

**COMMON SENSE
POLICE SUPERVISION**

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COMMON SENSE POLICE SUPERVISION

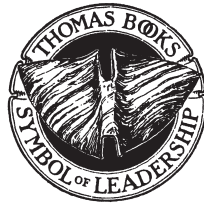
Practical Tips for the First-Line Leader

By

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Chief

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Greeley, Colorado*



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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. The third edition updated the leadership guidelines and added two more chapters. One chapter furnished 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 offered him guidance in leading his people to provide exceptional customer service in a day when true service is increasingly rare. This edition furnishes more real-life examples pertaining to leadership issues and adds yet another chapter, this one aimed at helping the leader plan his future in a law enforcement organization.

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, conscience 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 front-line 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 suggestions 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 three 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. 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. Chapter Eighteen is intended to help the police leader in planning his career and his future.

In addition, each chapter concludes with a brief “Points to Remember” section that provides a quickly-read and easily remembered checklist of the chapter’s salient points. This feature should prove especially useful for today’s in-a-hurry reader.

Not a single law enforcement organization in the country has too many competent leaders. It is time to get on with the task of creating more.

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**COMMON SENSE
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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 special nature of its performers, certainly involves some aspects 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 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 as *common sense*.

In defining common sense, dictionaries 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 and only his ample common sense to guide his actions. With common sense *and* some training in practical skills and a bit of 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 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 not unreasonable phrase notes that supervision is “the act of directing and controlling the talents and actions of others in carrying out certain goals and objectives.” With the exception of “overseeing,” a term that seems to reek of bullwhips, the given defini-

tions for supervision are quite acceptable for present purposes. Supervision must, in fact, deal with workers and their actions, abilities, and work products. In the case of the police employee, that work product will be delivered in the form of police service.

It is perhaps enough to say that the supervisor of any sort of work will find himself involved in certain, universal functions and responsibilities of leadership. First of all, he will be expected to lead. Unfortunately, it is possible to direct and control others (although with very little success) without setting the right example that a good leader provides. In this manner, the ineffective supervisor can temporarily get away with espousing the old “do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. His shortcomings are, however, destined to catch up with him.

The true leader knows that he cannot afford such a morally lazy approach to supervision. He does not ask anything of his subordinates that he is incapable of living up to or accomplishing himself.

A “follow me” philosophy can cover a wide range of activities and expectations. A patrol supervisor, for example, could hardly exhort his officers to maintain a high degree of physical fitness while he nurtures a fat gut himself. Likewise, his exhortations to avoid anything short of absolute integrity would look a little pale as long as he is personally accepting payoffs from the precinct’s biggest bookmaker. The true leader does not operate that way.

The supervisor also will be responsible for the continuing training of his charges. Whether he is working in an ice-cream factory or a police detective bureau, the supervisor will shoulder the responsibility for preparing his people for their roles. Some of this preparation may come from written materials; other parts of it may spring from a “hands on” practice session. Still more may be furnished via computer programs, lectures, discussions, and demonstrations. It will be the job of the supervisor to tailor and guide this imparting of knowledge and skills to all of his employees.

As an educator and trainer, the supervisor in just about any line of work will have to stay abreast of the latest approaches and devices for the transmittal of new knowledge to others. As a teacher himself, he will have to develop his own abilities to attract and hold the attention of his students while he endeavors to impart his subject matter.

The supervisor will be a planner. Whether he is plotting how many chickens he will need when his caterers feed the family reunion or how many officers he will have to have for his patrol team to handle

the ball-game crowd, he will be a planner. The supervisor's planning duties will range from relatively uncomplicated daily decision making to special projects and assignments for his boss. Whether he is scheduling the deployment of a patrol team or laboring over the chief's annual report, the police supervisor will need the skills of a planner.

The supervisor in any field will be a disciplinarian, too. The correction of improper conduct by his subordinates will be an important responsibility that he will not treat lightly. In his disciplinary function, the supervisor will not be working in an entirely negative area. His disciplinary efforts will be addressed more to changed behavior and improved performance than to outright punishment. He will be attempting to change for the better his peoples' actions. He will not be attempting to change the people themselves.

The responsibility to discipline fairly and wisely will sometimes be an uncomfortable burden for the leader to bear. Nonetheless, his decisions and actions as a disciplinarian will impact heavily upon the effectiveness of his subordinates as individuals and the organization as a whole. The duty to discipline, he will find, is a task he can never afford to avoid by "kicking it upstairs" or by blaming unpopular decisions on others. His unique position as part labor, part management demands that he be heard by his boss as the best judge of what is fair and proper discipline for one of his subordinates in a given situation.

Whatever his business or profession, the supervisor will be a counselor, confidant, and nonjudgmental listener. He will be a sympathetic ear for troubled employees. Where it is within his power to do so, he will attempt to help them solve their difficulties, job related and otherwise. While he will not be their solution, he will try to help them to find one. Where the problem lies outside of his area of expertise or authority, he will attempt to find a source that can provide the needed aid for his employee.

As a counselor, the supervisor will be patient. He will learn via experience when a subordinate may not want any specific action from him, but merely to be heard. This venting of frustrations and gripes will be recognized as healthful and necessary by the empathetic supervisor. He will listen.

As a counselor, the supervisor also will talk. He will give careful advice, knowing that a misunderstood or mistaken recommendation could boomerang on the troubled employee. The experienced supervisor will know when not to talk, too. He will recognize the appropri-