



“Get out of the field as soon as you can, kid, if you want to have a career in this Department.” These are the words that I heard while on probation. “You stay out here any significant time and you’ll be explaining your complaints and lawsuits for the rest of your career.” These are the same words that many others have heard during their time in the field. And if they did not heed the words of caution, perhaps the reality of working the streets may have taught them this very lesson. Although we always hear the words, “Patrol is the backbone of the Department,” the reality is that manure rolls downhill and stops on the bottom—aka Patrol. It is also this feared and an inconvenient place called Patrol that is used as a threat by management—“If you don’t get your mind right, you might find yourself back in Patrol.” And you know what? It works! That inconvenient place called Patrol speaks volumes of how too many, not only in the management but also in the rank and file, feel and view Patrol. It is quite frankly sad (my observation goes back at least 20 years as since I have heard Patrol used as a threat). Actions always speak louder than words. As long as we, as a Department, view Patrol as the inconvenient truth or the necessary evil, we will just have to be content with the fact that we can never be the Department we could, should or ought to be.

Let me offer anecdotal evidence. Two candidates are competing for a senior lead officer spot, say at East-West Division, the most community-oriented assignment in the Department. Both candidates have eight years on as police officers. “Officer A” has worked the division in question for the past six years and has gotten to know the neighborhood like the back of his/her hand and knows who the good folks in the community are—especially the criminal element and, therefore, oftentimes their families. She knows the business owners and the community block watch folks, and everyone in the division seems to know her.

“Officer B” did work patrol for a year after probation, just not at East-West Division. He has also worked four different divisions ranging from Universal Division and North-South Division and also gained valuable administrative experience by taking care of a multitude of audits and reviewing IOD paperwork at Central West Community Station and Central Headquarters. Both officers then take the competitive SLO oral exam. “Officer A” stumbled a bit due to being nervous and could not remember all the buzzwords for the SLO oral. “Officer B” felt pretty confident about the answers because he had a chance to prepare for the oral exam in the past two years amid admin duties. He aced the buzzwords. Simply killed it.

Now keep in mind what the position was and what the public (our ultimate boss) would expect as to who would be the most qualified candidate for the position. What do you think happens in the “real LAPD world” versus the real world? After all, we pride ourselves in running LAPD as a corporation. I remember once seeing a lieutenant exit a PIII oral. He/she (let’s leave the identity vague) seemed exhilarated and began raving about how some of the top candidates “nailed the buzzwords!” Really? The integrity and knowledge base of police work in real life is developed through exposure, contacts, critique, debriefing, introspection, dangerous and often life-threatening work was now quantified as and traded for buzzwords? That lieutenant, now a veteran captain, has never redeemed himself/herself in my books as he/she continued the dubious way of management to this day. Praying for your early retirement, Mr./Mrs. Captain....

There are many examples of the former, but I think the disconnect has been clearly established as evidenced by the recent League promotional survey and how this seemed to be a constant theme. Why even bother completing annual ratings for employees if they are “mildly interesting” in the promotional process? After all, they are supposed to be completed by supervisors who know their people (at least in theory) and who witness their strengths and weaknesses on a daily basis. Without getting into a deep psychology and philosophical dissertation of the “why,” I suggest that going back to the basics should be a slogan that we may want to revisit and internalize in our operations. It’s a simple concept of form following function, not the other way around, and the best part is that it is very effective. What is the mission? Let us start with that. I am not talking about the made-up, alternative reality and world of CompStat. I am talking about the mission as delineated in the manual and leaving it up to no interpretation.

Morale should always be on the forefront of the leader’s mind. Simply put, a happy workforce is a productive workforce. No better way to suck the life of an employee than by showing that merit, hard work, dedication to the community and suitability for the job do not matter, but as long as you know the buzz lines, you’ll have a bright future in the Department. This culture of rewarding wrong things can have a significant negative impact on morale, and vice versa a positive impact when rewarding the right things.

The following excerpt is from the November 2014 issue of *Harvard Business Review* titled, “Why Government workers are harder to motivate.”

“Running the NYPD is not unlike running a midsize Fortune 500 company – except that the stakes are much, much higher.... Like a CEO, (Commissioner Kelly) contends with a vast and varied cast of stakeholders who scrutinize his every move, but the metrics by which his performance is measured all have to do with life and death.”

The article continues, “In these highly visible environments, managers need government workforces to be highly engaged if they are to succeed. This requires that public sector leaders understand and address the factors that make increasing engagement in the public sector a special challenge.”

That being said, those two paragraphs apply to the LAPD just the same. We can never underestimate the effects of poor or lack of leadership, as the stakes are higher than in any other industry, namely life and death.

On employee motivation, “Research has shown that public servants find meaning in their work by making a positive difference in the lives of the citizens they serve. This is an advantage in building engagement. Many employees enter public service because they are already committed to the mission of government. Agencies need to find, aggressively recruit, and then hire job candidates who are motivated by public service. Managers must then leverage public-service motivation by involving employees in decisions and helping them see and appreciate their individual contributions.

“As managers increasingly focus on engagement, a cottage industry has grown that promises any number of one-size fits-all solutions and ‘secrets’ to improve engagement. In truth, there are no secrets to maximizing employee engagement. Great management always begins with understanding the unique characteristics of the workforce, figuring out what makes employees tick, and creating the environment in which they can and want to do their best work.”

While we, the men and women of the LAPD, understand the complexity of the work and decisions the command staff has to make, or for that matter anyone in a leadership role including our members, I would suggest that aforementioned, time-tested concepts should always be paid close attention and be incorporated in everything you do. Also, being able to make a distinction between leading and managing will make you a better leader.

(The cited material was from an article written by Robert Lavigna of the University of Wisconsin who is also the author of Engaging Government Employees: Motivate and Inspire your People to Achieve Superior Performance.)

Stay safe. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at TJTarjamo@lappl.org or contact me at (213) 798-2286.