

★ SUPERVISING ★ PATROL OFFICERS

Excelling at the Most Important
Job in Law Enforcement



GERALD W. GARNER

SUPERVISING PATROL OFFICERS

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 served as a law enforcement officer in Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. Before becoming a chief, he served at the nationally-renowned Lakewood, Colorado Police Department before retiring as a division chief after a 30-year career there.

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Having retired twice previously, Chief Garner came out of retirement to lead the Corinth, Texas Police Department before retiring for the third time. Presently he writes and speaks on law enforcement leadership topics.

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**Excelling at the Most Important Job
in Law Enforcement**

By

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Chief of Police, ret.



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*For
Kathy, Sandi, and Samantha*

PREFACE

As any veteran, law enforcement top leader will tell you, Patrol officers have the most difficult job in the organization. Those same leaders also will acknowledge that Patrol's first-line leader, whether he or she is called sergeant or something else, holds the most *important* job in the department. It always has been so.

Your job is a complex and multifaceted one. You are neither a member of upper management nor a first responding ground-pounder, a working cop. You occupy the territory somewhere in between, in which you have a legion of important duties to perform, and perform effectively. You must be a skilled trainer, a compassionate counselor, a fair disciplinarian, an officer safety expert, a tactical situation commander, and many other things. Perhaps most important of all, you must be a positive role model for the troops that are always watching your every move. And while you may not be a first-line officer anymore, your people will expect you to have a cop's sense. Indeed, many people depend on you to be an intelligent, caring, and courageous leader. What you now hold in your hands will help you accomplish all those things.

By the time you reach the end of this book, you probably will have said to yourself more than once, "I already knew that." That's good. In addition to providing new material drawn from the experiences of a lot of exceptional Patrol supervisors, the text works to confirm some things about supervision that you may have long thought to be true. In addition, you may find yourself saying at some point, "That's just common sense." Bingo. The book emphasizes the great value of your plain common sense in responding to various challenges, especially when there may not be a cut and dried, "official" answer. Within these covers, the reader will also find advice on leading his or her people in an era when the name of the game is community-oriented policing and exceptional customer service to a taxpaying public. Finally, you will gain some important tips for helping your officers thrive within their organization and plan their future careers.

No law enforcement agency in America has enough truly great first-line leaders. The purpose of this book is to help create more of them. For the already-great first-line supervisors out there, this text will help make them even better.

Gerald W. Garner

INTRODUCTION

If you are looking for a volume about Leadership Theory, this isn't it. Instead, this book provides valuable, experience-proven, practical advice for the most important individuals in American law enforcement: the first-line supervisors of Patrol officers. It has been written by a 54-year veteran of policing who spent, by choice, 15 years as a sergeant at a nationally-renowned law enforcement agency. He concluded his career by serving for over 20 years as a police chief at three municipal law enforcement agencies.

The book's sixteen chapters provide guidance to new and veteran patrol supervisors in several key areas. Chapter 1 discusses the art of merging officers and their supervisor (you!) into a highly-effective team, while Chapter 2 goes into detail in describing the things you must do—and avoid doing—to become the best Patrol supervisor ever. Chapter 3 outlines the steps to establish the relationship of mutual respect and trust you desire and need with your team members. Meanwhile, Chapter 4 delves into what is required to be an exceptionally positive role model for your officers. Then, Chapter 5 explores how to succeed (or fail) as a highly effective communicator, an absolute must-know for a great leader.

Chapter 6 covers your key role as a trainer of Patrol officers, while Chapter 7 furnishes practical guidance on how to serve as an effective counselor for troubled or troubling cops. Chapter 8 explores your role as a disciplinarian and how to discipline the right way. Then, Chapter 9 provides guidance on the challenging task of preparing and presenting employee performance reviews. Chapter 10 provides guidance on how to receive and resolve citizen complaints against your officers.

Chapter 11 provides an important discussion on the vital topic of ethics as applied to the Patrol officer's difficult job. Next, Chapter 12 delves into the details of protecting your officers from the dangers of the street. How to lead your officers effectively during a critical incident response is the topic of Chapter 13. In Chapter 14, you will pick up some pointers for helping your people provide top-notch service to their citizen-customers, a necessity if your

agency is to receive needed support from the public. The book's next and final two chapters offer tips for helping your officers develop effective career strategies within their organization and plan for their future. "Organizational survival" is a topic you will not often find talked about in police supervision classes, but you will find it covered in depth here.

Supervising Patrol Officers offers vital, pragmatic leadership advice that will be of equal value to both novice and experienced Patrol supervisors. Along with the knowledge, skills, and abilities you already possess, it will help you become an even better leader of the nation's front-line guardians.

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SUPERVISING PATROL OFFICERS

Chapter 1

TWO ROLES THAT MERGE

You and the Patrol officers you lead hold the keys to the success or failure of your law enforcement agency. Period. You are *that* important. Ask any law enforcement CEO worth their stars and they will acknowledge that you and your people are absolutely critical to the effectiveness of the department. They realize that while a police chief or sheriff can jump up and down and spout orders until he or she turns purple in the face, little is going to happen until first-line supervisors like you translate words into action. Without you and your ground-pounders, your agency's mission of providing service and protection to the community cannot be accomplished. You are *that* important.

If you're not already a first-line supervisor, chances are you aspire to be one. It is you and your Patrol officers who will be the first to arrive on the scene, regardless of the issue—be it a question, concern, service call, crime, accident, or disaster. Most of the time, you and your uniformed officers will manage the situation with little or no outside help. If the situation requires specialists, it will be you and your team who will be responsible for stabilizing and securing the scene until SWAT, detectives, narcotics units, or higher-ups arrive. As any law enforcement specialist will agree, their work becomes significantly easier or more difficult depending on what you and your team do or don't do. You are that vital.

Your officers have their role to play. You have yours. By working as a team, you will handle whatever happens successfully. Your department and your community are depending on you. You are *that* important.

THE PATROL OFFICER'S ROLE

Someone has to respond when a citizen calls 911. Usually, it is a young man or woman in a patrol officer's distinctive uniform. This is the individual who, alone or with peers, is expected to handle the situation safely and effectively, no matter how complex, strange, or dangerous it may be. Such calls and contacts make up the daily workload of the American patrol officer.

The public expects a lot from its uniformed guardians. They are expected to deliver babies and wrestle criminals into custody. They must direct traffic, solve crimes, mediate disputes, counsel the young and foolish, and comfort the ill and elderly. They need to stay calm when everyone else is losing theirs. They are required to be fair and compassionate even when the world they work in often isn't. Indeed, a lot hinges on the men and women you will lead as a Patrol supervisor.

As you probably have noticed, your patrol officers are very much like other members of the society they and you are part of. They get married and divorced. They have children. They go through personal highs and lows. They experience both joyful and sad moments. Sometimes they get sick. Sometimes they are hurt or killed while doing what they have sworn to do. These are the men and women you have agreed to lead.

However, you have likely also discovered by now that there are things that set these people apart from the general population. Many harbor an inner drive to help others and improve their community. Most want to do the right things in the right way. Most display great courage and just as much compassion when either is required. Most want to do a good job and please their leader. Most are very good people.

Because these good people are human, they sometimes face issues that may require your help as their leader. Sometimes, they will make good-faith mistakes. Very rarely, some will err in ways that may not be made in good faith. And sometimes they will need someone with patience, accessibility, and a willingness to listen. That person may well be you.

There is no doubt that the Patrolman or Patrolwoman bears more than their share of the work in your department. You, as their supervisor, are the best person in the agency to help that officer overcome the unique challenges of the job. The rest of this book will support you in fulfilling that important task.

THE PATROL SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

As a first-line supervisor, you are the most important person in the work lives of your patrol officers. Indeed, your people are aware of the existence and directives of the lieutenants, commanders, captains, and deputy or assistant chiefs in the organization. They even know that somewhere out there is a chief, sheriff, or director doing something. But it is you, their immediate supervisor, who matters the most to them. It is you who they expect to listen to their concerns, provide guidance and support, and lead them safely through their always-challenging and sometimes-hazardous jobs. You are their boss. You are their leader.

That places the responsibility on you to always do the right things the right way, as your troops are constantly watching. That is a duty you knowingly accepted when you took on your supervisor's badge and agreed (or swore) to perform the duties of a law enforcement leader honorably and ethically. In that role, you have much to offer your team.

There is a good chance your job title is sergeant. However, depending on your department, it could be something else, ranging from corporal to lieutenant. Regardless of the rank, you are responsible for your subordinates' work and well-being. That covers a wide area. You have many tasks to handle as the first-line supervisor of patrol officers.

You are, first and foremost, a positive role model. You set the example you want your team to follow. In the process, you will work to build a relationship with your team members based on mutual trust and respect. Along the way, you will demonstrate your skills as an excellent communicator and a skillful trainer. You will serve as both an attentive and compassionate counselor and a fair disciplinarian, as needed. Periodically, you will evaluate your personnel's job performance and guide them toward improvement when necessary. Occasionally, you will receive citizens' questions and complaints about your officers, and you will work diligently to resolve each one.

You recognize and understand the challenges your officers face on the street because you have been where they are now. You will discuss with them how reliance on personal and professional ethics can help them overcome some of these dilemmas. You will serve effectively as both an officer safety instructor and a vigilant risk manager—one of your most important roles as a safety-conscious leader. You will support your officers in their community-oriented policing efforts and

guide them in providing outstanding service to their citizen-customers, the taxpayers. Finally, you will teach your troops about career survival within a law enforcement organization and how to plan for their future. In short, by doing your job properly, you will stay busy.

Serving as an exceptional Patrol supervisor is perhaps the most challenging, yet clearly the most vital, position in law enforcement. The good news is that you are not working alone. Now, you will find yourself leading a team that you have prepared for a demanding and important role in society.

TOGETHER YOU ARE A TEAM

If you are an experienced supervisor, you might remember the first time you met the group of individuals who are now your subordinates. (If this hasn't happened to you yet, it will.) At that initial point in the relationship, you were probably like two tomcats on a fence. Your new subordinates were trying to recall everything they had heard and thought they knew about you. Were you known in the organization as a saint, a beast, or something in between? Were you recognized for being fair? What were your likes, dislikes, and hot buttons? Could your people trust you to back them when they were right? Were you known for being strict with discipline when they were wrong? They probably had many more questions as well.

And how about you? You, too, probably remembered what you may have heard or personally observed about each member of the group. Were any labeled, accurately or not, as "problem employees"? Were the reputations based on facts or biased opinions? What about individual strengths and weaknesses? Which ones were considered the most dependable workers, and which ones might need some help to reach your expectations? Who could you count on for the most support in getting things done? Were any likely to oppose your efforts? Undoubtedly, you also had additional questions.

At this point, the group consisted of all of you with you as the appointed leader. You could not yet call it a team. That would come later, hopefully soon. It would happen when, and if, a relationship of mutual trust and respect was established. It was now your job to create that much-desired, much-needed state of harmony. Your subordinates, or at least most of them, wanted that kind of relationship. You definitely did, too. Your superiors in law enforcement also wanted and

expected that kind of team and leader connection to develop. There was a task to complete, and you, as a leader, were expected to make it happen.

The law enforcement community is fortunate to have many effective, efficient, and well-led patrol teams that do the job of serving and protecting the American public well. You must be a leader of one of those outstanding teams. However, the disappointing reality remains that not every group of workers led by a designated leader is either effective or efficient. This can happen elsewhere, and it sometimes happens in law enforcement. You may have experienced this firsthand when you unintentionally sat down in a restaurant where the staff is rude, the place isn't well-maintained or clean, the service is poor, and the whole establishment conveys a "we just don't care" attitude.

On the other hand, you probably have visited a restaurant where the staff is welcoming, friendly, and helpful. The place is clean, the service is exceptional, and the food served to customers is of excellent quality. This might be the location where you see the boss—the team leader—greeting guests, mopping tables, delivering hot food from the kitchen, and generally taking part in the basic work he or she expects from employees. The establishment can accurately be called popular and successful, mainly because of the efforts of the team leader. The leader sets the tone and establishes the expectations for the entire operation.

You may have seen similar situations in your own profession or agency because they definitely happen. They can work out for everyone's benefit or go the other way. One police chief recalls his experience with "Sergeant Dave" when he was a rookie patrol officer: "We worked the all-night shift. One night at briefing, 'Sgt. Dave' told us he would be napping in the dumpster behind the police station, and he was not to be disturbed unless it was really, really important. We doubted he was really in the dumpster, but we took him at his word that he was not to be bothered. We knew we hadn't seen him on the street. You could say morale on Dave's team wasn't very high."

In more recent times, young patrol officers working in multiple large city police departments have reported similar supervisory conduct. As one officer said, "The Patrol sergeants have made it clear to us that calling for one of them to respond to anything short of an officer-involved shooting should not happen. It has been equally clear that we will be in deep trouble if we do call for a supervisor. We're not sure exactly what they are all doing during the shift, but they are not out there with us."



This book offers valuable, experience-based, practical advice for the most important people in American law enforcement: first-line supervisors of patrol officers. Its sixteen chapters guide both new and experienced patrol supervisors in key areas. It begins by explaining how to foster teamwork between officers and their supervisors and covers what you must do (and avoid doing) to become an excellent patrol supervisor. The author, a 54-year veteran of law enforcement, spent 15 years as a sergeant at a nationally renowned agency and served over 20 years as a police chief at three municipal agencies. Other topics include building mutual respect and trust with your team, being an exceptional positive role model, succeeding or failing as an effective communicator, training patrol officers, and serving as an effective counselor for troubled officers, including proper discipline. Additional topics include preparing and delivering employee performance reviews, handling citizen complaints, the importance of ethics, protecting officers from street dangers, leading during critical incidents, and assisting personnel in providing excellent service. The final two chapters advise on helping officers develop career strategies within their organization and plan for their future. "Organizational survival" is rarely covered in police supervision classes, but it is examined thoroughly here. *Supervising Patrol Officers* delivers practical leadership advice that benefits both new and experienced patrol supervisors. Along with your current skills and knowledge, it will help you become an even more effective leader of the country's front-line guardians.

