

The Leadership Challenge:

Emotionally Preparing the Workforce for a Pandemic Event

Submitted by

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Introduction

Some law enforcement leaders readily acknowledge the challenge of preparing a workforce to ensure the continuity of government in the event of an outbreak of the avian influenza. Others have failed to adequately prepare that same workforce for such an event, and have a far disparate view of the enormous challenge and the great consequences in their failure to plan.

Recent terrorist events, natural disasters and the potential for a flu pandemic have all forced changes in the traditional role and responsibilities of local law enforcement. As the United States continues in its global fight against terror, and as local budgets shrink, cities and counties will play a central role preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a pandemic event. In a report issued by a select bipartisan committee of the House of Representatives to investigate the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina called, “*A Failure of Initiative*,” several errors were noted in the public safety response after the storm made landfall. A lack of leadership leading to a collapse of local law enforcement and the lack of effective public communications all contributed to the ineffective response and also created unnecessary fear and despair. Specifically, the report stated the New Orleans Police Department was ill-prepared for continuity of operations and a lack of personnel, training and funding all weakened command and control functions.

Leaders must think about the implications a pandemic would create on the workforce and develop realistic plans before the inevitable occurs. Internet sites and government publications have addressed the impact the avian influenza would have on a workforce but few have actually walked a leader through a plan to emotionally prepare them. Police officers have been trained to deal with chaotic situations but very little in research exists for a leader to emotionally train his workforce to deal with mass casualties and exposure to a virus that is potentially quite lethal. This paper will walk the law enforcement leader through the potential steps needed to create a sense of urgency and enable him or her to psychologically prepare the workforce for a pandemic.

Traditional Role of the Police Officer

In 1931, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (more commonly referred to as the Wickersham Commission) wrote the following description of a police officer:

“Few can realize or appreciate the manifold duties of the police man. To the great mass of people he is just another one of those nuisances which one must endure, and even among our courts a general attitude of disfavor is often found. His services are great. His labor is full of interest and yet rarely, even among specialists, is full credit given to the position” (Dantzler 2003 p.1).

In 1973, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals described a police officer as one who:

“...plays a role in society which is difficult; he must clearly understand the complex social relationships to be effective. He is not only part of the community he serves, but is also part of the government that provides his formal base of authority, he is also part of the criminal justice system that determines what course of society will pursue to deter law breakers and rehabilitate offenders in the interest of public order.” (p.2)

Lastly, the California Commission on Police Officers Standards and Training identifies the key job dimensions of a police officer to be:

- Integrity
- Communication skills
- Judgment under pressure
- Ability to operate a motor vehicle
- Physical ability
- Credibility as a witness in court
- Willingness to confront problems
- Problem solving ability
- Dependability
- Learning ability
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Observational skills
- Interest in people
- Desire for self improvement
- Appearance

Over the last seventy-five years, the role of a police officer has dramatically changed. In none of the listed job descriptions is it mentioned an officer must be willing to leave his family behind in the wake of a terrorist attack, natural disaster, or pandemic, but recent events have demonstrated law enforcement plays a tremendous role in a local community's response to such catastrophic events. A pandemic event would cause chaos not unlike law enforcement has experienced in the past.

Earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters are a regular occurrence in California, and law enforcement is quite adept at effectively dealing with those types of situations. We have trained and performed well during unusual occurrences, but a pandemic would create a unique hysteria not seen during traditional natural disasters. For instance, officers might wonder whether or not they came into contact with someone who carried the virus and a simple cough or scratch of the throat would cause some to think they were infected with the avian influenza virus.

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) issued a report “Protecting Your Community from Terrorism” in 2006. This report noted that “more than four years after September 11, 2001, state and local entities responsible for the public safety are still working through how best to define, understand, and prepare for their new roles and responsibilities in responding to critical incidents. Government agencies in the United States and abroad are grappling with the same issue.” Although the report addressed the

response to terrorism events, many of the same strategies suggested could be used for a law enforcement response to a pandemic.

The potential of loss of life among family members would cause a shift in priorities for many police officers. Varying levels of commitment could be expected when asking officers to contain the spread of infection by enforcing isolation and quarantine among members of the general public. The risk of self-exposure would be too great for some, and it would be unrealistic for law enforcement leaders to expect unanimous participation among rank and file officers in the wake of such an emotional and anxiety-filled event. During chaos and while facing mass casualties, can law enforcement leaders really expect full participation from employees while leaving family members behind? Only those employees who have been psychologically prepared, through a well-communicated pandemic plan, will participate and only when they know their families are cared for.

What do we Know About the Pandemic?

The official United State's government web site for information on pandemic flu and avian influenza (www.pandemicflu.gov) defines a pandemic as a global disease outbreak. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily from person-to-person causing serious illness, and it can sweep across the country and around the world in a short time.

Health care professionals are concerned about the continued and expanded spread of the H5N1 virus, which has spread across eastern Asia and other countries. This virus is especially virulent; being spread by migratory birds and in some limited cases is being transmitted to humans. The virus continues to evolve. Many scientists believe an influenza pandemic will occur but the timing and severity cannot be easily predicted. The biggest concern is eventual human-to-human transmission. Since humans lack sufficient immunity to prevent infection, the virus will spread and become a pandemic.

Avian flu H5N1 infection was first recognized in 1997 when the virus infected eighteen people in Hong Kong resulting in six deaths. The H5N1 virus has killed large numbers of poultry flocks and other birds in Asia and Europe. Since 2003, there have been more than one hundred cases of H5N1 avian influenza reported in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, China, Turkey, and Iraq.

The United States Department of Homeland Security and the President of the United States has developed a "National Strategy" for the pandemic influenza. In November 2005, the President announced the National Strategy for dealing with the daunting challenge and possibility of an influenza pandemic. The plan outlines how the government is prepared to detect and respond to a pandemic and emphasizes the important role local governments will play to protect and prevent the spread of influenza.

The California Office of Emergency Services (OES) Law Enforcement Branch issued a "Preparedness Planning Document for Pandemic Flu Virus" in March 2006. This report "specifically urges law enforcement agencies to engage in pandemic flu preparedness planning activities in cooperation with their respective health departments, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, fire services and other pertinent organizations." Local communities are encouraged to limit the spread of an outbreak beyond the community's borders, develop comprehensive preparedness and response

plans, and integrate the non-health entities in the plan to include law enforcement and other city services. The National Strategy Plan and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) talk about roles, responsibilities and how the communication system is designed to strengthen teamwork in a crisis situation. Neither plan, though, addresses how to effectively manage and prepare a weary workforce in the face of a widespread pandemic, leaving that strategy to the devices of local law enforcement leaders.

There are many unanswered questions about the fear of a pandemic and the implications for law enforcement. What problems will local police leaders face if vaccines and medication are not provided to law enforcement personnel? How can they assure their personnel it is safe to carry out their sworn duties requiring close contact with highly infectious persons? How can peace officers force community-wide quarantine measures? In fact, we will need answers to those questions; most likely, in the very near future.

The fear of a pandemic is real and by most expert accounts, very likely. The Spanish Flu of 1918-1919 killed 40-50 million worldwide (Colwell 2006 p.14). The Journal of the American Medical Association in 1918 reported 28 percent of Americans became afflicted with the virus. More than 675,000 of them died, which was ten times as many in World War I (Billings 2007). Consider for a moment the impact of a pandemic on an American metropolis. For every life lost due to illness, how many more might be lost merely due to the panic if policing is unprepared to manage the fear of their constituency? As a starting point, we will consider the legal implications to our considered actions.

Legal Issues

Once we fully understand what the pandemic is and if a vaccine is available to prevent its spread, there will be a few significant legal issues to address during an outbreak. If the United States orders the use of large-scale quarantines to contain the spread of the avian flu and to prevent a full-scale pandemic, it is inevitable local law enforcement would be expected to play a significant role. The task would be monumental. In the International Association of Chiefs of Police and Policy Review (2005), President Bush, Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Mike Leavitt, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, noted to effectively deal with the potential widespread of disease would require the use of the military or National Guard to maintain civil order.

What is the legal authority that will allow law enforcement to enforce involuntary quarantines? Naturally, a conflict exists between the Constitution, which protects personal freedom, and that of forced quarantines. States have enacted legislation and extended broad authority to local health departments to control disease but those quarantines typically deal with the quarantine of animals, poultry and other agriculture products. They do not generally address the issue of forced quarantine of humans. Local health officials will call upon law enforcement to assist in the event of a call for quarantine, but the lack of uniformity from one jurisdiction to another poses significant challenges.

California Health and Safety Code Sections 101000 through 101475 establish the authority of County Health Doctors to preserve and protect the public health by enforcing

county orders, ordinances, and statutes pertaining to public health. The law also allows for the local health officer to take preventative measures necessary to control the spread of communicable diseases. How will orders be carried out? Will officers readily accept the health officer's authority to force quarantines? Is quarantine different than isolation in terms of limiting the spread of disease? All of these questions and many others would be answered by the County Health Doctor in the department's emergency preparedness planning.

Availability of Vaccine and Antiviral Medication

Pandemicflu.gov reports the influenza vaccine production process is long and complicated. The influenza virus strain continually evolves, making the effective match between the vaccine and the strain an elusive target. On the Internet site, www.pandemictoolkit.com, it states the "Center for Disease Control has a Strategic National Stockpile of medical supplies to protect the American public if a public health emergency occurs." This site also notes the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is required to stockpile sufficient quantities of anti-viral drugs to treat 25% of a target population in case of a pandemic. The federal government has asked each Governor's Office in the Country to submit their projected plans to purchase their allocated anti-viral drugs in 2006. The distribution of anti-virals will be based on population.

Protecting individuals who are the highest risk and protecting day-to-day services are an important consideration when planning on the distribution of vaccines to prevent a virus from spreading. The State OES report also noted, "as an essential service, law enforcement personnel *may receive* top priority in receiving vaccinations against the identified flu virus." The report also states that law enforcement agencies should review with their respective health department pandemic flu immunization strategies and provide prevention and wellness education to employees.

Hurricane Katrina

If leaders fail to adequately prepare employees for a pandemic event, they could expect to see high employee absenteeism and low morale. The OES report reinforced this predictable outcome. The report notes, "The World Health Organization estimates that an influenza pandemic will affect 30-50% of working adults! Agencies must anticipate and prepare for a reduced workforce due to the impact of the influenza on their own personnel. As an agency, your plans should consider a 50% or more absenteeism due the pandemic flu. Loss of staff to personal and family illness will be inevitable.

Officers would be too consumed with the fear of infection or too concerned about taking care of their own families to report to work as two hundred New Orleans police officers did so after Hurricane Katrina. Two officers committed suicide and according to New York Times writer J.B. Treaster in a 2005 article, some officers told superiors they were leaving, while others simply worked for a short time and then stopped showing up at work altogether. Edwin Compass, the Superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department, said morale was not very good and cited the deplorable working conditions as the central driving force for low officer morale and frustration.

Non-profit and other governmental agencies helped residents after the storm, but little was mentioned about the need for assistance to the police officers who resided in the area. Instead of evacuating the area, police officials responded to work every day and many did so without regard to personal risk. Twenty-two officers lost their homes in Gulfport, Mississippi, and two hundred deputies lost their homes in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana (Willingham 2005 p.16).

Although not specifically speaking about officers working in a pandemic environment, retiring police Chief Charles Ramsey said, "Some of what the job entails is sacrifice. You have to be psychologically tough to do this job," referring to the role of a police officer when he was assailed by the police union as using crime emergencies as a way to be nimble and flexibly staff his team of officers (Klein and Thompson, 2006 p. A01). The duties of an officer require personal sacrifice during normal working conditions, the sacrifice expected during a pandemic would be even greater. The value is great for law enforcement leaders to effectively prepare their personnel for a pandemic of epic proportions. The consequences may be even higher if they do not!

Local Experts Assist in Planning

To assist in the emergency preparedness planning a panel of experts came together in Modesto, California to discuss the impact the flu pandemic would have on the workforce. The panel also identified possible trends and events that would later serve as a reference point to begin the preparation of dealing with the poignant impact the flu pandemic would create on the workforce. The panel consisted of eleven divergent subject matter experts from law enforcement, the poultry industry, the Department of Food and Agriculture, the County's Public Health Doctor, a member of a local non-profit faith-based organization, and a Red Cross/FEMA volunteer. The panel also consisted of a licensed and practicing police psychologist and the president of the Modesto Police Officers Association. The panel concluded their work identifying several trends that could adversely and emotionally impact employees while having to deal with the flu pandemic.

- *Sensationalized media coverage*
- *Lack of employee knowledge or information to employees*
- *Failure of law enforcement personnel to make safety precautions for their own family*
- *Different generation of police personnel*
- *Lack of mutual aid resources in the event of a pandemic*
- *Unknown rules of engagement (quarantine issues)*
- *Inability to communicate*

The possible events were discussed in detail and although not supported by research, they did allow for the initial discussion about how a department could emotionally prepare its workforce for a pandemic event. The list of possible trends was not intended to be exhaustive or all inconclusive, but rather a starting point to assist leaders in the creation of a vision for his or her department.

Sensationalized Media Coverage

The panel felt the insatiable thirst for immediate news coverage would only serve to exacerbate the crisis created by the pandemic. News reports could be sensationalized for impact creating unnecessary fear for families and loved ones. The panel felt that even though the pandemic threat is real; the media would largely exaggerate the issue, creating fear and anxiety. For this reason, panel members felt it was critical for department leaders to include family members in the emergency preparedness planning to avoid unnecessary absenteeism that might result solely from the fear and anxiety created by spicy news reports (author's note- opportunities exist to inform the media about pandemic preparations and to even include them in the development of department plans).

Lack of Knowledge or Information for Employees

The public health doctor felt it was critical for employees to obtain relevant information through the County Public Health Department or the Center for Disease Control. The panel felt if police departments wanted unanimous participation from all employees, they would have to provide training and timely information for every employee about flu transmission. A department plan that forecasted absences from work and instructions on how to avoid face-to-face contact among employees, and the availability of mental health services would aid in the department's ability to manage and motivate the workforce. The creation of a "pandemic czar" will be discussed later in this paper and that position would serve as an individual who will disseminate vital information to everyone concerned (training bulletins, directives from OES, DHHS etc.).

Failure of Law Enforcement Personnel to Make Safety Precautions for Their own Families

The single greatest trend identified by the panel was the failure of employees to make safety precautions for their own family. Lack of preparation included the failure to have emergency kits at home, the failure to discuss obligations for mandatory attendance at work, and the lack of information about disease transmission all contributed to the success a leader might experience in his or her ability to emotionally prepare a workforce. The need for a "home plan" for employees was felt to be significant if a department expected full participation from its employees and without such a "home plan" departments should not expect full cooperation from a majority of their employees. It is possible that some officers/dispatchers would decide the risk is too great for their families if they report to work. Such a plan would not be compulsory, but if a leader is to be successful in his desire to prepare a workforce, the panel felt home emergency planning should be emphasized by the department leadership. Much like keeping in good physical shape and prepared for a physical confrontation at work, the decision to prepare for an emergency is ultimately an individual choice. Leaders should be prepared to deal with employees who fail to show up at work and consider disciplinary action when appropriate.

Different Generation of Officer

The police psychologist felt new employees entering the law enforcement profession are doing so not because of a calling or a sense of service, but rather because it is a job! Older employees with prior military experience are accustomed to accepting orders, but newer officers might be skeptical and jaded about service more so than older employees. The panel felt newer officers would simply quit and “walk off the job,” and newer employees would create a challenge for the police leader. The police psychologist did not have relevant data to support his concern but had a general impression newer officer candidates are far different than those examined in the past twenty years. It is unknown if his concerns are accurate, but it should be considered by leaders when planning for a pandemic.

According to a 2004 Harvard Business Journal article title, “Managing the Gamer Generation,” gamers are described as loners and as individuals who do not talk much. Wally Block describes Millennials as hard working individuals who place more importance on doing work that allows them to have an impact on the world. Leaders would be remiss if they did not consider the current generations to be dedicated and responsible. They should be expected to work in the face of danger and their dedication should not be questioned.

Lack of Mutual Aid Resources in the Event of a Pandemic

During a pandemic event, law enforcement would be called to assist in limiting an outbreak. Available resources would be stretched too thin adding to the hysteria. Other public safety agencies will be dealing with the same problem within their own jurisdictions and without the ability to pool resources, the panel felt frustration and anxiety would set in among employees, further complicating the leader’s ability to motivate and prepare their workforce. The OES report states there would be an immediate conferring with regional Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Coordinators to assist local agencies hardest hit.

Unknown Rules of Engagement (quarantine issues)

Fear and apprehension would be experienced by officers on the “front lines” without any real training when having to enforce the issue of forced quarantines and the conflict it creates with personal freedoms. The daunting logistical problem of utilizing police personnel to enforce large-scale quarantines would place added responsibilities on a workforce that is already been asked to do too much. Does forced quarantine mean isolating individuals in their homes or does it mean cordoning off large segments of a community would be answered best by the local Public Health Doctor.

Inability to Communicate (radio interoperability)

The inability to communicate between the various public safety disciplines would increase during a pandemic event. The ability to maintain close control of a quarantine

operation, while confronting the spread of disease, would be greatly exacerbated without the ability to effectively communicate. Effective communication was felt to be essential if the police are expected to inform the public with a coordinated and consistent message. Without good communication capability, the panel felt personnel would be quickly disillusioned and lack the motivation to serve. The situation would quickly deteriorate into a feeling of desperation. Quite naturally, an officer would wonder if a department truly cared about him if he was not provided with the best equipment to even communicate with the various public safety disciplines called upon to deal with a pandemic event.

The Leadership Plan

Leaders will need to be flexible and must create a sense of urgency if they want their department to effectively respond during a virus-caused pandemic event. The recommendations that were developed as part of the local subject matter expert group are outlined below and reflect suggestions in the State OES Planning Considerations report. The list is not exhaustive or all-inclusive, rather is only intended to serve as a recommendation to start the need to prepare a workforce.

- **Create a “Pandemic Czar” Position Within the Department**

This newly created position would be a management level person who would coordinate, develop partnerships, and enhance coordination with other local and state agencies including the county’s public health department, the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, fire service, and food and agriculture departments. This staff position would coordinate all of the department’s efforts related to the flu pandemic.

- **Develop Better Communication with Employees**

- ✓ A general order that delineates mandatory call to work responsibilities with different staffing levels determined upon the severity of the pandemic and the need to maintain the continuity of government.
- ✓ Development of a fact sheet regarding emergency preparedness and flu pandemic awareness.
- ✓ Post flu pandemic website links on the department’s Intranet as a source of information for employees.
- ✓ Invite the county public health doctor to attend roll-call training or to develop a training video that outlines the threat of the flu pandemic and how employees can be better prepared.
- ✓ Involve the respective employee associations in the discussion and emergency preparedness planning.
- ✓ Have a standing agenda item on the department’s staff meeting agenda where “emergency preparedness” planning is consistently discussed.

- ✓ Development of a training bulletin to serve as an “official” department-wide communication medium to lessen the fear and better prepare employees if a pandemic becomes reality.
- ✓ Include “emergency and family preparedness planning” as part of the agency’s overall strategic plan.
- ✓ Regularly discuss and distribute information regarding the legal issues surrounding quarantines and who has the authority to order and enforce.

• **Tabletop Exercise**

The “Pandemic Coordinator” would coordinate a tabletop exercise to evaluate urgent plans and infrastructure that may be employed in response to a pandemic.

- ✓ The exercise should include partnerships with emergency service providers, emergency management representatives, and other public safety representatives to identify gaps in coordination between participating agencies.
- ✓ Consideration should be given to having multiple tabletop exercises involving as many employees as possible.
- ✓ Multi-agency and discipline exercises should be considered (mutual aid).
- ✓ Radio Interoperability deficiencies should be evaluated.
- ✓ County counsel and city attorney staff members should be included to assist in quarantine and other legal issues.
- ✓ Include civil right activist groups in the exercise/planning. The delay in pondering whether or not the actions considered for quarantine and related legal actions could cause additional deaths and disease outbreak.
- ✓ Development of a model for the distribution of vaccines and antiviral medications to law enforcement employees in an effort to limit the spread of disease.
- ✓ Include local elected officials in the tabletop exercise.

• **Department-Wide Preparedness Day**

Every employee would be furnished with home supply kits including water, food, first aid supplies, tools, and other emergency supplies such as bedding and clothing. Disaster preparedness checklists will be distributed to every employee. A business partner should be developed where a large retailer sponsors a widely advertised “*Emergency Preparedness Day*” where employees and community members are provided kits at little or no cost. Employees should be encouraged to involve their extended family, which will enable them to respond to work knowing their family is cared for and prepared.

• **Personal Protective Equipment**

Purchase personal protective equipment and develop training on the proper use of the equipment for all employees’ not just personnel in the field. In an informal

survey of local agencies, many of them purchased personal protective equipment but have failed to issue to their employees for field use. Restrictive wear regulations and training were cited as reasons for failure to distribute.

Conclusion

These recommendations require little in the way of cost to the organization or in resources to start the employee preparedness planning. They are intended to be a “roadmap” for the leader. Some suggestions may already be implemented, some may be redundant, and others might have been overlooked completely. For those agencies that have not started the process of emergency planning, they are great first steps to ensure employee participation during a pandemic event for both police and fire departments.

As noted in this paper, the perceptive leader should expect reductions in the workforce, as some employees will be caring for others, some may be too sick and even others might be scared to report to work. The intuitive leader can use some of these strategies to maximize the department’s effectiveness and to meet the responsibilities to maintain public order during a pandemic. Research has demonstrated officers are better equipped to deal with the stresses of a pandemic event when emergency preparedness planning was integrated into the mission of the department and well in advance of an actual pandemic.

The lessons learned from other tragic events have emphasized the need to have proper employee-based preparedness training. Employees responding to work in the face of potential great personal risk is indeed a monumental leadership challenge, but one that can be accomplished if the steps outlined are followed. The result when leaders effectively prepare their personnel for a pandemic is one of accomplishment and participation. The result when leaders do not prepare their workforce is failure of the highest order and potentially disastrous.

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Department. Panel members consisted of:

- a. Tony Aragon, Corporate Security Director, Foster Farms Poultry
- b. Dan Bernaciak, Deputy Director, Stanislaus County Food and Agriculture
- c. Mike Dickinson, Major, Salvation Army
- d. Mark Frink, President, Modesto Police Officers Association
- e. Gary Hinshaw, Fire Warden/Director of Emergency Services, Stanislaus County
- f. John Kane, College professor: Emergency Management, CSULB
- g. Adam McGill, Patrol Sergeant, Modesto Police Department
- h. Paul Owen, Red Cross/FEMA volunteer
- i. Lucian Thomas, Deputy Director, Stanislaus County Regional 911
- j. Dr. Phil Trompeter, Police Department Psychologist
- k. Dr. John Walker, Public Health Doctor, Stanislaus County

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