

Second Edition

BASIC HANDBOOK *of* POLICE SUPERVISION

A Practical Guide for Law Enforcement Supervisors



Gerald W. Garner

BASIC HANDBOOK OF POLICE SUPERVISION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerald W. Garner is chief of police for the city of Corinth, Texas. A 52-year veteran of law enforcement, he previously served as chief for over 12 years at the Greeley, Colorado Police Department, serving over 100,000 citizens. Chief Garner's 13 books include several on the topic of police supervision and leadership. He has served as a guest lecturer for the FBI National Academy at Quantico, Virginia and the International Association of Chiefs of Police in addition to numerous other law enforcement in-service schools, academies, universities, and community colleges. Perhaps most relevant of all, he served for 15 years as a first-line supervisor at the nationally-acclaimed Lakewood, Colorado Police Department, before retiring as a division chief following 30 years of service.

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**A Practical Guide for Law Enforcement
Supervisors**

By

GERALD W. GARNER

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Corinth, Texas*



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To Kathy, Sandi, and Samantha

A NOTE TO THE READER

Throughout the book the pronoun *he* is used when referring to supervisors or supervisory hopefuls. This is for ease in reading purposes only. It has long been established that women officers are in every way as competent as leaders as are their male counterparts.

PREFACE

At one time or another in his or her career, every law enforcement supervisor has wished for a handbook providing reliable guidance on what to do next. For most supervisors, that moment of wishful thinking comes many times over a leadership career.

This is that handbook. Written by a veteran law enforcement leader and compiled from the experiences, both good and bad, of a lot of law enforcement supervisors, it offers practical, no-frills advice about what to do to counter the day-to-day challenges and outright calamities that make up the first-line leader's work life. Perhaps even more important, it offers time-proven recommendations on how to prevent a bothersome situation from escalating into crisis proportions in the first place. The handbook will prove equally useful to the veteran, novice, or future law enforcement supervisor. Its sound advice will help him retain his emotional as well as physical and moral health in a real-world environment that seems to become more challenging every day. It will help him to lead and bring his people to share his practices and beliefs in doing a very critical job the *right* way.

Just as it should be, the handbook is short on theory and long on "how to" advice. It is literally a resource that the supervisor can tuck into an equipment bag, or otherwise keep close at hand. It will help him grasp his difficult job's various demands, balance competing interests, and excel as a leader, all the while serving as an exceptional role model for his employees. It likewise will aid him in carrying out the very practical tasks of communicating effectively, evaluating employee performance, correcting inappropriate behavior, and helping his officers survive both on the street and in the police organization. Meanwhile, the handbook will assist the law enforcement leader in working well with his own boss and planning his own career.

There is no job description in the world quite like that of first-line law enforcement boss. The job is as unique as it is difficult and vital

to the success of any successful police organization. The position should be and can be staffed by extremely competent people with organizational as well as physical courage. This book will help them become even better at their very important job.

INTRODUCTION

The law enforcement supervisor faced with the challenges of the street is really not looking for philosophical discussions of the finer points of personnel management theory. Rather, he most often needs practical advice for solving the real-life problems he faces on the job each day. That is precisely the kind of “how to” advice this handbook provides.

The handbook combines the lessons of the author’s 52-year law enforcement career with the actual experiences of a lot of first-line police leaders. Some of these lessons have been learned the hard way. The purpose of the book is to impart the knowledge without sharing the pain another law enforcement leader may have experienced in the process of gaining the information. Most of the challenges faced by today’s law enforcement supervisors have been confronted (and solved) before. The actors and the stage may have changed; the script is often the same.

Chapter 1 will help the supervisor understand his new role now that he’s not “one of the guys” anymore. Chapter 2 examines the leader’s many obligations while the book’s third chapter seeks to help the supervisor balance his host of new tasks.

Being a positive role model is one of the first-line leader’s most important jobs, and Chapter 4 will help him in his quest to serve as an exceptional model for his employees to emulate. Chapter 5 will help him fill his leadership toolbox while Chapter 6 provides time-proven guidelines for communicating effectively – an absolute must if he is to excel as a leader. Meanwhile, Chapter 7 will help the supervisor master one of his toughest tasks: measuring the performance of his subordinates.

Chapter 8 will aid the supervisor in receiving and investigating complaints of employee misconduct. Chapter 9 provides practical advice in administering corrective action to his personnel. The chap-

ter will not teach him to enjoy handing out discipline. Instead, it will help him fix broken behavior and save careers. Chapter 10 provides him with the basics for keeping those same employees safe in the face of the many dangers of the law enforcement officer's job.

On occasion, the front-line supervisor will find himself confronted on-scene by the ladies and gentlemen of the news media. Chapter 11 tells him how to feed the newshounds without getting bitten. In Chapter 12, the police boss will learn the organizational survival tricks of the trade for surviving his own boss, while Chapter 13 will help guide him safely through the minefields of his own organization with its always present politics and pitfalls.

Chapter 14 will guide the law enforcement supervisor in serving as an effective leader during tumultuous times. The book's next two chapters provide advice on putting it all together and determining what to do next to assure a rewarding career and life.

This basic handbook is indeed a practical guide for today's law enforcement supervisor. Coupling that knowledge with his own good judgment and common sense, he should be well-prepared for whatever challenges the future might bring.

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BASIC HANDBOOK OF POLICE SUPERVISION

Chapter 1

HOW TO MASTER YOUR ROLE

You gained a lot when you became a supervisor. You certainly gained a lot of additional responsibilities. You gained additional respect and prestige, too. You doubtlessly began receiving a bit fatter paycheck and may have picked up some additional perks, as well. Hopefully, your gains were substantial once you sewed on those brand new stripes.

But you gave up some things when you became a supervisor, too. For one thing, you gave up the questionable privilege of griping about anything and everything concerning your organization and its leaders in front of whatever audience you might choose, whether inside or outside the department. You surrendered the option of damning the chief, the captain and your own immediate supervisor in front of your former colleagues who are now your subordinates. You gave up the ability to yammer about problems without proffering a realistic solution.

You gave up a lot, alright. But you did not give up anything that an ethical and competent leader requires to do his job, and do it well. In this case, the major change that has occurred in your work life will be a good thing. Your bosses certainly thought you were capable of mastering change, or they would not have chosen you for the role of supervisor in the first place.

Change for the better is still change, however, and change frequently does not occur without emotional fallout. Even good change can bring psychological upset. That's the topic to be explored next.

CHALLENGES FOR NEW SUPERVISORS

Supervising friends

Supervising senior employees

Supervising known “problem” employees

Realizing what you say and do has much greater impact now

Realizing it is no longer your job to do the work

Knowing that you are always on display

YOU'RE NOT ONE OF THE GUYS ANYMORE

You may have noticed it even before you affixed those new chevrons to your uniform shirt. While they were still friendly enough, your old pals just didn't treat you exactly the same as they did before. They may not have seemed quite as chummy, quite as unguarded in what they said in front of you. Your shift from buddy to boss had begun. You likely felt the change, however minor. To many of your friends, you were now one of *them*: the brass.

If it is any comfort to you, the “change” occurs in every kind of work, from the oil field to the battle field to the board room. Former peers are at least a little uneasy hanging and interacting with old acquaintances who are now their bosses. How great or how minor the discomfort for everyone involved depends upon a lot of things, ranging from the nature of the former relationship to the personalities of the individuals themselves. Whatever the case, the discomfort is often very real.

You almost certainly thought about the reality that former relationships would change before you ever decided to go for promotion. You already determined that you could handle the potential downsides in exchange for the benefits that your new role would bring. If not, you must face that truth now. Fortunately, if you are anything like the vast majority of your law enforcement peers who made the jump successfully you will determine that the favorable consequences of promotion greatly outnumber the bad.

Even more good news for you is that you do not have to stop associating with your old work pals. You can still have a beer with them or

take in the big game. You simply have to handle yourself just a little differently in their presence. You might say that you have a new outlook.

A NEW OUTLOOK

Now that you are the boss, you are expected to see a few things differently than you did as a first-line officer. For one thing, you are expected to take in the bigger picture of your organization that extends well beyond yourself, your assignment, your unit. As a patrol officer you had to concentrate on doing your own job well. What was going on in other parts of the agency may not have concerned you a great deal, so long as those doings were not obviously impacting you directly. You may not have much cared if the detectives were getting their fair share of resources or not so long as you were getting yours. Your own requirements were, after all, priority number one.

As a supervisor, you have to see the need for sharing resources agency-wide. Furthermore, you have to support filling that need through both words and action. On occasion that may mean offering personnel or other resources to another part of the department when you dearly would like to have them for yourself. That's called seeing the bigger picture that exists beyond your own slice of the larger pie that is a law enforcement organization. It is part of your new outlook on your work life.

Your revised outlook also has changed the way you look at some of those around you. Your line-level friends are now also your subordinates. In all likelihood, some of them are the people you must train, counsel, evaluate and lead. They are people you must, in a word, supervise.

At the same time, your superiors are no longer distant authority figures whom you can easily avoid. Now, some of them are your immediate bosses to whom you must turn for direction and advice. You are obligated to follow their orders. Indeed, things have changed in your world.

Your outlook likewise has been altered drastically in what you can ethically say to others about your peers and your supervisors. You undermine and weaken your fellow supervisors if you speak badly of them in front of your subordinates. You cause them equally serious

damage if you permit your employees to say bad things about them in your presence. It matters not if you agree with what your troops are saying. Permitting attacks on your colleagues in your presence is intensely disloyal and destructive to the organization in which you have been promoted to the position of leader.

This same prohibition on public criticism (or the tolerance of it) holds true when the individuals under attack occupy the upper echelons of your department. Once more, only bad things (including decreased respect for you from your subordinates) can result from the tolerance of such misbehavior. Your ethics as a leader do not permit such a morally lazy response. You are too good, too much of a leader for that.

Your very necessary change in outlook means that you look at the police organization much differently than you did as a front-line trooper. Your world has to be bigger now. Try to picture a supervisor, a leader in your organization whom you have always admired and perhaps wanted to emulate. How did he or she appear to view the organization? How did he or she look, sound and act in front of subordinates? The positive role modeling of that leader is what you are striving to duplicate. (More about role modeling later.)

A changed outlook does not mean less fun or freedom for you. Far from it. Sergeants tend to have more fun than anyone else in the department! An altered outlook does, however, call for a personal reassessment of what you can say and do in the presence of others. If you previously harbored the nasty habit of operating your mouth before engaging your brain, you will need to curtail the practice now. Your common sense not to mention your organizational survival requires no less.

Your new outlook is in no way a bad thing. It is what an effective leader masters and maintains. It is an integral part of the leader you have become.

WHAT YOU CAN (AND CAN'T) DO NOW

As noted, your world has changed in that you are faced with a new set of things you can and cannot do to add to the long list of other "rules" you follow as a law enforcement professional. These guidelines provide a framework for your job performance as a leader. They include the following:

- You CAN help influence the future direction of the agency. Believe it or not, the decisions you make or participate in today will help shape what your organization will look like in the future. That's one reason you want to always do your best and keep an eye cast on the future. The personnel you help guide and train today will be the department's future, even when you are no longer part of the organization.
- You CAN contribute to the effort to recruit and hire the best people. That's a huge part of building the agency's future. You should always be on the lookout for new "talent" and seek to attract good prospects to the organization. Their presence may help make your own job easier today. Tomorrow they will run the department once you have moved on. A good leader cares about what happens when he is no longer part of the picture.
- You CAN ably represent your agency and your profession in the community. You know that you are part of a good organization serving a noble profession. But you will run into a lot of otherwise smart people who don't know that. What you say about your department and your profession can impact a lot of individuals. You should strive to leave a good impression on each one via your actions as well as your words. *Look* for the chance to talk about what you do.
- You CAN set a great example as a positive role model. It's what your subordinates need from you more than anything else. As a leader your job is to *SHOW*, not *TELL* them how an ethical, professional peace officer works and lives. There is a great deal they can learn from you. Make sure that all of it is something you can be proud of.
- You CAN coach and mentor young talent. Many of your rookies will look to you for guidance on how to pursue their law enforcement careers. Others won't ask, but require guidance all the same. Go out of your way to spend time with them. Find out what is on their minds and what concerns them. You can strengthen both them and the agency by helping these youngsters learn the same lessons you did — but perhaps minus some of the pain!
- You CAN learn your boss's job and prepare for advancement. If you are truly good at your job as a leader, the agency needs your skills and abilities in its upper echelons. Here is the opportuni-