

**COMMON SENSE POLICE  
SUPERVISION**

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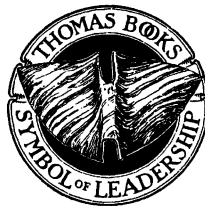
# COMMON SENSE POLICE SUPERVISION

Practical Tips for the First-Line Leader

*By*

**GERALD W. GARNER**

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*To  
Kathy*



## PREFACE

The supervision of law enforcement personnel is unlike any other endeavor on Earth. It is not easy. The work is saddled with great challenges, but it can produce tremendous rewards.

A great deal has been written and spoken about law enforcement supervision and leadership. Some of it has been quite helpful. At other times, theory has smothered practicality. Considerable psychobabble and “modern management” gibberish has been uttered on the topic. Neither is very useful to the working law enforcement leader.

This book aims to stimulate the veteran, novice, or would-be police supervisor to utilize his or her most powerful tool in carrying out the duties of an effective leader. That tool is COMMON SENSE. Made up of life experience, good judgment, prudence, and a well-developed ability for solid reasoning and logical decision making, common sense will guide the intelligent individual in finding effective solutions to most of the problems he or she will encounter while leading police personnel.

The first edition of *Common Sense Police Supervision* presented the basics needed by the successful police supervisor. The second edition bolstered them and added chapters for the leader facing the twin challenges of leading his troops into the era of community-oriented policing while keeping them safe on the street. This third edition updates the leadership guidelines and adds two more chapters. One furnishes the law enforcement leader with the know-how he will need when called upon to represent his agency in front of the news media. The second offers him guidance in leading his people to provide exceptional customer service in a day when true service is increasingly rare.

This book will not enable its reader to speak glibly in the latest, pop management catch phrases and buzz words. What it DOES offer is solid, practical, leadership advice developed from the experiences and observations of real police supervisors.

While this text emphasizes the extreme importance of the police sergeant, its contents will be of equal value to anyone in a position of leadership in a law enforcement agency. Although the narrative most often uses the male gender, it should be obvious to all that the choice is for ease of reading only. Women long ago established that they are the equal of their male counterparts as effective law enforcement leaders. In the future they should be better represented in law enforcement's leadership ranks.

It is the author's sincere belief that the current or wannabe supervisor who follows the dictates of his or her ethics and common sense cannot help but serve law enforcement as a highly capable leader. It is towards that potential for excellence that these efforts are directed.

G.W.G.



## INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to learn too much about how to be an effective leader. A great leader never stops learning. He or she does it for the right reason: to help others by helping guide the people, policies, and operations of a modern law enforcement organization. But there is a more “selfish” yet equally legitimate reason for learning to excel as a leader. In a world in which seemingly everyone is willing to sue everybody else for just about anything under the sun, the responsible police supervisor will see to it that he protects his organization, his people, and himself by doing things the right way for the right reasons at all times. Equally important, he will ensure that those he leads do the same. He will assure that any lawsuit ever targeted on him and his agency alleging “failure to supervise” does not accurately describe the way in which he leads his law enforcement employees.

This book emphasizes the real value of common sense in good leadership practices. The first two chapters examine just what supervision means and seek to show the hopeful leader what he or she needs to know and do to make the leap from frontline officer to first-line supervisor.

Chapter Three discusses supervisory ethics and professional responsibilities while Chapter Four explores the key qualities of true leadership. Chapter Five looks at the police leader’s tasks as educator and trainer and offers some helpful hints for succeeding as an instructor. Chapter Six examines the supervisor’s vital job as an evaluator of employee performance and gives tips on how to do it well. Pitfalls awaiting the careless job performance appraiser are exposed, too.

Chapter Seven scrutinizes the leader’s role as a disciplinarian in the correction process while Chapter Eight covers his or her work as a planner in areas ranging from special operations to personnel deployment to personal goal setting. Meanwhile, Chapter Nine targets the very important communication function and furnishes concrete sug-

gestions for improving both oral and written communication skills. Barriers to effective communication are identified. Chapter Ten supplies problem-solving advice to aid the police leader as an effective counselor to subordinates experiencing a variety of difficulties.

Chapter Eleven sees the law enforcement leader as a manager of human and material resources who can visualize the integral parts of the organizational “Big Picture.” Chapter Twelve delves into the difficult job of the complaint or grievance processor. The proper handling of allegations of police misconduct is detailed. Chapter Thirteen takes a candid look at some special problems such as organizational survival for the ethical police leader.

Chapter Fourteen analyzes the first-line leader’s pivotal role in today’s community-oriented style of policing. Chapter Fifteen reminds the police leader of his or her responsibilities as a teacher, inspector, advocate and role model for officer safety.

The last two chapters are presented in a slightly different format than the rest of the book. Chapter Sixteen gives the first-line leader the skills he will need when he is given the task of serving as his agency’s on-scene spokesperson in front of the ladies and gentlemen of the news media. Finally, Chapter Seventeen serves as a resource the leader can rely upon when he educates his subordinates on the intricacies of providing exceptional customer service, a commodity too often missing in both public and private sectors today.

No law enforcement organization in the country has too many competent leaders. It is time to get on with the task of creating more. . . .

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i> .....	.vii
<i>Introduction</i> .....	.ix
<b>Chapter One: What Is Supervision?</b> .....	.3
Theory and Common Sense .....	.4
Supervision in General .....	.5
Police Supervision in Particular .....	.10
Some Specific Tasks .....	.15
Summary .....	.18
<b>Chapter Two: Preparation for the Role of Police Supervisor</b> .....	.19
Psychological Preparation .....	.19
What's to Know? .....	.27
Test-Taking Skills .....	.31
Boards and Assessment Centers .....	.33
A Change in Outlook .....	.40
Summary .....	.41
<b>Chapter Three: Ethics of Police Supervision</b> .....	.43
Responsibilities to Management .....	.44
Responsibilities to Officers .....	.51
Responsibilities to Self .....	.56
Summary .....	.59
<b>Chapter Four: Qualities of a Leader</b> .....	.60
Characteristics of a Leader .....	.61
Bars to Leadership .....	.68
Command Presence .....	.76

Morale as a Tool .....	78
Summary .....	80
<b>Chapter Five: The Police Leader as an Educator .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Responsibility to Instruct .....	82
Topics for Police Instruction .....	83
Proper Use of Lesson Plans .....	86
The Presentation .....	91
Aids to Instruction .....	96
Summary .....	99
<b>Chapter Six: The Police Leader as an Evaluator .....</b>	<b>100</b>
Purposes of Evaluation .....	101
Means of Evaluation .....	103
Guidelines and Pitfalls .....	112
Inspection and Follow-up .....	119
Summary .....	122
<b>Chapter Seven: The Police Leader as a Disciplinarian .....</b>	<b>124</b>
Purposes of Correction .....	125
Requisites of Fair and Effective Discipline .....	131
Importance of the Supervisor in Discipline .....	138
Summary .....	139
<b>Chapter Eight: The Police Leader as a Planner .....</b>	<b>140</b>
Elements of a Plan .....	141
Writing Plan Objectives .....	145
Planning Goals for Employees .....	147
Planning Personal Priorities .....	149
Summary .....	151
<b>Chapter Nine: The Police Leader as a Communicator .....</b>	<b>153</b>
Elements of Good Communication .....	155
Hazards to Good Communication .....	164
Benefits of Good Communication .....	168
Written vs. Oral Communication .....	170
Summary .....	172
<b>Chapter Ten: The Police Leader as a Counselor .....</b>	<b>173</b>
Identifying Personal Problems .....	174

Problem-Solving Techniques .....	178
Sources of Assistance .....	183
Counselor-Counseled Relationship .....	186
Summary .....	191
<b>Chapter Eleven: The Police Leader as a Manager .....</b>	<b>192</b>
The Management Role .....	193
Handling Specialized Tasks .....	198
The Finished Product .....	201
Attitude Towards Change .....	208
Summary .....	210
<b>Chapter Twelve: The Police Leader as a Complaint Processor ...</b>	<b>212</b>
Allegations of Misconduct .....	213
Internal Complaints .....	229
Employee Grievances .....	230
Labor Issues .....	232
Summary .....	236
<b>Chapter Thirteen: Some Special Problems .....</b>	<b>238</b>
Straight Talk .....	239
Organizational Survival .....	242
Internal Strife .....	246
Corruption or Incompetence? .....	249
Current Issues .....	253
Summary .....	256
<b>Chapter Fourteen: The Police Leader's Role in Community Policing .....</b>	<b>257</b>
What Is It? .....	257
Problem Solving .....	259
The Supervisor's Role .....	261
Summary .....	265
<b>Chapter Fifteen: The Police Leader's Role in Officer Survival ...</b>	<b>266</b>
Training Responsibilities .....	268
Inspection Responsibilities .....	269
Equipment Responsibilities .....	270
Intervention Responsibilities .....	271

Employees' Emotional Survival .....	.272
Explaining Officer Safety .....	.272
The Supervisor as Role Model .....	.273
Summary .....	.274
<b>Chapter Sixteen: The Police Leader as Agency Spokesperson ...</b>	<b>.275</b>
Get the Facts Straight .....	.276
Anticipate and Practice .....	.277
What to Say .....	.279
Doing It on Television .....	.281
Traps to Avoid .....	.282
Writing a News Release .....	.285
Summary .....	.288
<b>Chapter Seventeen: The Police Leader's Role in Exceptional</b>	
<b>Customer Service .....</b>	<b>.289</b>
What Do They Want? .....	.290
What They Don't Want .....	.292
How Can They Be Reached? .....	.294
Good Call or Bad? .....	.296
Summary .....	.298
<i>Index</i> .....	.299

**COMMON SENSE POLICE  
SUPERVISION**





## Chapter One

### WHAT IS SUPERVISION?

“He takes care of you.”  
“He helps you.”  
“He looks out for your interests.”  
“He picks on you.”  
“He gets on your case.”  
“He’s a pain in the neck (or worse)!”

The two separate categories of descriptions would appear to describe two very different individuals. The first set would be good descriptors for Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. The second group might better be used to describe Darth Vader or some other character from a bad dream.

Yet, all six of these descriptive comments have been and could be attributable to employees describing a person quite important to their workaday lives: their supervisor. At one time or another, more than a few members of the national work force have felt many or most of these emotions for the man or woman they know as “boss.”

In reality, of course, what constitutes a supervisor and the manner in which he supervises is a bit too complex for such simplistic explanations, however sincerely they might be felt.

What, precisely, is a supervisor? What is it the supervisor is supposed to do? Many attempts have been made in an effort to answer that question.

Over the past decade much has been said and written about supervision and supervisors. Some of it has even been put forward by people who *know* something about their subject matter. Such contributions have been valuable to those charged with leadership responsibilities in virtually every field of human endeavor. Many of these hints on how to

supervise effectively are equally applicable to both men and women in all types of occupations.

At the same time, however, each field of work has its own peculiarities; it only follows that there must be corresponding adjustments in the supervision function. Law enforcement, by the very nature of the work performed and the quite special nature of its performers, certainly requires some peculiarities of supervision not found in other fields of endeavor. This chapter will examine some of these peculiarities and their meanings for supervisors and the supervised.

### **THEORY AND COMMON SENSE**

When one speaks of theories, he is of necessity talking about a particular concept or view of something that generally involves a set of guiding rules or principles. The theorist is most likely proposing an explanation for something in terms of propositions or suggestions of fact. If the theorist happens to be living in the ancient world and is attempting to explain thunder, for example, he may speak in terms of angry gods, riled godly sensibilities, and a need to humble a human race gotten out of line. If, instead, he is a modern management theorist attempting to reason out what it is that motivates people to do work, he may talk of personal needs, drives, and interrelationships.

All of this is well and good. The practical supervisor's most common complaint with the theorist, however, is that he sometimes fails to relate his neatly constructed postulates to the everyday world of work with its attendant everyday crises. The working supervisor may not be a student of formal theories himself. He may be a very pragmatic individual who daily sees the effects of some of what the theorists are trying to talk about—as seen in his workers and the work they do. He may not be able to label their behavior as neatly as the theorist could do. The important thing for him is that the behavior is real.

Unfortunately, what the formal theorists are trying to say to help the practicing supervisor may be lost or overlooked in the demanding practicalities of the everyday push to get the job done. At the same time, the working supervisor, regardless of his field, does have something going for him that many theorists may heed far too little in their

well-intentioned efforts. That very real something is frequently referred to simply as *common sense*.

In defining common sense, dictionaries often use such phrases as “normal intelligence” and “practical sense.” Common sense includes considerably more. Common sense also entails the practical application of good judgment, prudence, and an aptitude for calm and logical reasoning. It is the total of formal learning added to life experience. Yet its total is more than formal education and life added up. Common sense might be what the bright if “uncivilized” individual with no formal training whatever might apply when faced with a new situation or problem.

The police officer must, of necessity, possess a large ration of common sense. It sees him through the field situation or crisis that no training manual or departmental procedure deals with directly. By applying good common sense to procedures or techniques which he *has* been taught this very practical officer frequently can solve the unique problem at hand.

It is not reasonable to expect that a supervisor can survive and prosper with only good common sense and nothing else any more than it is reasonable to assume that the patrol officer can successfully do his job with no formal training at all and only his ample common sense to guide his actions. With common sense *and* some formalized training in both practical skills and a little theory, the contemporary supervisor can do his best as a leader.

Theory of supervision can be picked up from a myriad of books and professional journal articles. It will remain this book’s aim to show the supervisor the great potential contained within the intelligent application of his own good common sense to a variety of supervisory tasks.

## **SUPERVISION IN GENERAL**

Not unlike the term *common sense*, the word “supervision” invites some fairly standard responses in any attempt at definition. One often sees references to “the overseeing of the actions or performances of others.” Another stock and not unreasonable phrase notes that supervision is “the act of directing and controlling the talents and actions of others in the carrying out of certain goals and objectives.” With the