not administer punishment without fully ensuring that such action is necessary. However, they also have a responsibility to address a subordinate's unacceptable behavior *before* punishment is warranted. When a subordinate's performance

requires it, nonpunitive, corrective action should be taken as quickly as possible.

Supervisors should sincerely praise positive performance as well. Those who honestly recognize the performance or accomplishments of individuals encourage desirable behavior. Employees know they are supposed to do a good job. They are also human and appreciate being recognized for the effort they put into their work. Supervisors who cannot reward behavior in any other way can verbally recognize it with a "good job" when warranted. Such recognition goes a long way.

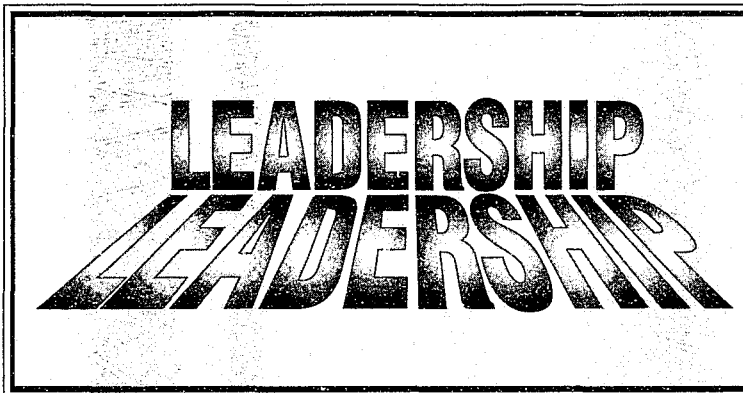
Commitment

Being an effective supervisor can be very difficult. Some administrative policies are inherently unpopular. Supervisors must demonstrate a commitment to the agency that employs them. They must support the agency's mission statement, while at the same time supporting their personnel's efforts to fulfill personal and agency goals.

While personal goal attainment is satisfying, employees derive a higher level of satisfaction from playing a vital role in attaining organizational goals. Traditions of excellence and esprit de corps do not just happen. They result when dedicated individuals believe in what they are doing and for whom they are doing it. They give of themselves to benefit others.

Goals

Knowing where we want to be allows us to prepare to be there. Organizational skills are important in career development, just as they are in personnel supervision and incident management.



One helpful exercise for supervisors is simply to write down goals. To enhance the probability for success, large goals should be divided into smaller ones. As subordinates see their supervisors accomplishing "the impossible," they will be more motivated to set and to accomplish their own goals.

Examples

Most people admire certain individuals. Because police supervisors deal with such diverse populations, they should not limit themselves strictly to law enforcement examples of leadership. Rather, progressive supervisors should look for traits in individuals representing the many related fields with which they come into contact. Supervisors also should not overlook those whom they supervise when

identifying positive traits to emulate to achieve desired goals.

The individuals whom I hold in high esteem include a number of subordinates, one of my college professors, a priest, a game warden, my wife, and a select few superiors.

Each possesses some trait that I admire. Each of them can help me to become a better leader.

Conclusion

Effective leadership in law enforcement is an ongoing process. It requires attention to appearance, technical proficiency, good communication skills, aptitude to

train and be trained, ability to treat others fairly, confidence to perform tasks, appropriate use of praise and punishment, and commitment. It also requires the ability to establish and achieve realistic goals and to identify desirable traits in others.

These various and complex skills underscore the fact that in the police profession, individuals do not become leaders solely by attaining credentials. Leadership in law enforcement is hard work, accomplished by dedicated people who work in an occupation where rewards are few and scrutiny is intense.

In the end, true leadership is both a challenge and a responsibility. Those who successfully accept the challenge are among the most admired individuals not only in the judicial system but also in their communities. ♦