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The *Criminal Justice Institute* provides management and supervision, forensic science, and computer education and training, as well as research services and technical assistance to Arkansas' law enforcement and criminal justice community.

This quarterly newsletter is designed to provide current, timely and useful information to improve the management, leadership and performance skills of supervisors.

*Your comments and suggestions
are solicited and welcomed.*

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THE ORGANIZATION'S ROLE IN MANAGING STRESS

Ofentimes we are confronted with the double-edged question "Do you want the good news or bad news first?" In this instance the bad news is that stress is an unavoidable aspect of modern policing. This is no surprise to any individual actively involved in managing a facet of criminal justice.

The good news is that even though stress is constantly a concern, there are remedies available to the law enforcement leader. I emphasize the word "remedy" in that stress will be unavoidable. Attention will have to turn to techniques to lessen the bad effect of stress, particularly where it adversely affects the vital functioning of the law enforcement community.

Stress certainly has to be dealt with on an individual basis. In certain respects, the individual bears a lot of the responsibility in ensuring that they develop techniques to effectively deal with and minimize the stress that is encountered. The purpose of this dialogue, however, is to address areas where the law enforcement organization is burdened to assist its members with eliminating and minimizing stresses as best it can.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Study after study has been conducted in an attempt to identify the source of the major stressors in law enforcement. Witnessing the tragedies and the plights of victims can wear down an officer's psyche. Studies tend to indi-

cate, however, that the most troublesome stressors, and the ones that create the most havoc, arise from the organizational environment itself.

Such are the observations supplied by a 1990 National Sheriffs' Association publication funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance entitled "Preventing Law Enforcement Stress: The Organization's Role." This work advocated looking past the individual officer as being the source of the problem and addressed the organization taking a more active role in preventing the stress. It was conceded that individual effort on the officers' part was needed and should be applauded, but in the report's words "... [I]n reviewing law enforcement stress literature, one begins to wonder whether law enforcement administrators have been treating the symptoms rather than the problem."

The authors of this study, Richard M. Ayres and George S. Flanagan, advocated moving from addressing the problem of stress as a medical model to perceiving stress in the light of an organizational health model. Some differentiating is in order.

The hazard of viewing stress from the medical model alone is that once the individual officer is labeled as being dysfunctional, much needed attention is drawn away from questions surrounding the effect that the law enforcement agency has itself. By concentrating on the individual's inability to cope, the ultimate source of the problem stress is overlooked. *(continued on page 2)*

The organizational health model approach leaves the individual's treatment and coping skill development to trained psychologists. It also promotes the more important organizational goal of preserving and maintaining a good work environment that is conducive to productivity. As stated in the Introduction of the study, "the basic premises are that: 1) personal stress is often the symptom of an unhealthy workplace; and 2) the best stress management approach is to identify the organizational stressors, eliminate them, and work in harmony with the employees in developing a healthy workplace environment."

PREVALENT SOURCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS

Ayres and Flanagan's study enumerated several problem areas that they reported as being major stressors. They asserted that these stressors needed to be addressed and eliminated if possible.

Law enforcement agencies are generally designed to function as autocratic quasi/paramilitaristic entities. While some may value this model for its efficiency it doesn't allow much latitude in dealing with individual problems or the human factors that enter into the profession. An autocracy reduces workers to the sense that they are just replaceable cogs in the wheel and minimizes their self-worth.

Adding to this degradation of self-esteem is the hierarchical structure inherent with a paramilitary organization. An agency of size, with many layers of rank, creates great social distances between the administration and the lower levels. This hierarchy can greatly reduce the feeling of professionalism, especially affecting the workers performing the essential tasks at the bottom of the pyramid. An added danger is that

communication, both downward and upward, is severely hampered and adds to the stressors of morale problems.

Poor supervision can be devastating to any unit and was cited as a major stressor. A poorly supervised shift will suffer with communication problems, favoritism in duty assignments and a general lack of trust and mutual respect just to name a few. It will be incumbent on the leadership to ensure that supervisors are selected based upon their management skills, that they are properly trained and instructed in interpersonal skills and that they are afforded the proper amount of authority dependent upon their position.

Employees lacking any real sense of input in determining proper policy and the attendant decision-making process are subject to stress. Officers with a sense that leaders are on their side and share in their understanding of problems will be better armed to cope with stress. Individuals who are not allowed meaningful participation generally will exhibit low levels of job satisfaction.

Any officer worth their salt will attest to the necessity of documentation in respect to official documents needed to secure convictions in court. Excessive paperwork, however, can create high levels of stress. Agencies will need to guard against unnecessary correspondence, redundant and obsolete forms, the lack of clerical support and the failure to utilize computers. The proliferation of paperwork is a necessary evil in some instances but the abandonment of useless "red tape" can help lower the stress level.

As a general rule, no one likes to be second-guessed. Unfortunately, being second-guessed in the law enforcement profession is generally widely chronicled in the news media and is during the aftermath of some major issue involving the use of force or some

other procedural aspect. Any lack of administration support during these tedious times is especially stressful. Law enforcement leaders will have to carefully educate their officers to the distinctions between the perception of abandonment and the sound internal investigation process necessary to determine wrongdoing.

Role conflict and ambiguity can result from a sense of no clear direction or mission. This may be the result of poor supervision or the inability of the organization to clearly define what is expected of department members. This type of stressful situation certainly arises in an agency that formulates new rules every time a new contingency comes up or a new infraction occurs. Officers are hard pressed to remember every rule and regulation and this uncertainty creates situations where there is confusion as to what behavior is expected or what the organization stands for.

Ayres and Flanagan addressed the stressors created by inadequate pay and resources. Officers perform important duties for their communities and they are frustrated if they perceive that they are not being adequately compensated in comparison to the dangerous world in which they police. Additionally, they are introduced to new stresses when they know or feel that the equipment that they are working with is substandard or "the low bid." Revenues are scarce admittedly but comfort will be given the officers if they feel that their leadership is battling for them nonetheless.

Adverse work schedules are unavoidable given the fact that law enforcement duties must be conducted around the clock. Special attention should be given to the stresses inherent with rotating shift work, especially a rotation scheme that occurs on a frequent

basis. Studies tend to indicate that steady shifts are the least stressful in that they disrupt the officer's life less and are more agreeable to other family members.

To an outsider it would appear that law enforcement is far from being boring. The seasoned officer is well aware of the repetitiveness of the job, however. The traffic accident may be at a different intersection but it is a traffic accident, just like the other twenty that the officer has investigated that month. Adept leaders will be able to sense when an officer is ready for a new duty assignment that will add a little zest to the profession.

The last element addressed by Ayres and Flanagan has to do with disciplinary practices, performance evaluations and promotional practices. They could very well have been included in the review of poor supervision practices but the authors felt that they were worthy of consideration separately. It was felt that first-line supervisors play a very important role in these areas but it was conceded that top management has the greater responsibility to see that the organization has a climate of fairness. A great amount of stress is generated if an officer is subjected to unfair disciplinary practices such as inconsistency in implementation, lack of due process or too much time elapsing between the infraction and the corrective action. Performance evaluations should have some meaning and relevancy and should be meted out fairly and impartially. And ultimately, any promotion should be based upon fairness and objectivity. There is already stress provided by the lack of promotional opportunity. It is only compounded if a promotion is made that smacks of favoritism.

DEVELOPING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

To develop a healthy workplace, the leader will have to abandon the mindset that the stressed officer is maladjusted. They will have to recognize that the maladjusted work environment might induce the stress instead. In Chapter IV of the study, Ayres and Flanagan advise: "the unhealthy law enforcement work environment is, to a large extent, the direct result of the management practices and organizational characteristics previously identified as contributing to law enforcement stress." With this sense of direction, the effective law enforcement administrator can attempt to neutralize these factors and implement a good place to work.

The importance of the chief executive's role in developing a healthy workplace cannot be minimized. Any real commitment to effect real change within the organization must start there. But this commitment must work itself down the entire organization also. To effectively accomplish this goal, Ayres and Flanagan propose the following management strategies.

There has to be a commitment to examine the workplace and make proper assessments as to what needs immediate attention. Everyone in the organization must believe in the mission of the organization. This is made easier by all visible components of the leadership core living the organizational values that are espoused.

Communication is essential and upward communication, or feedback, must be encouraged and allowed without prejudice. Autonomy will have to be afforded at lower levels so that it will provide meaningful opportunities for entering into the decision-making processes.

Fairness cannot be overemphasized. It is essential whether or not an officer is being disciplined, promoted or evaluated for any purpose. Being treated as an equal is always a welcomed event.

Ayres and Flanagan concluded by remarking that supervisors must care about people. This is a basic tenet of good supervision and is perhaps the best stress management tool. For this reason, only the best and most capable middle managers should be selected to perform this vital role.

SOURCE:

Ayres, R. and Flanagan, G., (1990), *Preventing law enforcement stress: the organization's role*, The National Sheriffs' Association, Alexandria, VA.

FAMOUS QUOTATIONS:



"In spite of the cost of living, it's still popular."

—*Kathy Norris*

"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing; it was here first."

—*Mark Twain*

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

—*Charles Darwin*

"He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt."

—*Joseph Heller*

"The perception of a problem is always relative. Your headache feels terrific to the druggist."

—*Ramona E. F. Arnett*



BOOK REVIEW

By: Mike Mashburn

Flight of the Buffalo: Soaring to Excellence, Learning to Let Employees Lead, (1993), by James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Stayer, Warner Books, Inc., New York, NY.

James Belasco and Ralph Stayer teamed up to write this book thus combining many years of experience, insight and passion. Their combination of academia and practitioner based knowledge produces a readable work that advises organizations of the changes necessary in their leadership practices that will allow them to survive the coming decades. Law enforcement leaders and middle managers have been hearing for years that the traditional autocratic paramilitary structure of their agencies is outmoded. This book offers insight in ways of abandoning the old traditions and embracing the new open communication forms of organization.

Belasco and Stayer's approach is pre-viewed early in the book by providing a comparison between herds of buffalo and gaggles of geese. The symbolism impresses upon the reader that significant differences exist between these animal groups, just as

there are vast differences between leadership styles in certain organizations.

A hasty reader may conclude that an organization similar to a herd of buffalo might be a good solid organization. The buffalo is a powerful creature and surely a large group of them would be powerful indeed. The buffalo herd, however, is dependent upon a strong central leader. The dominant bull in a herd of buffalo owes its power to the many loyal followers that make up the rest of the herd.

Anyone familiar with this type of organization realizes that little gets done by the loyal followers until the leader dictates what needs to get done. There may even be a lot of "standing around" until the leader gives directions. Also, if the leader is neutralized, the rest of the herd wanders around with no sense of direction of their own. Besides this, being the absolute leader takes an enormous amount of time.

The flock of geese exhibits a more favorable form of organization. A flock of geese is made up of numerous independent members, all responsible to the general aim of the group. More importantly, they are capable of shifting roles when needed. They take their turn leading the "V" formation and fall back into the group when tired allowing others to exercise leadership capabilities. In es-

sence, the entire group knows where it is headed and they assist each other in making the crucial flight.

Throughout the book, Belasco and Stayer offer usable advice in how to turn organizations around and to enable them to function more efficiently. They speak to the necessity of instilling ownership of the organization in their workers. The worker must realize that they are a valuable member of the flock and that they are headed in the right direction as they take flight.

The book addresses the vision of the organization and the power that is generated in sharing this power with all employees. Admittedly, the revamping of an organization takes time, energy and a tremendous amount of education. There will be the need to ensure commitment. Also, the authors realize that obstacles will be present and that they will have to be removed to make any real progress.

The reader will find the other illustrations and parodies presented in this book to be helpful and enlightening. The credibility of the book is enhanced by the collaboration of the two authors' backgrounds. Both have extensive histories of business experience as well as educational backgrounds that help them to convey this vital information.

CJI Management Briefs

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