

Reinforcing Organizational Values in First Line Supervisors

Introduction

Law enforcement officials around the country have recently expressed concern about the attitudes, behavior, and performance of their first line supervisors. While most of these supervisors are dedicated, exceptional employees, there is a growing percentage that appears to be unwilling or unable to make decisions, take responsibility, or handle the complex duties required of a first line supervisor in today's evolutionary policing environment. When a small percentage of first line supervisors in an agency begins to display a negative attitude towards the administration, it can be a very destructive and divisive influence, which ultimately serves to undermine the goals and objectives of the organization.

This is an evolutionary period in law enforcement. Agencies are shifting from strictly crime fighting traditional organizations, to community-based problem solving institutions. This dynamic shift to a new paradigm in police service requires the organization and its members to fully understand and support the newly defined mission, goals and objectives of their department. The agency itself, at the direction of its leaders, must play a key role in providing not just a new mission statement, but the organizational structure required to facilitate the delivery of police service. The traditional command and control model which emphasizes centralized decision-making cannot facilitate the management of community based policing. We cannot declare that we want our officers to become creative, problem-solving partners with the community, and then insist that they gain approval from eight layers in the chain of command before they can make any decision. We cannot expect our first line supervisors to effectively quarterback a team of officers, if they have to call a time out and await the decision of a coaches' meeting prior to every play. If agencies do not re-engineer the organizational environment to facilitate the new style of policing, it will lead to frustration of their employees and substantially reduce effectiveness.

While many agencies are beginning to recognize and reorganize their agencies to foster the achievement of their mission, others have done little else but publish a mission statement and declare that they now practice community policing. Agency heads must provide both vision and leadership that will guide the organization toward community policing or abandon the rhetoric that is not being practiced. If the first line supervisors in an agency are not performing to expectations and are not motivated toward fulfilling this new organizational mission, most likely they don't understand what the real mission is.

This paper will examine the concepts of a mission driven organization and strategies to reinforce the organizational core values into the first line supervisors. We believe this is a critical function of leadership and is required to properly align organizational behavior to be more consistent with the established goals and objectives of the agency.

Managing the Culture

Every law enforcement agency has both internal and external rules and regulations, which seek to control behavior and limit discretion when deemed necessary. The most controlling force within any police agency however, is determined by the established culture, accepted norms and boundaries of acceptable behavior, which are ultimately determined by the members of the organization itself. For example, all law enforcement agencies have rules that prohibit excessive force. Despite these rules as well as state and federal statutes which prohibit this activity, many agencies throughout the nation have struggled with controlling brutality in their agencies. If a subject resists arrest or is captured after a chase, the subsequent conduct of the involved officers is more likely determined by the organizational culture, then the regulations enacted by the agencies. The first line supervisors are instrumental in forging the boundaries of acceptable behavior and will be guided by their value system.

As we move as a profession from the rigid, rule oriented, traditional models of administration toward more flexible styles of management, it is critical that we adopt and instill values to guide behavior. Some of the key terms used to explain this relatively new concept are defined below to ensure common understanding:

A Mission Statement is the articulation of the purpose of the organization, from which flows the goals and objectives established by the administration. It provides a framework to establish priorities and align practices with values. The core values are enumerated within the mission statement.

Core values are the essential and enduring tenets of an organization. There is no right or wrong set of core values, but they should represent the very essence of what an organization believes in. They are a small set of guiding principles, which illuminate the path to follow, and are universally accepted throughout the organization. ⁱ

Police chiefs have to go beyond creating mission statements and identifying core values to truly influence and manage the culture of the organization. They have to **personally** become committed to communicating these beliefs throughout the organization on a continual basis in order for them to truly become the fabric of the organization. When these values are truly driving behavior, the first line supervisors will be leading the charge toward achieving

the mission and will be vigilant toward any violation of the core values. Law enforcement agencies are now in a position where they are able to influence the conduct of their employees' to behave more ethically and in sync with the established core values. We have reached this point only as a result of progressive-minded chiefs of police who had the courage to challenge the status quo and reform our profession. The key now, is to take the next evolutionary step of truly energizing every individual in the agency to understand and support the mission, and behave in accordance with the core values because they have become their own values. Perhaps for the first time in the history of the law enforcement profession, police officials are able to proactively shape and manage the culture of their agencies.

We have seen hundreds of scandals in the past few years where corrupt and irresponsible behavior have infected highly respected police departments throughout the country. The loss of credibility to our entire profession because of deteriorating values and embarrassing conduct of just a relatively few individuals has tarnished every shield in America. We are now in a position to influence and manage our own culture instead of standing by idle and hoping officers will follow the rules we impose. We can now create an environment, which will restore our credibility, and ensure our employees are doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do.

Internalizing the Core Values and Understanding the Mission

One of the key ingredients for this concept to become reality lies in the acceptance by the agency first line supervisors. When these key players in the organizational front line validate the core values and follow them with a passion, they provide the inspiration for their subordinates to follow suit. If they are doing the right thing and "walking the way they talk, " they will become the champions of the cause and influence their peers and subordinates alike. Conversely, if they only have a vague notion of the significance of the mission statement and core values without a deep sense of ownership in the process, they can render these concepts meaningless.

The initial development of the mission statement and identification of the core values provides a critical opportunity to gain employee acceptance and understanding of these relatively new concepts. Agency administrators in some cases have already missed this opportunity by publishing the mission and values statements without including agency employees in their development. This is not a fatal error however, and can be overcome by emphasizing the inclusion of all employees in training and meaningful dialogue about the mission and values.

Many departments have created an impressive looking document describing the mission statement and departmental values, and have circulated posters and wallet cards to every member of the agency. This is a positive

preliminary step in the right direction but falls short of insuring that the values contained in the document will become woven into the organizational fabric. While most agency members will probably read the document, they will probably be skeptical of its sincerity until they begin to see how management practices it. For example, if the core values are integrity, respect, service, and fairness, they will expect these values to be grounded to departmental rules and performance evaluations. If they can see and experience the transformation from a strictly rules driven orientation to a value based orientation, the newly circulated document will immediately become more significant. If they further begin to realize that they will be required to explain the meaning of the document during the promotional process or when being interviewed for desirable assignments, they will become motivated to develop a complete understanding of mission and values because it impacts on their career.

One of the greatest challenges facing police administrators today is incorporating the values and mission statement into every aspect of departmental operations. If the agency first line supervisors understand the mission and practice the core values, they will infect the majority of the organization and will become a catalyst for moving the agency toward the desired behavior. The Metro-Dade Police Department is currently producing a videotape in which the Director and his top staff personally explain the mission of the agency and what the values mean to each agency member. The goal of the tape is to provide examples of how the core values can be utilized to facilitate decision making during every day field operations. Upon the tape's completion, each command staff member will be expected to personally meet with every member of their staff and discuss the significant issues addressed in the tape and instill the values to their subordinates by discussing the involved issues. Other agencies have prominently displayed their mission statement in departmental publications, business cards, and even on computer screen savers to reinforce the message.

The key point here is that if this document is distributed in a routine manner within the agency, it will be considered routine. If it is given elevated status and distributed in a manner that signifies importance, employees will begin to take notice and the stage will be properly set to begin to shift the agency into practicing value based leadership.

Communication

Once an agency has published their mission statement, and codified the core values in a document, they must be effectively communicated to both the internal and external stakeholders effectively.

The formal internal communication mechanisms of many police agencies follow the traditional chain of command format. Information flows very

mechanically and efficiently up and down the organization, but the environment does not encourage free flow of information or open exchange of ideas. Sergeants for example, communicate with their officers and their lieutenant, but rarely have the opportunity to directly speak with their captain, major, or chief. We believe chain of command communication will have to be temporarily bypassed, allowing officers to directly speak with upper command staff members during the initial indoctrination of the mission statement within the organization. The required “buy-in” of the mission statement is unlike the distribution of a new policy or directive. It requires open discussion and dialogue in a forum that encourages challenge and questions to be addressed. We are talking about people accepting principles and values that will guide all future behavior concerning their employment. This is not something that can be mandated. Employees must completely understand these values and accept them as their own for them to have any significance in terms of guiding their behavior. When the questions are sincerely addressed and the required credibility and trust are established, the entire organization will understand and support the departmental mission. Once the “buy-in” has been accomplished, the daily reinforcement becomes a primary responsibility of the first line supervisors.

Unlike a new policy or procedure that routinely flows down from the top, the mission statement is an organizational set of principles that the entire group needs to deeply believe in to gain legitimacy. The head of the agency, the chief, must be willing to personally attend roll calls, provide opening remarks during training sessions, and encourage real feedback and meaningful discussion about where the agency is headed and how it will get there by following the principles established in the mission statement. Patrol officers who were not originally involved in the drafting of the mission statement will initially be skeptical of another new concept that is being discussed. The chief will set the stage for change, but his commitment and personal endorsement, must be followed by the involvement of every supervisor in the organization. The chief must not only convince his immediate staff of the need to internalize the identified core values, but needs to challenge every supervisor to gain the support of their immediate staff as well. Involvement builds commitment, and by charging every supervisor with the responsibility of explaining the mission statement to their subordinates, two positive things are immediately accomplished. First, they are required to gain a good personal understanding of the mission statement so they can explain it to their subordinates. Secondly, the supervisor is made to feel like a member of the team, and will have a sense of pride in gaining his subordinate’s acceptance of the mission statement.

Perhaps the most significant communication about the validity of the mission statement will occur informally. If key people within the organization continually express their beliefs in how important the mission statement is,

others will begin to share in their beliefs. The first line supervisors are extremely important to this process because they interact continually with the largest segment of the organization.

While internal communication of the mission statement is essential; sharing this information with the community and other agencies within the criminal justice system is equally significant. Civic association meetings, crime watch, and other public forums are opportunities to build credibility outside the organization and educate external groups about the departmental mission. This process builds trust, and provides critical feedback about how the agency is performing. Radio, cable TV, and video-conferencing are mediums of which law enforcement agencies are now beginning to take advantage to reach a broader segment of the community with their message. The media is often viewed as the enemy among law enforcement agencies; however, enlightened administrators are now recognizing the value of providing the media positive information to enhance the image of their agency.

Whether the communication about the mission statement is internal or external, the most important aspect is that it be delivered honestly and sincerely. No matter how eloquently delivered, the audience will judge the outcome by the actions that follow the rhetoric. An agency administrator must be 100 % committed to the implementation of the mission statement prior to endorsing it publicly, or false expectations will develop causing poor morale and reduction in trust.

Walking the Talk

Beginning with the chief, followed by every supervisor in the organization, the agency core values have to be authenticated by their own personal behavior. If the chief has been talking, for example, about a value of *fairness*, and applies a different standard of discipline to members of the command staff than the rank and file, his/her credibility in applying the values becomes seriously damaged. When an assistant chief speaks to his subordinates about the value of *integrity*, and zero tolerance for gratuities, and routinely himself accepts discounted green fees or other privileges which violate the value, the mission statement is rendered meaningless. The cliché' of "practice what you preach", or more recently "walk the talk," are underlying principles that cannot be violated when seeking to become a mission driven organization. Many agency administrators hesitate to confront these issues because they will personally have to modify their own behavior, which had previously been acceptable. The rank and file, however, will declare these values as fraudulent if they can point to examples of superior officers routinely violating the very values they have been preaching.

Conversely, if the chief and his immediate staff contemplate every decision and action they make in accordance with the mission statement, they can ***insist*** that the mid managers, first line supervisors and the entire organization follow suit. Leading by example is not an option, but a requirement when creating a management strategy, which is based upon a value system to guide behavior. This is precisely why many agencies have failed to shift the organization from being rule driven to value driven; because the upper command of the organization has been unwilling to model the behavior they are demanding from their subordinates. There can be no compromise or exceptions to behaving in accordance with the core values once they have become institutionalized. The chief must model the desired behavior and accept no less from every member of the agency. Once this message is transmitted throughout the organization, the mission statement will become a living document that guides the agency toward professional conduct.

It is equally important that people outside the organization notice the desired values being practiced. If the general public observes the police department emphasizing values such as service, respect, and integrity, they will become very supportive of the process. The public can be encouraged to partner with the police department in pursuing the organizational mission by becoming involved in the process. For example, when the value of gratuities is being violated because storekeepers are encouraging police discounts, the chief and his staff can solicit them to cease that practice. While they may be initially resistant, once they become informed and “buy in” to the significance of the departmental core values, they can be persuaded to accept a shift in ideology. The public can also be recruited to report behavior that does not reflect the professional conduct sought by agency administrators. While complaints against police officers are routinely processed in most police departments, in a value driven organization they take on additional significance. It is no longer just the incident that requires investigation, but the pattern of behavior that is out of step with the mission that must also be addressed and corrected. By encouraging civilian involvement in the complaint process, the trust and credibility required to accomplish the departmental goals and objectives will be significantly enhanced.

Training

Departmental training at all levels can become a very effective vehicle to instill the departmental mission and core values throughout the agency. Recruit training is a tremendous opportunity to reinforce ethics and create an environment that emphasizes the significance of making decisions based upon values. The IACP recently indicated the national average for ethics training in the basic recruit curriculum was 2-4 hours. This is unfortunate when you consider today’s recruits will become tomorrow’s field training officers, first line supervisors, and future departmental leaders. Many

agencies are beginning to take advantage of the opportunity to emphasize ethics training at the recruit level, and are building an ethical component into every block of instruction.

For example, if the recruit training involves report writing, a discussion about the ramifications of embellishing reports or testifying in court should be built into the curriculum. If they are being trained in defensive tactics, the curriculum should include both the policies involving use of force, as well as the application of the core values in deciding when force is deemed excessive. Every block of instruction in recruit training is an opportunity to instill the departmental values and to provide examples of appropriate ethical conduct. Many law enforcement agencies are now taking advantage of the opportunity to reinforce ethics during daily uniform inspections and drills. While memorizing radio signals and other codes is important, reciting and applying the departmental values during simulation training exercises can build good habits and improve decision making skills.

Newly promoted first line supervisors typically receive a 40-80 hour block of instruction which traditionally has emphasized supervision and technical skills required in the field. While this is important, we are suggesting that more emphasis should be placed upon ethical decision making and leadership, which will ultimately build character and foster the mentality of “doing the right thing, because it is the right thing to do.” Top administrators can play a key role in this training by facilitating the discussion about the vision of the department and the significance of the mission statement.

All in-service training, executive development training and other types of advanced training should include some discussion and emphasis highlighting the importance of the departmental mission statement. This may seem redundant, but this is essential if an agency truly seeks to become mission driven and expects the core values to become the guiding principles of future behavior.

¹ Thomas Donaldson, Values in Tension: Ethics Away from Home, Harvard Business Review, Sept-Oct., 1996.