

COMMON SENSE LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERSHIP



GERALD W. GARNER

**COMMON SENSE LAW
ENFORCEMENT LEADERSHIP**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerald W. Garner, a veteran of 54 years in law enforcement, served as a police chief for over 20 years for three police departments, including one in a city of over 100,000 people. He has also served as a law enforcement officer in Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. Before becoming a chief, he served for 30 years at the nationally renowned Lakewood, Colorado Police Department before retiring as a division chief after a 30-year career there.

Garner holds a master's degree in administration of justice and is a graduate of the Senior Management Institute for Police conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum. He has authored 15 books and over 200 magazine articles on law enforcement and leadership topics. He has instructed at various police academies and specialized training schools in addition to the FBI National Academy, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.

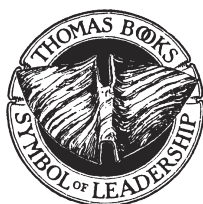
Having retired twice previously, Chief Garner came out of retirement to lead the Corinth Police Department in Corinth, Texas.

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By

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Chief of Police, ret.



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*For
Kathy, Sandi, and Samantha*

PREFACE

The problem with common sense is that it is not all that common anymore. You probably have said the same thing yourself. But exactly what *is* common sense, anyhow? Common sense is sometimes viewed as the accumulated learning brought about by life experience, good judgment, and exceptional decision-making with a smattering of education and training thrown in. It is what every law enforcement officer needs and the stuff that law enforcement leaders need in spades. Whatever your leadership rank in a police agency, you will be expected to demonstrate an exceptional amount of common sense.

Leading law enforcement officers is a complex undertaking. A lot of in-person and online courses propose to tell you how to do it well. After more than half a century spent in law enforcement, I have sat in many of these classes. I have never failed to learn *something* from each one of them. But my complaint with the guy or gal with the expensive briefcase, felt-tip markers, flip-chart, and big deck of PowerPoint slides is that he or she spends way too much time spouting theory while short-changing the students on the *practical* aspects of leading law enforcement officers. The colorful boxes, arrows, and circles on the screen are pretty, but they do not always help me a whole lot when I pull up next to the patrol car of one of my male subordinates and find that he is crying uncontrollably. They don't aid me much when I sit down across from the angry woman who tells me her spouse is involved in a torrid affair with one of my officers.

I have had the privilege of authoring separate leadership texts and articles for wannabe sergeants, first-line supervisors, law enforcement mid-managers, and police chiefs. Advice from *Making Sergeant*, *Common Sense Police Supervision*, *Basic Handbook for Police Supervision*, *Leading the Small Police Department*, and *Police Chief 101* can all be found here, along with a lot of new information. These different leadership ranks have enough in common that a single book would be of value to each of them. That is, of course, if the book contained *practical* advice that the law enforcement leader could apply to the challenges he or she faces virtually every shift.

This is intended to be that book. It recognizes that, while many leadership issues are the same regardless of the rank of the leader, some of the challenges faced by the sergeant are not identical to the ones confronted by the chief or sheriff. While advice applicable to every rank is furnished in each chapter, each chapter also addresses the different issues encountered at each level of leadership. All of that hopefully-helpful advice emphasizes practical application, not theory.

After all, that is what common sense is all about.

Gerald W. Garner

INTRODUCTION

Whether you serve your community as corporal or chief, no other job in the world compares to what you do. *You lead law enforcement officers.* As you know, the work brings great challenges and responsibilities. Whatever your rank in your organization, your tasks can be extremely difficult and sometimes frustrating ones. The good news is that the successful accomplishment of those tasks can also bring a great sense of satisfaction and pride.

You are a leader. Because you are a leader, you want to do all of your many tasks well and serve as a positive role model for others. You want to be known as an exceptional trainer, a knowledgeable expert on law enforcement tactics and procedures, a scrupulously fair job performance evaluator, and a just disciplinarian. You want to be comfortable in front of a camera or a community gathering of five or five hundred. You desire to plan, communicate, and make the tough decisions well. Your aim is to keep your subordinates both safe and sane. And you want to be able to counsel, coach, and mentor them competently towards accomplishing their goals and yours. In sum, you want to be a highly effective leader.

You will draw heavily upon your training, knowledge, and experience to do that. To be truly effective in your quest, you must add a healthy dose of common sense to these things. This book will aid you immeasurably by relating the experiences – good and bad – of other law enforcement leaders. The information provided is not based on theory but on actual practice. A solid core of common sense supports it.

It is not unreasonable to assume that you also want to take care of yourself throughout a long and rewarding leadership career. The book will help you do that by offering time-proven advice on working for someone, handling bad events, when and how to ask for help, and surviving the hazards of your position.

This book is about helping you do your important job extremely well while living to enjoy great satisfaction from your accomplishments. It's all about being a leader with common sense. It's about *you*.

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**COMMON SENSE LAW
ENFORCEMENT LEADERSHIP**

Chapter 1

WHAT IS A LEADER?

You are a leader. Someone – or, more likely, several individuals – concluded that you could lead others in achieving some version of goals and objectives, probably organizational ones. They then equipped you with the official authority needed to guide others. It may or may not have been your responsibility to develop the skills and abilities necessary to inspire those “others” to help achieve your organization’s goals and objectives.

But exactly what is this thing, this “leader,” that you have become? Many barrels of ink have been spilled in an effort to define the term “leader.” Many hours spent in supervision and leadership classes have attempted to do the same. Yet, the proposed definitions can vary widely depending on who is defining them.

Formal definitions aside, most people can quickly identify a leader in a crowd of diverse individuals. This identification may be based on manner of speaking, personal ethics and beliefs displayed, treatment of others, body posture, and more. It is a fact that true leaders often stand out in a crowd, based not only on what they do and say but also on what they believe in and stand up for. In your law enforcement career, you have undoubtedly observed and perhaps worked for men and women you readily identified as genuine leaders. You may have also seen and possibly worked under individuals who purported to be leaders but fell far short of that coveted status.

Whether you serve as a corporal, captain, or police chief, your desire is almost certainly for the term “leader” to be accurately applied to describe you. What follows will help ensure that the label fits you well. It all starts with arriving at a straightforward, working definition of what a leader truly is.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE IT?

Some attempt to define a leader by referencing historical figures who, by common agreement, exhibited exceptional leadership skills. They might cite wartime U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt as an exemplary leader. He was charismatic, an accomplished public speaker, and he led an entire nation in a noble cause. Therefore, he can be identified as an effective leader, which he certainly was.

But then there's Adolf Hitler, without a doubt the most evil man of the twentieth century. Did he have charisma? To conclude that he had it abundantly, you only need to look at the black-and-white newsreels of the era and observe the mass, frenzied crowds who worshipped him. Was he a great public speaker? Again, look at his passionate performances and the adoring faces of his audiences to know that he was.

Roosevelt led a democracy for a noble cause. Hitler instigated an apocalypse that claimed at least 50 million lives. Both were effective leaders, at least until one of them began losing badly. Therefore, it appears that goodness in character or cause is not always required to anoint someone as a leader.

Are leaders born or made? Are there natural leaders? If so, a lot of time, money, and energy are wasted in a whole cottage industry of leadership texts, courses, and websites. On the contrary, evidence suggests that leadership skills can be learned and effectively exercised by a significant portion of the population. Perhaps this reflects what a true leader thinks when they tell their subordinates, "I expect all of you to be leaders." You have probably heard that said more than once during your law enforcement career, as it is absolutely relevant in the profession you have chosen.

For present purposes, a working definition of a leader might look something like this:

A leader is someone who has both the *authority* and the *ability* to influence, guide, and direct a group of individuals to the accomplishment of a goal or task.

By that definition, you have already received permission, responsibility, and authority to lead. It is now up to you to refine your skills in developing (or further developing) your demonstrated ability to lead. This starts with adjusting your perspective on your organization and the people within it.

A CHANGE IN OUTLOOK

Now that you are a leader in your organization, you must see some things differently and respond to them in new ways than you did as a front-line officer. You need to view the bigger picture that exists beyond your current assignment, yourself, and your own needs. If you were previously a detective, for example, you likely did not concern yourself too much with what was happening elsewhere in the organization. Reasonably, you were focused on what was directly pertinent to your job.

As a leader, regardless of your rank, a narrow outlook must change. Seeing the bigger picture means you should be concerned with the happenings and resource needs in nearly all aspects of the department. You should help address those needs through both your words and actions. This might mean observing or directing resources, including human resources, to other areas in the agency, even if you would prefer to see them elsewhere. Larger needs must now take precedence over personal desires.

Your boss is no longer a distant authority figure whom you can avoid or, worse, speak negatively about in public. Whether you work for a captain or the town manager, you must not consistently turn to them for directions or advice. You must refrain from speaking ill of your supervisor in front of your subordinates, as doing so weakens and undermines their authority. An absolute ban on this type of behavior is a cardinal rule you must uphold. You cannot allow your subordinates to verbally attack your bosses in your presence. It does not matter if you agree with the negative comments your team is expressing. Only negative consequences, including a lack of respect for you as a leader, can arise from permitting such behavior. You are a capable leader who should not allow that to happen.

A changed outlook for the better does not imply that you will feel less satisfaction from your job; quite the opposite. It does, however, mean that you must now be mindful of what you say or do in front of others, particularly your subordinates. If you previously had the unfortunate habit of speaking without thinking, that ill-advised practice must come to an end. Your loyalty to your organization, as well as your own professional survival, requires nothing less.

Your new outlook is beneficial, not detrimental. It is a trait that an effective leader embodies as a positive role model. It is an integral part of who you are as an ethical and competent leader.

SOME DON'TS FOR YOUR BEHAVIOR

As a leader, there are numerous actions you should and must undertake. These deserve their own listing and discussion. However, the list of things you cannot do as an ethical and effective supervisor is just as important. That list includes the following:

Don't criticize other members of the department to your subordinates. You relinquished that questionable privilege when you were appointed to a leadership role, regardless of its position in the department hierarchy. Don't do it.

Don't gripe about your employer or his or her policies in front of your people. If you have an issue, try to bring a solution when discussing it privately with your boss. Present it in the appropriate setting at the appropriate time, which should never be in front of your subordinates.

Don't set a bad example in either your work or professional life. It is not enough to tell your employees what you want them to do and avoid. You must lead by example. Your aim is for your team to aspire to be like you.

Don't ever give less than your best effort, whatever the task. Your people are watching. You don't want them to put in a half-hearted effort, so you can't afford to, either. Whatever the task, give it your all.

Don't display a "bad attitude." You, too, can have a bad day – or several. Even if you feel sad, angry, depressed, or otherwise unlike your usual upbeat self, do your best to prevent your subordinates from seeing, hearing, or sensing it. Your team is constantly observing and taking cues from someone they admire.

Don't break the rules. Sounds simple enough, but it's vital. Show your people the importance of following the rules by doing it yourself. Do not cheat or otherwise fail to adhere to the guidelines you expect your employees to follow. Following the rules, whether formal or informal, means that you do everything correctly, from how you account for your work hours to how you treat a "difficult" citizen. Once again, your people are watching.

Don't lie, even for a "good" reason. You expect your subordinates to tell you the truth, without exception. They have the right to

expect the same of you, their leader. Omitting pertinent parts of the story (lying by omission) still constitutes untruthfulness. Your own boss will expect the truth from you in all matters. Occasionally, it may feel easier to tell an untruth in an effort to soothe feelings or “fix” a difficult situation. In reality, this approach will probably do neither, especially not in the long run. Credibility is a key component of your integrity as a leader. Nothing is more critical to your reputation as an honorable and admirable boss.

Don’t blame others for your actions or decisions. “I didn’t do it. Susie did.” That may or may not have worked for you in kindergarten, but it most assuredly won’t work for you as a leader. You’ve heard it before, and it’s absolutely true: Own your decisions. The same holds for your actions, right or wrong. Your people will expect it, and so will your boss. Doing so is yet another building block for constructing your reputation as a leader with unquestioned integrity.

Don’t neglect the personal touches. Your subordinates reasonably want you to see them as more than just numbers to plug into slots on an organization chart. Most of them likely wish to be recognized as individuals with names, faces, and families. They will appreciate verbal recognition or a note from you acknowledging their good work. An email, text, card, or phone call from you during significant moments in their lives will also be valued. Birthdays are important, but funerals and celebrations of life are equally significant. If a close family member of one of your team members has passed away and a service is being held nearby, your presence, when feasible, will definitely be appreciated. You care, so let your people see that you do.

Don’t get carried away with your own importance. Indeed, you are making a positive impact on your organization. However, someday, someone else will take your place, and the organization will continue to function. Throughout your career, you have likely known or at least observed a man or woman who was somewhat too consumed with themselves and their own importance. This probably did not leave you feeling positively impressed. It would be wise to step back and take an honest look at yourself from time to time. Are your insignias of rank, whatever they may be, feeling a bit burdensome? Self-confidence is essential for a law enforcement leader, but it must never cross into what others perceive as arrogance.

Author Garner provides advice from his numerous books for aspiring sergeants, first-line supervisors, law enforcement mid-managers, and police chiefs, which can all be found here, along with a lot of new information. These different leadership ranks have enough in common that a single book would be of value to each of them. That is, of course, if the book contained practical advice that the law enforcement leader could apply to the challenges they face virtually every shift. This is intended to be that book. It recognizes that, while many leadership issues are the same regardless of the rank of the leader, some of the challenges faced by the sergeant are not identical to the ones confronted by the chief or sheriff. While advice applicable to every rank is furnished in each chapter, each chapter also addresses the different issues encountered at each leadership level. Hopefully, all that helpful advice emphasizes practical application, not theory. After all, that is what *common sense* is all about. You will draw heavily upon your training, knowledge, and experience to do that. To be truly effective in your quest, you must add a healthy dose of common sense to these things. This book will aid you immeasurably by relating the experiences – good and bad – of other law enforcement leaders. The information provided is not based on theory but on actual practice. A solid core of common sense supports it. The book will also help you take care of yourself by offering time-proven advice on working for someone, handling bad events, when and how to ask for help, and surviving the hazards of your position. This book is about helping you do your important job extremely well while living to enjoy great satisfaction from your accomplishments. It's all about being a leader with common sense. It's about you.



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