

Conveying Expectations

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An elementary tenet of superior leadership is conveying expectations. Overlooking this principle in police organizations can have serious negative effects on the members, the public and the performance of the department itself.

Clearly defined and communicated expectations are vital to police officers and law enforcement agencies, since they help set goals and markers by which officers can measure their progress. Conveying and setting clear expectations are the most basic elements of supervision, and essential elements in good leadership.

In the field of leadership, expectations are often described in terms of the Pygmalion Effect. In the book *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, the cockney flower girl changed, but would always be seen as a cockney flower girl because of the way she was treated. The difference between a lady and a flower girl was not how she behaved, but how she was treated. But what does Pygmalion have to do with police officers and their organizations? J. Sterling Livingston linked the Pygmalion Effect to management this way:

"What managers expect of their subordinates and how they treat them largely determine their performance and career progress.

"A unique characteristic of superior managers is the ability to create high performance expectations that

subordinates fulfill. Less effective managers fail to develop similar expectations and, as a consequence, the productivity of their subordinates

suffers. Subordinates, more often than not, appear to do what they believe they are expected to do."¹

Leaders of police organizations should expect superior performance from those who work for them. It is not enough for the chief alone to communicate expectations; indeed, it is the responsibility of all those in leadership positions in the organization to communicate expectations in order to set standards for the members. Corporals, sergeants, lieutenants and captains must keep a constant vigil to ensure that expectations are not only communicated to but understood by the police officers in their units.

Students studying leadership are often shown the movie "Twelve O'Clock High," starring Gregory Peck, which vividly depicts the effects on an organization when a leader conveys expectations. Set in Europe during World War II, the plot involves a bombing wing, flying B-29s, conducting daylight strikes in German-occupied Europe. The unit was afflicted by high casualties, low morale, low confidence, high sick call, absence of military bearing, failure to take responsibility and poor performance, as indicated by the sorties' missing their targets. The colonel in charge of the unit not only accepted these conditions but enabled them by rationalizing these obvious deficiencies to himself, the offenders and his superiors. Peck's character, a general, replaced the colonel and took over the unit, immediately taking a number of steps to improve the unit. Significantly, he conveyed high expectations and demanded that they be enforced. Through his leadership, the failures that were present under the previous colonel were eliminated.

As obvious as this concept seems, this writer had the opportunity to observe firsthand the effect of a failure to convey expectations. The Fifth District of the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., had two support units available for proactive patrol. One group—Motor Tact—consisted of 10 motorcycle officers known to be average at best. Along with another unit, the Power Shift, they were deployed to work the most violent, drug-plagued, crime-ridden areas in Northeast Washington. Both units worked the same areas at the same times.

The Power Shift had been together for some time and had had expectations explained to them. Month after month, their performance was superior, with many recovered weapons, arrests for vi-

Do all you can to convey trust in your employees. Generally, they are more aware, more committed, more caring, and have more to offer than most administrators recognize or are willing to admit.

— Sheldon E. Greenberg
IACP Leadership Conference

olent Part I offenses and seizures of sizable quantities of drugs. The Motor Tact group was left alone. Its officers wrote their tickets, handled special details and made a few arrests. It was perceived that that was all they could do.

In early 1997, the whole Power Shift unit was to be detailed out for at least four months, leaving only one flexible unit: the Motor Tact officers. A meeting with the unit was set. Finally, the same expectations that had been conveyed to the Power Shift were communicated to the Motor Tact officers. The change was almost immediate. Their performance improved significantly—to near-Power Shift levels—and remained high. Clearly, they were capable of performing at whatever level was expected.

The link between expectations and performance is well known and well documented outside of police departments. In Los Angeles, teacher Jaime Escalante believed that students in an inner-city high school could learn calculus. He conveyed these expectations to the students and, with his help, they succeeded.

An individual's personal security is largely born of a sense of justice²—justice that a police department often plays a large part in. Both the community and the individual officer must know what is ex-

pected, what the limits and rules are, and what the consequences are for meeting expectations. Life can be thrown out of kilter when expectations are uncertain, limits are shifting or rules are arbitrary.³ The leader's expectations must be clearly established, communicated, understood and enforced. Conveying expectations can also guide the organizational culture.

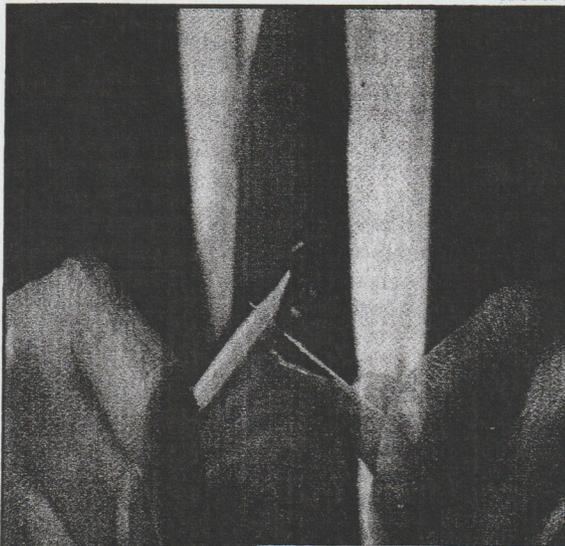
From an ethics and integrity standpoint, failure to communicate and enforce expectations has led to disastrous results in many police departments. If administrators convey the expectation that excessive force will not be tolerated, and reinforce it by quickly and vigorously investigating complaints and dealing with offenders, a decrease in brutality complaints will likely follow. If the expectation is conveyed that members of the police department shall refrain from accepting gratuities of any kind and that violators will be dealt with, a decrease in graft and bribes will likely follow.

The Christopher Commission, investigating the Los Angeles Police Department after the Rodney King beating, found that a significant number of LAPD officers "repetitively use excessive force against the public and persistently ignore the written guidelines of the department regarding force" and that "the failure to control these officers is a management issue that is

at the heart of the problem."⁴ Was the expectation being conveyed to the LAPD officers that excessive force would not be tolerated?

During the Knapp Commission hearings, following publication of Serpico's story in the *New York Times* in the 1960s, it was disclosed that plainclothes "pads" existed throughout the department and that corruption was, to some degree, part of life in almost all police units.⁵ Was the expectation being conveyed to New York City police officers that corruption would not be tolerated? When Police Commissioner Patrick V. Murphy took over, he conveyed his expectations in a number of ways. He implemented systems to hold others accountable for integrity, rewarded officers who did not tolerate corruption and punished those who looked the other way. He then used both promotions and demotions at the executive level to winnow out those who did not share his expectations.

Departments have orders and regulations prohibiting such conduct, but it is necessary to communicate the expectation to the officers that those specific orders and regulations must be followed. Communicating expectations on matters of ethics and integrity sets a tone and affects the organizational culture. It can



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make the difference between an organizational culture that accepts brutality or corruption, and one that does not. It can help create a culture of integrity.

Communicating expectations is also important in giving direction. With many departments moving to community policing, or in the middle of organizational change, officers who have been policing by the traditional model may be left shaking their heads.

Clearly understood expectations are critical in the evolution of individual officers and the organization itself. Why would an officer suddenly start organizing the community, unless he knew he was supposed to and that department leaders expected him to do so? Why would an officer begin searching for the conditions underlying community problems—engaging in problem-solving policing—if that expectation had not been conveyed to him by the department leadership?

Certainly, a one-time exposure is not enough. How often expectations must be conveyed depends on the amount of change needed, the seriousness of the problem being addressed and/or the level of resistance encountered. In matters involving serious problems like brutality or corruption, the expectations may have to be communicated every day. In the case of an organizational change from traditional policing to community policing, expectations may need to be conveyed to the officers once a week. An important aspect of communicating expectations is that they cannot be presented one time, then forgotten.

The communication of the expectations itself can range from the "loud and clear" to the subtle. Obviously, written and face-to-face conversation is direct. But other methods can also be effective. If, for example, an officer organizes a neighborhood, he could be recognized by the leader with a commendation, a positive evaluation or a promotion. He could be given more responsibility, less supervision, more flexibility. The expectation that organizing a fragmented neighborhood is

is a good thing is obvious not only to the officer involved, but also to his fellow officers—some of whom may not have taken the message seriously. On the other hand, an officer who receives a small bribe and overlooks a minor violation could be subject to an immediate suspension, full investigation, referral to the prosecutor or termination. Clearly, the expectation conveyed is that corruption on any scale is

serious and will not be tolerated. Conveying expectations clearly and forcefully can go a long way toward building integrity within a law enforcement organization.

Of course, expectations must be consistent in order to avoid contradiction and confusion. If an officer is engaged in a community policing project, meeting with residents of a neighborhood to actively problem-solve and called away by a supervisor to take a report on a three-day-old bicycle theft, considerable confusion could arise. The action contradicts

the expectations in community policing and problem-oriented policing. The same holds true if police officers in leadership positions turn a blind eye toward excessive force, profanity directed at citizens and corruption. These actions will not only cause confusion and contradict expectations of integrity, but may create an organizational culture no police department would be proud of.

Expectations conveyed not only by the chief but by the department's entire leadership can improve performance, reduce criminal and unethical behavior, and reduce resistance to organizational change. The continual communication and reinforcement of these expectations are among any leader's primary responsibilities and obligations. ♦

¹ W. Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1989).

² S.R. Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership* (New York: Summit Books, 1991).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ J.H. Skolnick and J.J. Fyfe, *Above the Law* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

⁵ *Ibid.*

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Interviews and surveys are another source of data. Interviews can be conducted with officers, victims and offenders. Surveys can be taken of neighborhood residents. Interviews provide useful information about the respondent's opinions, attitudes, and knowledge. Although individuals may distort their response so that their true beliefs, opinions, or knowledge are not divulged, many survey techniques have been developed to reduce this problem. Interviews and surveys can be administered—

- in person, with the researcher asking the questions and recording the answers
- in person, with the respondent filling out a questionnaire
- over the telephone, with the respondent answering questions
- through the mail, with the respondent completing the questionnaire in private, then returning it.

The cost, validity, and reliability of the data will vary according to the way the data are collected. The wording and format of survey forms also affect their usefulness (Eck, 1984). If an agency or officer is considering collecting data through interviews and surveys, numerous survey research texts can provide suggestions, guidance and ideas.

Self-reports are a third source of data. Officers are asked to keep a record of the activities they perform or to describe events in which they participate (Eck, 1984). The record of activities can prove invaluable in program evaluation, since self-reporting provides a process measure. To improve self-reporting—

- develop a simple and short log or form
- provide instructions on how to record activities
- stress the importance of accurate reporting.

A fourth source of data is observation. Observations are a good method of obtaining valid and reliable data. Officers can conduct visual inspections that a camera or video recorder can then document. Visual inspections are not subject to distortions that may affect other sources of data collection.

There are three important considerations in selecting methods and sources of data collection. First, identify data sources. Second, determine how to obtain these data and how much time, resources and money obtaining them will cost. How easy are the data to acquire? Third, consider how reliable and valid the data might be (Eck, 1984).

Data should be collected from as many sources as possible, even if duplication arises. For example, when collecting data on a specific location, a researcher can interview beat officers, review calls for service, check reported crime, survey residents and conduct visual inspections. This multiple collection method will provide checks and balances. The weakness of one source will be balanced by the strengths of other sources (Eck, 1984).

Applying the Concepts

In the case of the sergeant and the open-air drug market, how does he determine if his plan was successful? The sergeant begins a program evaluation by identifying the goals of the intervention. There could be many goals, including:

- to reduce the number of loiterers standing on the corner;
- to reduce the level of traffic coming into the neighborhood;
- to reduce the level of drug dealing;
- to reduce the level of violent crime;
- to reduce the calls for service, and
- to reduce the level of fear among residents.

The sergeant then collects data on whether or not he has reached his goals. He can use interviews, observations, and official records. Each goal has its own possible data collection methods:

- fewer loiterers on the corner
 - interviews of the residents at the community meeting
 - interviews of the beat officer
 - interviews of the vice officer
 - personal observation—visual site inspection



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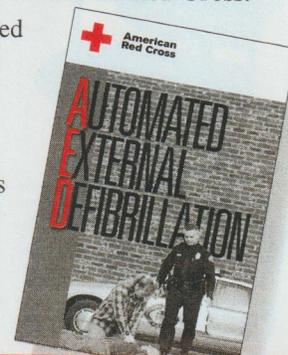
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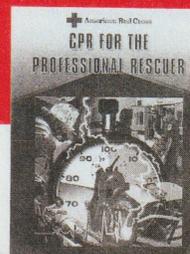
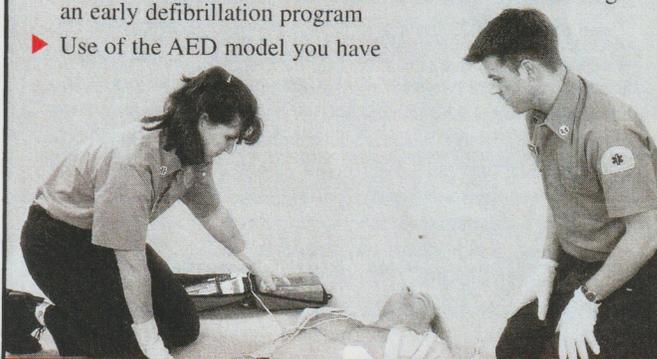
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- less traffic coming into the neighborhood
 - interviews of the residents at the community meeting
- less drug dealing
 - interviews of the residents at the community meeting
 - interviews of the beat officer
 - interviews of the vice officer
 - observation—visual inspection
- less violent crime
 - interviews of the residents at the community meeting
 - official records of reported crime
- fewer calls for service
 - official records
 - less fear in the community
 - interviews of residents at the community meeting

The sergeant now has identified the problem, his goals, and potential data sources. His response to the open-air drug market is to place officers in the area. The sergeant can then apprise the officers of the problems and suggest tactics to reduce the problem. These tactics are the process, which can be measured through officer self-reporting.

The self-reporting need not be a cumbersome and time-consuming task. It can be as simple as describing accomplishment and observations on an index card or keeping a program journal.

After the 60-day intervention, the sergeant conducts an impact assessment. In order to obtain impact measures, the sergeant again gathers data on whether the plan accomplished the goals. Data collection includes:

- surveying and interviewing the residents to determine whether they observed changes and to measure their level of fear
- interviewing the officers to determine if the foot patrol, regular beat and vice officers observed changes
- reviewing the official records to assess whether calls for service and reported violent crime decreased
- reviewing the officer self-reports
- observing the corner for improvement.

Measuring Success

In the program evaluation in this example, the goals have been stated, the process measures have been collected to determine if the plan was implemented as planned and outcome measure have made an impact assessment possible. The program evaluation either indicates the success of the intervention or suggest that additional interventions or tactics are needed. The program evaluation also illustrates any difficulty encountered in implementing the plan, and determines whether or not the plan was efficient.

Conducting program evaluations can make known what works in policing. This information is invaluable. It can be used to address similar problems elsewhere, and can lead to quicker solutions. Conducting program evaluations improves efficiency because it pinpoints what works, allowing departments to avoid ineffective and costly approaches to problems. Police departments need to begin to measure their performance with program evaluations to improve how they operate and the quality of service they provide. ♦

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