

**Advanced Leadership Training as a Means of Improving Law Enforcement**

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**Abstract**

With more scrutiny being directed at the law enforcement profession in recent years, effective and credible leadership at every level of the organization has become even more important. To ensure these leaders are present in our organizations, providing advanced-level leadership training to the current and future leaders is vital. This paper will establish the rapidly evolving, unpredictable, and dangerous situations law enforcement agencies face requiring the implementation of advanced leadership training. We will compare the military and law enforcement leadership development and the priority the military takes in developing its leaders. We will discuss the importance of providing training to officers before they find themselves in leadership positions and the advanced training available for our current leaders. We will cover how leaders can impact the agency's relationship with the community. We will discuss the need for advanced leadership training to educate leaders and potential leaders on the positive and negative uses of social media. We will also address the need for this training to consider human factors such as officer well-being. Based on our research, it seems imperative for law enforcement agencies to implement advanced leadership training.

## **Introduction**

Great leadership is essential in all aspects of law enforcement, from the new hire's first day on the job to the most senior officer nearing his retirement. Advanced leadership training can help us to develop great supervisors. One area where leadership must be in place is during unexpected, highly stressful, and possibly dangerous situations. Law enforcement has always consisted of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity, known as VUCA. Today more than ever, departments around the nation are experiencing VUCA more frequently. It may come from the growing popularity of active-killing events, officer-involved shootings, and protests that can turn into violent riots at any given time. These incidents, including many others, will undoubtedly increase VUCA in our profession. How VUCA is handled during a crisis will not only affect the department but will ultimately bleed over to our community through the media and the ever-growing popularity of social media outlets. Our ability as leaders to handle VUCA can significantly affect the outcome of a situation and how the community perceives our competence in our duties. Leaders must be capable of adaptive decision-making, referred to as problem-solving (Dugan 2017). A good leader must be credible with the media and the public to assure the situation and that the investigation will be handled correctly and without bias. Normand (2015) states, "Our goal should be to build career-long leaders who can address the chaos in policing and thrive in Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity as competent servants and guardians with empathy, sympathy, and a high degree of intellect."

On January 6, 2021, a mob of Donald Trump supporters stormed the U.S Capitol to interfere with the certification of the electoral votes of the presidential election. The mob members quickly passed security and law enforcement personnel with little to no resistance. At approximately 2 p.m., the mob had access to the Capitol, during which time members of the

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Senate and House debated an objection to Arizona's electoral votes. Some members were able to be evacuated, while others had to seek shelter in an underground bunker. Meanwhile, the rioters continued to loot and destroy the building. It took two hours before the National Guard was activated to gain control, allowing law enforcement and the FBI to begin clearing the Capitol. The chaos continued for several more hours, and it was not until approximately 8 pm that the Capitol was declared safe and free of rioters. The incident resulted in the loss of life of a protester and over 100 officers injured.

Most would agree the thought of a mob attacking the Capitol was far from anyone's mind, but we ask the question. Two of the aspects of VUCA? As previously mentioned, the answer would be uncertainty and complexity. There is no argument that the attack on the capital was complex, and no one was certain it would have ever occurred in today's time. We, as leaders, must be physically and mentally prepared for such incidents. We must not only prepare ourselves but our citizens as well. A successful leader needs to have the ability to adapt and change to each situation and not stick to one specific method. Normore (2022) stated, "Leadership is a process and interactive." It can be left up to debate, but if the officers had been adequately trained and prepared, the damage, while not prevented, could have been lessened.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Military Comparison**

Most law enforcement agencies do a poor job at preparing future leaders for the responsibility of leading others. Newly promoted officers are expected to know more by just being promoted. Unfortunately, this is not a realistic assumption. "The lack of thorough, proactive police management training looms even larger as many older, experienced officers are

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heading into retirement; this has created upper-level vacancies that are often filled by officers with little to no formal leadership and management training” (Fritsvold, n.d.). While there has much criticism regarding the “militarization” of the police, there are things the law enforcement profession can learn from the military, most notably the development of its leaders.

This introduction to leadership begins in each member’s respective basic training. From drill instructors leading by example, the assignment of leadership billets within a squad, and classes on principles of leadership and leadership traits, the importance of leadership is significant. However, this is not the case in a law enforcement academy class where the main concern is teaching the skills to graduate a basically trained police officer. If we want the statement “Every Officer is a Leader” to ring true, this must be changed early on in a police officer’s career.

The military makes it a main priority to the training and development of their leadership personnel. According to Cleverly (2016), “I see the military spends a lot of effort training supervisors. Each time you get promoted, you receive more leadership training. In the military, each person receives weeks to months of training at each promotion, while in policing a new supervisor is lucky to get a two- to three-day class. I see the military leaders as far more prepared for leadership positions than new police supervisors” (p. 10).

In the Marine Corps, for example, enlisted personnel begin their leadership training with a course titled *Leading Marines*. This is a required course that is necessary to be promoted to Corporal. It is followed by the *Corporals Course*, *Sergeants Course*, *Career Course*, and *Advanced Course*. All these subsequent courses are a requirement to be promoted to the next rank. For officer ranks, the Marine Corps offers the *Expeditionary Warfare School* and the *Command and Staff College*.

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Another difference between the military and law enforcement is military members are expected to attain rank within certain time requirements or face discharge. Police agencies are filled with career patrol officers, either by their choice or the choice of those above them, and this does not negatively impact their careers to the point they are terminated. We have seen officers who refuse promotions because it is not in their current division or in another job they do not want to do.

A sharp contrast between the military and law enforcement is a military leaders' pride comes from the successes of their people. Dr. Wes Doss (2018) states, "In the military, a supervisor is not judged based on his or her own accomplishments, but rather from the achievements of those he or she leads. The supervisor's role is the mission as much as it is the development of his or her people to move up and eventually take his or her place" (para. 25). This differs from some law enforcement leaders in that their sources of power come from their knowledge, skills, and abilities or in their attendance in a training course no one else has attended. This can be a point of contention and can cause animosity among the rank and file. This could be considered a form of toxic leadership in that the leader is only concerned with his or her training and not the betterment of their subordinates.

A veteran of both the military and civilian law enforcement, Dr. Doss (2018) states, "The lives of law enforcement today are demanding to say the least, and scrutiny from our communities has never been higher. It is during the infrequent times when high liability skills are called into play that both agency and officer are most vulnerable. A better-trained and better-prepared individual wields the responsibility that comes with use of force better, more confidently, and much more efficiently. Modern law enforcement could learn much from how

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the military prepares its people and how it leads them to accomplish difficult tasks in some of the world's most challenging environments" (para. 30).

### **Training Our Officers in Advanced Leadership**

To incorporate advanced leadership into law enforcement we must include it in our training. We should start in the earliest stages of training and development. We can develop programs to introduce recruits to leadership principles during the police academy. By exposing them to these ideas early on we will make it easier for them to understand advanced leadership concepts in the future. This will also encourage our young officers to believe in our commitment to advanced leadership.

Likewise, we need to make leadership training part of our in-service training. This will allow us to include the officers that did not learn leadership principles in the police academy. It will also help us to reinforce these concepts to our officers throughout their careers. We can also include advanced leadership classes during our in-service training sessions for our current leaders. Training is like exercising and we need to ensure that we create a continual learning environment. If we stop exercising, our muscles will atrophy and if we stop working on our leadership skills, we will return to our natural habits of leadership.

As our agencies identify and promote supervisors, we can provide access to training that is more intensive about advanced leadership, such as the Institute for Credible Leadership and Development. We should encourage these supervisors to take advantage of training opportunities to help them become more effective and competent leaders. We should also acknowledge them when they complete phases of advanced leadership training. This

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acknowledgment will act as a kind of reward, which may encourage others to complete the training as well.

There are some potential pitfalls to consider. First, we need to ensure that officers who complete leadership training understand the concepts that they have learned. We can accomplish this by putting them through practical exercises that challenge them to employ the theories covered in the training. Second, we must recognize that merely understanding leadership principles and how to apply them is not enough. We need to make sure that leaders are implementing the leadership techniques that they learned in their training. If we believe in the theories that are taught in classes that we provide to our employees, then we must ensure that they are followed. We will not have the ability to convince our officers to buy into advanced leadership training if we don't follow through with the concepts we are promoting. We can accomplish this by instituting a peer review program. Agencies should survey employees to ensure that leaders are appropriately utilizing the advanced leadership principles endorsed by the agency. If any deficiencies are exposed, then actions should be taken to improve the leadership of the deficient supervisor. If through this process a toxic leader is identified that leader should be terminated. This will reinforce the agency's commitment to leadership principles and demonstrate to employees that they stand by those principles. Last, is that training is all too often administered for the purpose of checking a box. This is prevalent in law enforcement. Agencies hold classes for officers on a subject so they can receive a certificate and the organization can have a record that shows their officers were trained on that topic. The common belief is that these classes are held for the purpose of protection from civil liability.

If we truly want to affect the deep change of advanced leadership training in our agencies, we need to encourage all of our officers to embrace its concepts. We should promote



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the people that buy in and remove the leadership that doesn't. The greater the percentage of employees that accept the advanced leadership training the easier it will be to implement.

### **Police Leadership and Community Relations**

The relationship between law enforcement and the community is essential and must not be taken lightly. First and foremost, we owe it to our community to provide them with the blanket of protection they deserve, and we swore to provide them. The ability to build trust and understanding from both sides would create a relationship that is a must to achieve harmony. Ellis (2022) states, "It's not us against them," which can lead to problematic behavior such as cynicism, tunnel vision, misunderstanding, and a lack of empathy and sympathy.

A short survey was taken from four individuals to gain their opinion on how law enforcement can improve training and provide them with the desired service. The subjects consisted of different cultures, financial levels, ethnic groups, ages, and gender. One goal was to see if the opinions were different or similar based on each individual. For this study, we chose to leave out their identity and will refer to them as subjects 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Subject 1 is a 23-year-old single white female from Mississippi who comes from a wealthy family. She has a master's degree in the medical field and has a family member in law enforcement. Subject #2 is a 44-year-old Hispanic single mother from Louisiana with a high school education who works at a middle-class job. Subject #3 is a married 29-year-old white male who lives in Colorado. He works a low-end financial job, a self-proclaimed liberal status who openly supports BLM and other social movement organizations. Subject #4 is an 18-year-old black female from Louisiana raised in low poverty, high-crime neighborhood and is currently attending a local technical college.

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Subject #1 "I think officers should have to attend regular training regarding excessive force. The world is full of good cops, but unfortunately, the bad ones outshine them. I firmly believe if officers were better trained in de-escalation techniques, it would result in fewer injuries or even loss of life. Also, the accountability of their actions should be more consistent and equal to the citizens they swore to protect. This would result in mutual respect and trust and the general public being more accepting of police interaction."

Subject #2 "I believe law enforcement could do a better job ensuring the community outreach programs reach the minority areas. I'm trying to raise a strong young man with a positive attitude. I believe better communication and availability of youth camps through law enforcement would be good and help make a positive connection with youth."

Subject #3 "I believe my generation finds comfort in police presence even though we don't always trust them. We would like to see solidarity with the lower and working class and recognize that we are citizens too. I want police officers who do not hold someone to a different standard or treat someone differently just because they have money or political influences. We want to trust the police and need them more than they realize."

Subject # 4 " I live in a neighborhood that is not the best of places when the police are called to visit. I would like to see LEO attend more activities in my community and visit the school more than once a year for the DARE program. LEO have no idea the admiration our children have for them. A badge is like a movie character; to these children, you are "Superman." I would like to see policewomen and men teach our children you are in a safe place and they can always trust you".

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According to our research, the common goal among all subjects is trust between law enforcement and the community. We must do a better job of effectively communicating with the people within our community. We need to focus on more community outreach programs that target all cultures of our community and not just the one that benefits our social agenda.

Allowing our citizens to know the woman and man behind the badge will help humanize us and combat social isolation between law enforcement and our citizens. As in leadership, relationships are a continuous process we must continue to build upon. Warren (2001) states, "trust must be rebuilt over time, and trust requires a track record." We owe it to our community to build a trusting relationship because without our community, what is our purpose? By incorporating advanced leadership training into law enforcement, we can develop our agencies to better interact with the citizens in our communities.

### **Advanced Leadership and Technology**

Technology in law enforcement generally refers to equipment that officers use to do their jobs. Technology has made significant changes and impacts on human life and the way we interact with one another. Life without technology is different compared to the experience with technology. Over the years, technology has drastically changed how law enforcement agencies solve crimes and stay connected with the public. As technology advances, law enforcement leadership and training are forced to evolve. Effective leadership is important within law enforcement agencies because it sets the standard for the organization. Advanced leadership training in law enforcement must include topics such as new technology, social media, and navigating current political environments. Today, social media is typically used for social interaction and access to news and information. This increase in interaction creates some danger for organizations. As law enforcement officers, we tend to have more information than the media

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or the general public relating to specific incidents. When we see stories or comments about those incidents and a desire to set the record straight begins to grow inside us. Commenting on or posting about these stories is dangerous and could influence the agency or the officers' careers. As leaders, we have to mentor younger officers away from these hazards. Managing officers' posts on social media is a daunting task. Agencies should create guidelines for their employees to follow to protect them from negative feedback from the media and the community.

As social media has become more popular, law enforcement has adapted to use it to communicate with the public and to improve public relations. Some departments have started using social media to educate the public. They inform the community of their mission and vision statements, keep them apprised of current incidents, and build trust between the agency and its citizens. Advanced leadership training should teach our leaders how to use social media in positive ways to increase the credibility of law enforcement. Social media has forced law enforcement to adapt to a different form of interaction. We need to use it to our benefit.

### **Human Factors**

Today's policing can take a tremendous toll physically and mentally on our bodies. Many factors in our profession can impact our well-being, and as leaders, we must step up and ensure our people have the sufficient tools to deal with the stressors. Human factors describe how our brains interact with our bodies and affect our decision-making ability during stressful incidents (Harrington, 2017). Human factors that could potentially affect our duties consist of poor physical conditioning, fatigue, and stress, which have a significant influence on our reaction time and our decision-making. One job of a leader is to be cognizant of these signs and address them with our people before they have a chance to impact the individual. We need to consider incorporating debriefings after a critical incident to ensure the opportunity for our subordinates

to be heard. Effective listening and emotional intelligence must be applied during this time to ensure the well-being of officers and the agency as a whole. We need to ensure that officers have a balance between their regular shift, and off-duty details to ensure they are getting the proper amount of sleep. This will allow their mind and body an opportunity to recharge. Grossman states, “Everything about sleep is a mystery, but one thing is certain: our body needs four things to survive: air, water, food, and sleep. You can die from the lack of sleep faster than the lack of food” (p. 23). We should also encourage and participate in physical activities not as individuals but as groups which could promote cohesiveness.

### **Leadership Training and Succession Planning**

An often-forgotten concept of what leadership training can do for an agency is how it applies to succession planning. “Succession Planning is a critical tool for ensuring organizational growth and continuity by eliminating substantial gaps in institutional memory, knowledge, and leadership through the strategic placement of key personnel” (Scott, 2017). Agencies must make a concerted effort and have a leadership development program in place to ensure they have qualified candidates for succession.

“Succession planning is more than merely selecting someone to succeed the chief or another leadership position in the agency; it also requires investing in the development and training of those individuals” (Bratton, 2008). This training not only includes leadership training for command and mid-level management officers but training in preparing your patrol officers to lead. Training such as patrol officers preparing shift briefing materials to present to the shift, internal courses on budgets and the myriad of paperwork associated with being a supervisor and allowing patrol officers and deputies to attend leadership classes before being promoted.

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A report published in 2015 titled, *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*, stresses the importance of leadership training as one of its six pillars of success for law enforcement. "To advance American law enforcement, we must advance its leadership. To that end, the task force recommends the establishment of a top-quality graduate institute of policing to provide ongoing leadership training, education, and research programs which will enhance the quality of law enforcement culture, knowledge, skills, practices and policies" (Final report of the president's task force on 21st century policing, 2015). This type of training will aid agency executives in their succession plan.

Succession Planning is not easy and is usually not at the forefront of an agency leader's mind. In my experience, they do not usually think about it until there is a vacancy with a particular rank and then there is a rush to fill the position. However, because of officers promoting upward, retirements, and unfortunately deaths, it needs to be a priority. For any succession plan to be successful, there needs to be agency support at all levels. With proper training, agency executives can feel comfortable in knowing that when they finally step aside, the agency is in good hands because of their plan and the selection and development of future leaders.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a career in law enforcement has never been more challenging. These challenges include media and community scrutiny, budgetary constraints, and the recruiting and retaining of officers, just to name a few. Another major challenge we face is a lack of leadership in our respective agencies. Almost every internal issue inside a law enforcement agency can be traced back to a leadership problem at some level. With this in mind, the identification, development, and training of all of our officers in the skill of leadership is critical. Agencies need

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to commit more resources to this type of training. Byproducts of formal, ongoing leadership development are improved decision-making skills and critical thinking. This equals an improved police-community relationship which is something we should all strive for.

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