

**ENDURING, SURVIVING, AND
THRIVING AS A LAW
ENFORCEMENT EXECUTIVE**

The Illinois Law Enforcement
Training and Standards Board
Springfield, Illinois

**ENDURING, SURVIVING, AND
THRIVING AS A LAW
ENFORCEMENT EXECUTIVE**

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FOREWORD

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES NATIONWIDE are facing increased public and political scrutiny as they operate in a milieu of complex cultural, organizational and societal change. Never before has the citizenry and its institutions, e.g., government, media, community groups, legal systems, demanded so much of law enforcement officials, while concurrently critiquing their actions. Police organizations are under review.

Police agencies must strike a balance between retaining and refining organizational elements that have proven operationally effective, and taking the risks necessary for continuous innovation, renewal and organizational rebirth. Stated in other terms, police agencies must remain traditional, when traditional methods have proven effective, but must be willing to abandon traditionalism when the old way of doing things is no longer effective. As Margaret Meade once stated, “The world in which we are born is not the world in which we will live, nor is it the world in which we will die. “ Police managers of today and of tomorrow face an interesting dilemma. What do we keep; what do we throw away; what has worked; what has proven ineffectual and what do we modify? Do we change for sake of change by following every new and emerging professional fad, or do we cautiously resist and risk being labeled as out of touch and out of date?

It is the leadership of law enforcement agencies which has the most significant and immediate effect upon the delivery of constitutional, civil, enlightened, and effective law enforcement. Simply stated, if we strive for effective police organizations and service delivery, we must first develop effective police administrators. This book is designed to assist current and future police executives in sorting through important leadership and management issues.

The genesis of this book was a law enforcement executive retreat conducted in the state of Illinois. The Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board was interested in identifying skills, abilities, knowledge, and personal attributes important to surviving as a law enforce-

ment executive. Contemporary literature abounds with documentation on the limited tenure of police executives. However, Board staff knew of several chiefs and sheriffs who had served the same community consecutively for 20 or more years. This awareness led to the following line of inquiry, “What factors had contributed to their survival?” Do these chiefs and sheriffs hold knowledge and professional secrets that could be shared with others preparing for leadership positions? And importantly, is it possible to survive as a police chief or sheriff without also being viewed as effective?

Invitations to the executive retreat were sent to 20 law enforcement executives, who were deemed to be well respected throughout the state by their peers and by their respective communities, and who had served as police executives for 20 or more years. The executive retreat was conducted in a resort atmosphere, was scheduled to last two days, and had no formalized agenda or scheduled guest speakers. The objective of the retreat was to ask one question of the participant chief executives, “What has made you successful as a law enforcement executive?” In popular vernacular, these law enforcement executives had been there, done that. Our question was, How did you do that?

What started out with looks of doubt from the invited participants and the unstated question of, “What! You called me here for this?” slowly developed into reflection and to a realization of the importance of the question.

It was obvious that many of these old hands had not really given serious consideration to the myriad factors contributing to their extended successes. They had learned and adapted throughout their careers; they had made mistakes and overcome obstacles; they made positive incremental adjustments; and, they had endured, survived, and thrived.

In this experiment the Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board had a selfish, yet laudable, interest in answering the question of “What made you successful as a law enforcement executive?” If the Board is to effectively train new law enforcement leaders, a body of knowledge concerning the state of the practice must be identified. Philosophy and theory combined with day-to-day application and practice was the body of knowledge we sought to identify. Our hypothesis was that 20 years of experience multiplied by 20 participants would yield 400 years of applied application and practice as law enforcement executives.

What began as a two-day executive retreat, focused on one question, developed into a series of three more executive retreats, the development of a week-long course curriculum for newly-appointed law enforcement administrators (see the appendix) and the publishing of this book.

Many of the original contributors to this work currently serve as instructors in the law enforcement administrators course—law enforcement executives with considerable experience, teaching our law enforcement leaders of tomorrow. As experienced law enforcement leaders, they feel an important obligation to give back to the profession and to assist in the development of future law enforcement leaders.

The insights, perspectives, suggestions, warnings, concepts and ideas contained within this book codify years of wisdom and experience related to law enforcement leadership and management. Returning to our earlier proposition, what do we keep, what do we throw away, and what do we modify?—that is the challenge to law enforcement leaders of tomorrow. But, it was also the challenge of law enforcement leaders who began their careers 20 years ago. It is the wise person indeed who learns from the lesson of the past in order to prepare for the future; who holds a healthy appreciation for tradition, but is open to challenge, exploration, inquiry, and change.

Thomas J. Jurkanin, Ph.D.

PREFACE

A PERENNIAL CONCERN VOICED BY POLICE CHIEFS AND SHERIFFS from large and small departments is: you can do it correctly, you can be professional and still lose your job. The recent dismissals of chiefs over political differences with mayors or city councils are indicative of the job tenure problems faced by many law enforcement executives. Today, police chiefs are less secure in their positions than ever before. A scandal is no longer a necessary requisite to dismissal. The days of the police chiefs position as one of the most secure in local government have given way to a decade in which the position may be one of the least secure (Mahtesian, 1997).

Currently, the Police Executive Research Forum estimates that the average large city police chief will last anywhere from two-and-a-half to four years on the job. However, as Charles Mahtesian noted in a recent article in *Governing* magazine: "The sacking of the police chief has become part of the routine of the 1990s" (p.19). The issue of long-term survival has become the hot topic among law enforcement executives. Organizations such as the Police Executive Research Forum have initiated studies that attempt to measure and track the length of tenure among executives in the profession.

There is considerable debate as to why the rate of turnover among chiefs is increasing. As with any job, there are circumstances the officeholder can control or at least influence, while other environmental factors are beyond the control of the individual. Factors likely contributing to increased turnover include: (1) increases in the number of competing constituencies chiefs must appease, (2) new demands and expectations of police departments and police chiefs, and (3) the perception that all government (including police programs) are part of the problem, not the solution, in our society. One cannot measure the impact of any one of these factors on local law enforcement executive turnover. However, it is reasonable to suggest that they collectively have influenced police executive tenure.