

**Building your bench strength; it's not just for sports
teams anymore**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Building your bench strength; it's not just for sports teams anymore.

Introduction

California law enforcement agencies are experiencing rapid turnover in their leadership ranks due to both budget issues and enhanced retirement benefits. Leaders are retiring in droves, prompting the newer generations to fill these vacancies. The question remains as to how policing prepares younger staffers to fill these upcoming vacancies. Currently, the profession is experiencing a lack of formal education in the area of law enforcement leadership. Some larger organizations are beginning to forge ahead, but most don't formally train line staff in the area of leadership until these employees are promoted into those positions.

Picture this: It is the Super Bowl. Your favorite team is behind by six points, and has the ball on the ten-yard line ready to score with one minute left in the game. The quarterback is injured and needs to be removed from the game. The head coach looks down his sideline and has no other trained quarterbacks prepared to enter the game. He puts a wide receiver in the game to play quarterback, and subsequently loses the game. The coach didn't have the bench strength required to deal with this unexpected event. It can be argued that law enforcement is in the same situation today.

Leadership voids: How did we get there?

Law enforcement is finding itself in a new situation where enhanced retirement programs are causing our current law enforcement leaders to retire at a younger age. This is creating an unprecedented surplus of vacant leadership positions. Most police agencies

are unprepared for this situation, and don't have a formal leadership development process to prepare them for this emerging reality.

This leadership void was created primarily because many agencies have adopted a 3% at 50-retirement program that allows individuals to retire at the age of 50 years and collect 3% of their salary for each year worked.¹ Employees who have tenure of 30 years and are 50 years old can retire, earning about 90% of their salary for life. As experienced personnel leave, the pool of knowledge and experience decreases dramatically. The transition of leadership to the next generation is experiencing gaps. These gaps include shortages in training to prepare the next generation of leaders.

Thomas Whetstone authored an article in the American Journal of Criminal Justice that examined why police officers decline to participate in promotional processes. His article was supported by a mail survey, followed by focus groups.² He provided evidence stating officers not seeking advancement is driven by a number of factors including considerations of family, lifestyle choices, and satisfaction with current assignment. He states that "eligible officers who do not seek promotion may be more internally motivated and not driven by the extrinsic rewards attendant to upward mobility."³ His research suggests there is a significant decrease in the number of candidates desiring to promote to these leadership positions.

Who will be the next Law Enforcement Leaders?

Law enforcement has become a multi-generational work place. The majority of today's executives are from the Baby Boomer generation (those born between 1943 and 1960).⁴ This group, who number about seventy million, has values that have shaped the

roles of current managers and executives. These values include an extreme work ethic, and a general willingness to work hard on any project until they succeed⁵. In his book, “Generations at Work”, Zempke states that Baby Boomers’ most single notable feature is their ability to arrange their lives to benefit themselves and to keep themselves in power.⁶ The incompatibility between the Baby Boomers and subsequent generations entering the workplace may be one of the biggest gaps facing the transition of law enforcement leadership in the future.

Generation X (born between 1960 and 1980) has been characterized by different values. In his book, “Managing Generation X”, Tugan describes one of the core principles of Generation X is to value family life over work life. He illustrates that “Generation Xers” value and will choose family priorities over the needs of the employer. He also states that members of Generation X value individual recognition over group or team recognition. As a group, they are more educated and technologically advanced than Baby Boomers.⁷

The newest and youngest group entering law enforcement is identified as Generation Y (born between 1980 and 2000). These individuals will share future leadership roles with members of Generation X. Although there is no hard data, Zempke predicts that members of Generation Y will share values similar to those of the Veteran Generation (born between 1922 and 1943)⁸ and will vary vastly from those of Generation X.

These generation shifts and different paradigms associated with each generation are forcing law enforcement to re-examine the promotional process. In the past, people competed for promotional positions in large numbers. Candidates prepared themselves

by enrolling in advanced officers classes and developed themselves outside of the workplace on their own time without compensation. People who wanted to “climb the corporate ladder” would compete for specialty positions such as Field Training Officer or Detective, putting them in the spotlight. They worked hard to prepare for future promotional opportunities. Recently, there has been a dramatic **decrease** in officers vying for these specialty positions.⁹ This trend adds to the validity of the generational challenges law enforcement leadership development will face in the future.¹⁰ The current trend of today’s younger officers is that they forego promotion for a variety of reasons. A recent roundtable of senior managers in policing identified reasons as diverse as the increased complexity and demands of top level law enforcement positions, a desire to focus more on family obligations, perceived loss of prestige and respect, and the loss of civil service protection in senior management positions.¹¹

According to Rick Michelson, in an article for Police Chief Magazine, many agencies are replacing veteran leaders with younger candidates who have not had the length of service in the field and have little experience in leadership positions.¹² Consequently, the need arises for more concentrated efforts to identify leadership traits, to create a career path and to prepare those replacements as supervisors.

Numerous law enforcement agencies find themselves with vacancies in leadership positions and a small pool of candidates prepared to fill them.¹³ This lack of planning can lead to a lesser-qualified selection of candidates for leadership positions. Additionally, these leaders may experience a steeper learning curve due to their lack of continued leadership training. In law enforcement, we typically hire good “managers”.

According to Tim Little, Undersheriff of Marin County CA, When leadership positions arise, we want to promote people who will be good “leaders”.¹⁴

Often, people confuse the difference between leadership and management. In his book, “The Worlds Most Powerful Leadership Principle”¹⁵, Hunter describes leadership as the skills of influencing people to enthusiastically work towards goals identified as being for the common good, with *character* that inspires confidence. Hunter describes management as “the things we do”, and leadership as “who we are”¹⁶. He further simplifies the distinction by stating, “We lead people, but manage things”¹⁷. Steven Covey has a similar definition, “Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right thing”¹⁸. Colin Powell has his own definition of leadership. He states, “Leadership is the art of accomplishing more then the science of management says is possible.”¹⁹ Law Enforcement needs to identify or develop a process that discovers leadership rather than management potential.

When candidates go through the entry-level testing process to become law enforcement officers, they are tested and evaluated for management-type skills. Those with the highest scores move on to the hiring process. Once hired, law enforcement continues to provide management skills training. The gap occurs when these managers promote to leadership positions, but have only received management training. Generally, their leadership training is non-existent.

Our training pattern reflects our emphasis on management skills, but we need also to create a solid leadership curriculum beginning early in every law enforcement officer’s career. In California, most police officers get little exposure to any formal leadership training until they move into supervisory or management positions. In California, there

are several leadership training programs available. All supervisors must attend the POST Supervisory Course. Veteran police sergeants may attend the Supervisory Leadership Institute (SLI). Other options for managers include the West Point Leadership Program, Executive Training Seminars and Command College.²⁰ These programs work well, but their concepts need to spread to training given to those who will later promote, and not just to incumbents already serving in leadership roles.

An expert panel provides ideas for the future

In September of 2008, a panel of eight experts gathered in San Rafael, California to discuss the issue of law enforcement leadership development. The panel's expertise was in succession planning, police leadership and leadership in the private sector. They included a Deputy Chief Probation Officer; an owner of Pro Transport, a large ambulance company in Sonoma County, a Quality Assurance Officer from a large company, an Under Sheriff with a County Sheriff's Office, a retired Human Resource Manager, three Deputy Sheriff's representing Generation X and Y, and a Fire Captain from a mid-size Fire District. The panel provided the following observations and recommendations regarding leadership succession planning:

- **Establish a formal leadership program at the local level:** Research indicates this type of development model has been very successful in the military. With some slight modifications, a formal program similar to this would be attractive to both Generation X and Y employees. During the panel discussion, the Generation X and Y panel members suggested that being identified as a potential future leader early in their career and being

groomed for promotion would significantly enhance their job satisfaction.²¹

- **Establish an evaluation plan:** This plan will be implemented to study the progress of those exposed to the leadership development program. Establishing an effective means to monitor the success of this program locally could then be the catalyst towards offering the program regionally.
- **Establish a method to examine the promotional process:** Research continues to show that the Civil Service promotional process may not be the best means to identify leaders. The panel suggested this type of testing, usually consisting of a written test and an oral interview, might not reward the best candidates, but might reward just the best test takers.²² The process needs to be studied. A culture needs to exist which will embrace revamping the process; allowing past performance, leadership preparation and the candidates law enforcement experience to have a larger role in the rating equation.
- **Establish a formal mentorship program:** Many law enforcement agencies have either a formal or informal mentorship program to help develop their line level staff. Although the informal programs might lack the consistency of a formal program, any time line staff is paired with someone above them in their organization, development occurs for both parties. Care should be taken by carefully selecting the mentor, and also assuring the mentor is sharing information that is in line with the Mission and Vision of the organization.

- **Establish a program to evaluate the use of new technology:** Several leadership measurement tools are available (such as the Meyers- Briggs Type Indicator).²³ Research has shown these instruments have been successfully used in the military and the private sector.²⁴ Perhaps they should be reviewed to determine their applicability and effectiveness for police agencies.
- **Establish programs in secondary education:** Establish a statewide program that would initiate recruitment in the high schools to produce a pool of recruits early in their lives.

The panel of experts agreed the challenge and ultimate implication to law enforcement is to recognize this issue as a real threat to the profession's future. The panel acknowledged police culture is strong, rigid and driven by years of tradition. The old culture needs to change as the public's expectations are constantly changing. It is time to develop new standards for subordinates so they can transition into leadership roles to meet the cultural and community changes that will occur as generations pass the baton. The approach to law enforcement leadership development needs to be progressive, more flexible and show a commitment to implement newer technology to improve daily operations. These technologically advanced tools will appeal largely to the newer generation of law enforcement leaders who have an expectation to have technological gadgets to assist them in their workplace.²⁵

While law enforcement has come a long way in the area of technology such as computers in patrol cars, night vision, less-lethal weapons and hybrid vehicles, the panel

concluded it is time to embrace this same futuristic perspective preparing for leadership positions that will occur in the next decade.

Conclusion

Throughout California, police administrators are experiencing a lack of candidates to fill their increasing leadership positions. Society demands more responsive law enforcement. Trends indicate the expectation for flexible, customer-service oriented departments will continue to increase.²⁶

Research shows that the new generations of police officers demand innovation and are comfortable with and accept rapid change.²⁷ Current leaders must be prepared for this rapid change. If not, the “newer generation officer” may be driven away from policing, disappointed by how long it takes the old culture to change.

A formal Leadership Development Program is the answer. It will fall within the agency’s mission and vision. It will also help bridge the gap between the older managers and future new leaders through the mentoring process. Furthermore, it will provide the line level employees with a feeling of progress, a dynamic that research has shown to be important to the current Generation X and Y workers.²⁸

For law enforcement to meet the public’s ongoing expectations, law enforcement needs to build the bench strength of those destined to become the next generation of leaders. The public expects and deserves this. It is certainly a decision that police departments can justify both fundamentally and financially. Law enforcement plays the “Big Game” everyday. If we plan accordingly, we can play to win.

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- ¹ Calpers 3% @50, {on line} accessed August 2008 <http://www.porac.org/3percent@50.html>
- ² Copping out: Why police officers decline to participate in the sergeants promotional process, {on line} by Thomas S Whetstone accessed August 2008 at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/n51p5p57kt3230q7>
- ³ Copping out: Why police officers decline to participate in the sergeants promotional process, {on line} by Thomas S Whetstone accessed August 2008 at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/n51p5p57kt3230q7>
- ⁴ Zemke, Ron, Raines, Claire, Filipczak, Bob, Generations at Work
- ⁵ Zemke, Ron, Raines, Claire, Filipczak, Bob, Generations at Work
- ⁶ Zemke, Ron, Raines, Claire, Filipczak, Bob, Generations at Work
- ⁷ Tulgan, Bruce, Managing Generation X, 205
- ⁸ Zemke, Ron, Raines, Claire, Filipczak, Bob, Generations at Work.
- ⁹ This information was provided by Scott Hagmark, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Brad Kashack of the Marin County Sheriff's Office during the September NGT. They represented Generation X and Generation Y workforce groups.
- ¹⁰ Cited by Liz Weber in "Leadership Development and Success Planning", International Public Management Association for Human Resources Newsletter (January 2006)
- ¹¹ This information was provided by Undersheriff Tim Little who obtained this data from a round table exercise conducted at "Seconds in Command Conference" in San Diego, California in 2008. This information was supported by Scott Hagmark, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Brad Kashack of the Marin County Sheriff's Office during the September NGT.
- ¹² Preparing Future Leaders for Tomorrow, {on line}, by Rick Michelson accessed August 2008 <http://www.policechief magazine.org>
- ¹³ Copping out: Why police officers decline to participate in the sergeants promotional process, {on line} by Thomas S Whetstone accessed August 2008 at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/n51p5p57kt3230q7>
- ¹⁴ This thought was generated by Marin County Sheriff's Office, Undersheriff Tim Little who is an advocate for leadership development in law enforcement.
- ¹⁵ Hunter, James, The Worlds Most Powerful Leadership Principle
- ¹⁶ Hunter, James, The Worlds Most Powerful Leadership Principle, Crown Business, 2002
- ¹⁷ Hunter, James, The Worlds Most Powerful Leadership Principle, Crown Business, 2002
- ¹⁸ Covey, Steven, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Free Press 1989
- ¹⁹ Harari, Oren, The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell, Mcgraw Hill, 2002
- ²⁰ Accessed in August of 2008, {on line} http://www.post.ca.gov./Training/Leadreship_Development.asp
- ²¹ This information was provided by Scott Hagmark, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Brad Kashack of the Marin County Sheriff's Office during the September NGT. They represented Generation X and Generation Y workforce groups.
- ²² Building Law Enforcement Leadership in the 21st Century, {on line} accessed August 2008, available at: <http://www.copseek.com>
- ²³ More information available at <http://www.myersbriggsreports.com>
- ²⁴ More information available at <http://www.myersbriggsreports.com>
- ²⁵ The Nominal Group Technique Panel was assembled on September 25, 2008 at the Marin County Sheriff's Office in San Rafael, California. Panel members consisted of Timothy Little: Under Sheriff Marin County Sheriff's Office; Mike Daly: Deputy Chief of Marin County Probation Department; Elena Whorten: Owner of Pro-Transport Ambulance Company in Rohnert Park, California; Carol Bryant: Former Manager of Marin County Human Resources Department; Susan Ferran: Quality Assurance Officer for Pro Transport Ambulance Company and Police Chaplin; Brad Kashack, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Scott Hagmark: Marin County Sheriff Deputy's; Gerald McCarthy: Novato Fire District Battalion Chief.

²⁶ This information was discussed during the NGT exercise in September of 2008.

²⁷ This information was provided by Scott Hagmark, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Brad Kashack of the Marin County Sheriff's Office during the September NGT.

²⁸ This information was provided by Scott Hagmark, Jennifer Cetrangalo and Brad Kashack of the Marin County Sheriff's Office during the September NGT.