

Succession Planning (or lack thereof): Could Trump Succeed in the Police Boardroom?

Article

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Imagine the impact on your department if your agency's next Chief of Police was Bill Gates, Lee Iacocca, or retired Army General Norman Schwartzkoff. Has the time arrived for law enforcement to look at the leadership and management abilities of private sector or non-law enforcement executives to bring their inventiveness and cutting-edge ideas to develop the profession in ways never considered of before? With the acceleration of retirements among police officers now and over the next five years, coupled with a lack of serious succession planning, cities may need to explore more innovative and unconventional methods to select future police executives.

Consider for a moment the absolute necessity of a sworn police officer working as the chief executive of a law enforcement agency. At the federal level, former judges and prosecutors are appointed to lead federal law enforcement positions in the Attorney General's Office, the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation having no previous experience in law enforcement. This raises an interesting issue for law enforcement command staffs and poses the question, have we adequately prepared our police managers through succession planning to assume the role of police executives? For many years, the civilianization of police departments has become the norm for certain positions as outlined in a study by the Federal COPS office in 2000¹. The resulting data showed that civilianization of sworn positions resulted in:

- Offloading of routine tasks from sworn officers.
- Filling of new or existing specialist positions such as computer technicians.
- Staffing of new community policing positions such as community coordinators, domestic violence specialists, or crime prevention planners.

Why stop there? Hospitals are commonly administered by professionals skilled in the leadership of large organizations, thus freeing doctors for the task of healing the sick.

There are about 2,700 health service administrators nationwide² who oversee the daily operations of hospitals and medical clinics. These hospital administrators are non-physicians. Why not expand the police civilianization model to include management positions up the chain of command to include the Chief of Police?

Trends in Police Civilianization

An article titled “Civilianization May Be Too Much of a Good Thing in Chicago Suburbs” discusses the rising trend of hiring civilians to fill jobs that once went to sworn personnel in many of the departments in Chicago’s northwest suburbs. Since 1995, the Schaumburg Police department has civilianized 11 of its 138 sworn posts, 7 of them supervisory including an evidence technician supervisor, an administrative lieutenant and training director³. In a dissertation prepared by Captain Stavros S. Anthony of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department titled “The Structural Dimensions of Community Oriented Police Departments,” Captain Anthony supports the civilianization of police positions currently performed by sworn personnel⁴. Captain Stavros found that the civilianization of support functions, historically performed by sworn positions has actually increased operational efficiency and put more cops on the street.

The common theme of both of these studies is that they typically focus on moving officers to the streets by filling support positions with civilian personnel to meet the rising demand for prompt service in emergencies. Using an extension of the same concept, a city manager may choose to hire a Chief of Police with a strong background in

personnel issues, budget skills and demonstrated leadership abilities, allowing his command staff oversight of the day to day policing activities.

The Impact of Executive Retirements

The recent enhancements to public safety retirement plans and future proposed changes to the same retirement plans will significantly impact the number of police executives and managers who may retire over the next five years. The result will be fewer police managers with the executive training and experience to assume the number of vacancies created by these retirements. This will in turn result in line-level officers ascending to the ranks of management with very short tenures and limited supervisory experience, and newly promoted lieutenants being rapidly promoted to captain without the benefit of executive leadership training.

In a sampling of twenty-four law enforcement agencies from throughout the state of California, a representative from each agency indicated that many retirements from the command staff level are anticipated over the next few years. The problem is quite immediate in the case of the San Bernardino Police Department, where 50 retirements have occurred over the past year in a department of 301 sworn positions⁵. This concern raises the question of whether the department (and law enforcement profession) is adequately preparing today's police managers to assume the role and responsibilities of the chief's position. The San Bernardino Police Department has an internal leadership development program geared for sergeants and above in an effort to enhance succession planning. Unfortunately, most of the agencies in the sampling survey rely on California's

Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) to provide advance officer and leadership training and have no mechanism in place for succession planning.

In The Minding Organization, Dr. Moshe F. Rubinstein writes of making a “half-plan,” advocating that organizations “must be ready to respond to 50 percent of the future that cannot be anticipated.”⁶ Across California, enhanced amendments to the state’s retirement plan have resulted in many police executives reaching their maximum retirement benefits at an earlier age and tenure. This has catapulted to the forefront the issue of civilian executives entering the law enforcement profession in key management positions as the vacuum of leadership creates vacancies throughout the state.

Civilian Police Executives-Two Examples

An excellent example of an executive with no previous law enforcement experience (but with a strong military background) entering the policing profession is New York Police Department’s Deputy Commissioner of Counter-Terrorism Michael Sheehan. Commissioner Sheehan graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1977, later graduated from the Army’s Command Staff College and holds two master’s degrees. He retired in 1997 as a Lieutenant Colonel and was appointed Deputy Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Organizations. In that role he was involved in the international policing effort in Bosnia and Kosovo, subsequently rising to become an Assistant Secretary General in these peacekeeping operations. His office managed the peacekeeping operations of over 35,000 military and police deployed

around the world⁷. In June of 2003, Sheehan was appointed to his current position with the New York Police Department. In this role, he is responsible for counter-terrorism operations within the department, including terrorism investigations. He oversees training and exercises for NYPD personnel along with risk assessment and critical infrastructure programs within New York City.

Another police administrator who entered the law enforcement profession with limited or no previous policing experience is Los Angeles Police Department Administrator John Miller who oversees the Los Angeles Police Department's Counter-Terrorism Bureau (CTB). In his position Mr. Miller facilitates the administration of approximately 150 personnel, most of who are in sworn positions, including two police captains. As Bureau Chief, Mr. Miller oversees the operations of the Anti-Terrorism Division, Bomb Squad and Hazardous Materials Unit. Prior to joining the LAPD John Miller served as a correspondent and anchor for ABC News. During his five years with the network his primary focus was the coverage of terrorism. Mr. Miller has traveled extensively in the Middle East, including the countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Lebanon.

Research Results and Questions for Consideration

In late 2004, a panel of representatives from police labor organizations, police management associations, a human resources director, a city council person and a state legislator met to discuss this critical issue. There was an immense amount of discussion and heated debate, particularly between police labor representatives and local elected officials. The group's consensus was that the issue of civilianizing police executive positions has the potential to become reality. One major obstacle would come from

police labor groups who may oppose changes in legislation that would be required to allow the civilianization of the chief's position. One of the panelists, Sergeant Steve Filson, represents the considered opinion of the practitioner.

Filson is a twenty-four year police veteran, currently assigned to supervise a specialized narcotics enforcement team. He also served thirteen years as his agency's police labor association president, representing the majority of employees in his department. Filson found the question of civilianizing the position of Chief of Police as a very interesting concept; and one that would provide for spirited debate amongst his peers. He explained that there would, in most likelihood, be too many obstacles to overcome in order to experience any satisfactory level of success, and he cited two areas of obvious concern:

- Acceptance of a non-policing leader by the agency's sworn officers.
- Acceptance of a non-policing leader by members of the community

In serving as a labor association president, he was involved in many aspects of organizational development, and said the obvious question that would arise would be "What does this person know about police work?" Sergeant Filson did mention that a similar argument was often raised by police labor groups when agencies first recruited outside their departments to replace a retiring Chief of Police. The belief from the line-level officers was that an outsider would not understand the organizational culture.

With regard to an executive without a background in policing, Filson conjectured that it was hard enough for the rank and file officers to overcome their objections when they feel the undeserving or minimally-qualified are promoted from within their ranks. He said he could not even imagine the comments that would occur if one were appointed to lead the department with no experience at all. He sees minimal comparison between the running of a private corporation and a public safety agency. An agency's Chief of Police is responsible for the development of comprehensive policing strategies and providing to the public his reasoning in wishing to implement them. This requires in-depth experience in law enforcement and crime prevention issues which an executive with no experience in police work would lack.

Interestingly enough, the panelist representing local municipalities were quick to note that many locally elected mayors or appointed city managers have no previous experience in managing a street department, planning department, water department or facilities management, yet a mayor or city manager has overall responsibility of all these departments. Ed Raya, Human Resources Director for the City of Fontana agreed with Filson that the strong political ties of police labor groups would be a major obstacle to the implementation of a plan to civilianize the chief's position. Raya disagrees with the police labor association's stand against the civilization, and cited the hospital administrator model as a perfect example of why it would work.

The Road Ahead

Having a road map or clear direction is crucial to the success of any new idea. Dr. Carey Simon of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California has conducted extensive research on transition management and ways to bring change to an organization or profession⁸. He identifies transformational change as one of the ways for civilian executives to enter the policing profession and take this issue forward from theory to reality. In transformational change, the old way of operating must end or die for the realization of the new to emerge from its remains. Using transformational change to eliminate resistance from labor groups or others with their own personal agendas may make a reality of the vision of a Donald Trump serving in the position of Chief of Police.

Conclusion

As law enforcement agencies and city officials look for new and innovative ways to continue to provide quality police services, while at the same time dealing with a vacuum of leadership caused by earlier retirements, one must ponder whether it is time to look outside the box for future Chiefs of Police. If you are a cop, especially one in a supervisory or management position, and this idea does not sit well with you, then succession planning and mentoring programs must be on your agency's radar screen today to ensure that we are adequately preparing the future police executives of tomorrow. As a police captain in a medium size agency I have accepted the reality that one day I may be working with a police administrator with limited law enforcement experience. Using the successes of hospitals being administrated by non-physicians and other policing agencies being run by executives with little direct experience, I must

consider that adopting this model could very well prove to be as successful in the law enforcement profession. This article is not attempting to draw conclusions on the value or validity of looking outside of policing for our next generation of leaders. By broaching the topic, however, we might now engage in discussion within the walls of law enforcement agencies regarding the validity of a civilian executive assuming the role of Chief of Police. Is your agency properly preparing the future leaders of your department through succession planning? If not, the future you assume may be radically different than you may imagine. The responsibility of charting the future course of our profession lies with all police managers; the responsibility to lead is our obligation.

¹ The Law Enforcement News magazine (April 15, 2000)

² <http://www.collegeview.com> (November 11, 2004)

³ The Law Enforcement News magazine (April 15, 2000)

⁴ Captain Stavros S. Anthony, *The Structural Dimensions of Community Oriented Police Departments* (December 1999)

⁵ Captain Frank Mankin, *Mentoring: Leaving a Legacy of Leadership*,

⁶ Rubinstein, M.F. & Firstenberg, I.R. *The Minding Organization* (Adams Media Corporation, 2003)

⁷ <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us> (August 10, 2004)

⁸ Dr Carey Simon, Assistant Professor of Management, Naval Postgraduate School.