

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

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Labor force projections indicate that growth in numbers of older workers will soon exceed the growth of young workers who are just entering the workforce. The outcome is that by 2016, one in four workers will be age 55 or older. Police and detective supervisors are among the top ten occupations that will be most affected by “Baby Boomer” retirements and on average, 54 percent of workers aged 45 and older will leave the workforce in the next 10 years (U.S. Economist Office of Employment Projections, 2000). Veteran (ages 62+) and Baby Boomer (ages 42–61 years) law enforcement leaders increasingly express concerns about the influx of Generation X (ages 28–41) and Generation Y (ages 21–27) recruits into policing careers during the time when a mass departure of experienced supervisors is anticipated.

To fill the void left by retiring Baby Boomers, police departments will be required to promote less experienced officers whose positions will in turn need to be filled by inexperienced recruits. In addition, early retirement programs may further exacerbate the exodus of seasoned police personnel. Police departments could end up with severe staffing shortages due to projected retirements and attrition. This should come as no surprise; similar occurrences have happened before; often with disastrous outcomes.

Hiring Rush

Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), 1989-1990

Based on an estimate that 2,351 officers (61%) of MPD’s 3,880 officers were nearing retirement and expressing alarm at the increase in violent crimes, Congress mandated Washington MPD to hire 1,800 officers. Quotas and hiring deadlines were put in place with very rigid and short-term demands that they be met (Horton, 2000, P. 12-13). Within twenty months, roughly 1,500 applicants were recruited, rushed thorough academy training and turned out on patrol. More than half of the lieutenants and captains and nearly 80% of the inspectors had retired (Flaherty, 1994). The considerable increase in probationary officers

coupled with a scarcity of veteran officers meant that there were not enough field training officers to go around. Consequently, 1,500 inexperienced police officers began to patrol the streets. A few were fearful, most were poorly trained, and all worked under minimal supervision and guidance.

An investigation conducted by the *Washington Post* found that the 1,500 graduates comprised a third of MPD's workforce and accounted for more than half of 201 D.C. police officers arrested for charges ranging from forgery to rape and murder (Harriston & Flaherty, 1994, p. A1). In addition, in May of 1992 the FBI conducted an undercover investigation code-named "Operation Broken Faith" and involved the arrest and conviction of 12 MPD officers—11 of whom were part of the hiring rush—on charges ranging from bribery, extortion, conspiracy to distribute cocaine, conspiracy to distribute marijuana, and carrying a firearm during a drug trafficking offense (Horton, 2000, P. 14).

Pittsburgh Police Bureau (PPB), 1994-1995

The city of Pittsburgh offered early retirement incentives that brought about the rapid departure of 410 senior police officers. An additional 136 officers retired on disability or regular pensions. Pittsburgh was compelled to replace nearly half its police force with new recruits. The outcome was that fifty percent of Pittsburgh's 1,171 officers had less than five years experience. One zone commander commented that 90% of the officers in her sector had less than three years experience. Field training suffered for lack of seasoned supervisory staff. For a time, field training was suspended; there simply were not enough veteran officers to train the recruits. Mistakes were made; inexperienced officers' errors in judgment and performance went uncorrected, sometimes escalating into criminal offenses:

Moreover, while most of the veteran officers were fired for long-standing, noncriminal problems such as alcoholism, most of the younger officers were terminated after being arrested on criminal charges that included insurance fraud, drug selling, prostitution, sexual assault and even homicide (Fuoco, 1999).

In 1996 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other organizations filed suit on behalf of sixty-six plaintiffs, alleging civil rights violations against the city and 100 PPB officers. The ACLU invited the US Department of Justice to conduct an investigation under the Violent

Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which provided authority to use civil litigation to root out “patterns and practices” of police misconduct. The Justice Department agreed to investigate. Findings included use of excessive force, false arrests, improper searches and seizures, failure to discipline officers adequately, and failure to supervise officers. In April 1997, Pittsburgh was the first city in the nation to sign a consent decree subjecting PPB management and operations to federal oversight.

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), 1999

The US Department of Justice launched an investigation in response to citizens’ complaints regarding officers involved in theft, drug dealing, perjury, improper shootings, evidence tampering, false arrests, witness intimidation, and beatings of suspects by LAPD’s Rampart Division officers. The officers had been assigned to an elite anti-gang unit called “Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums” or “CRASH.” LAPD formed a Board of Inquiry (BOI) to analyze management failures and propose remedies. Among the findings was that the application of “hiring standards was compromised ... *during periods of accelerated hiring* in the late 1980s and early 1990s” (emphasis added) (Los Angeles Police Department, 2000, p. 14).

In September 2000, the city of Los Angeles agreed to enter into a consent decree allowing the U.S. Department of Justice to oversee and monitor reforms within the LAPD for a period of five years. The decree addressed: use of force investigation procedures, search and arrest procedures, gang unit operations and administration, the initiation of complaints, the conduct and adjudication of investigations, discipline and non-disciplinary action, motor vehicle and pedestrian stops, and the implementation of a non-discrimination policy. Due to negative and ongoing publicity about the Rampart Division corruption scandal, LAPD’s rate of attrition soon doubled its hiring rate, leaving open positions for 884 officers. Veteran officers increasingly transferred out of LAPD to take positions with other agencies and there was a sharp reduction in the number of new applicants. LAPD was forced to cancel a July 2001 training academy for lack of recruits (Butterfield, 2001).

The BOI found that the average experience of the officers who remained on the job was about five years.

We also have a fairly young Department and many people promote so rapidly through the supervisory and mid-management ranks that they never have the opportunity to acquire the institutional knowledge, which is so critical in those positions (LAPD, 2000, p. 351).

The BOI determined that quality of supervision was poor and that inexperienced officers were provided little or inadequate guidance.

Instead of having the very best officers and supervisors, the CRASH unit and other specialized entities were now staffed by a pool of officers and supervisors with limited tenure and experience. The specialized units often had new, untested sergeants and either very young officers or officers who may not have been selected into the units had a larger selection pool existed. In some cases, probationary officers were assigned to CRASH in order to fulfill their personnel needs. These inexperienced young officers were simply unable to distinguish effective police work from patterns indicative of potential misconduct (LAPD, 2000, p. 57).

Police departments should prepare for the anticipated exodus of Baby Boomer supervisors and seasoned line officers and anticipate high recruiting needs. Leadership training must become an integral part of police curriculum, beginning at the academy and continuing on the job as officers promote through the ranks.

Lowered Standards

Whether mandated or politically motivated, downward modifications of intellectual, physical, and character standards of police officer candidates to satisfy hiring quotas may ultimately lead to collapse of public trust and support, especially if such practice generates incompetent police officers. An analysis of hiring practices and outcomes of the above-cited police departments is illustrative.

Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), 1989-1990

In its rush to hire 1500 officers, MPD's traditional applicant vetting processes were abbreviated:

Critical background checks on applicants were cut short, and investigators scrimped on visits to neighborhoods and interviews with former employers. Physical examinations were hurried, and some people who failed to meet minimum requirements were hired

anyway. The psychological services unit, which had rejected one in five applicants in other years, rejected just one in 20 (Harriston & Flaherty, 1994, p. A1).

An MPD academy training director reported that numerous recruits tested low in reading comprehension and needed remedial classes. District Mayor Marion Barry reportedly refused to allow the classes out of concern it would reflect negatively on the city's public schools that many of the recruits had attended (Harriston & Flaherty, 1994, p. A1).

Pittsburgh Police Bureau (PPB), 1994-1995

In the case of Pittsburgh Police Bureau, there were no discernable signs that hiring standards had been lowered in order to quickly replenish the depleted ranks with 550 new officers. However, there were indications that some corners were cut. A court order in effect from 1975 to 1991 directed PPB to hire one white woman, one black woman and one black man for every white man it hired (Leinwand, 2004). A reverse discrimination lawsuit caused the court to set aside the injunction. When the push was on to quickly recruit replacement officers, the new hires were predominantly white males.

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), 1991 & 1999

A decade before the Rampart corruption scandal in Los Angeles, a widely televised incident depicted a fleeing felon, Rodney King, being beaten by LAPD officers. Public outcries of police brutality regarding the telecast compelled an inquiry conducted by the Christopher Commission review board. In 1991, the Commission recommended, and LAPD agreed, to increase racial diversity by imposing hiring quotas for minority and female officers. To meet those requirements, however, LAPD found it necessary to lower standards for physical capability, intellectual capacity, and personal character. Former Los Angeles Police Department Chief Daryl Gates described the challenges of compliance with the guidelines:

As a result, if you don't have all of those quotas, you can't hire all the people you need. So you've got to make all of those quotas. And when that happens, you get somebody who is on the borderline, you'd say "Yes, he's black, or he's Hispanic, or it's a female, but we want to bring in these additional people when we have the opportunity. So we'll err on the side of, we'll take them and hope it works out." And we made some mistakes. ... Some folks became cops, LAPD officers, who shouldn't have (Boyer, n.d.).

The outcome was that mediocre applicants, including some with street gang affiliations or other criminal ties, became LAPD officers. Several were prosecuted as a result of their criminal activities while assigned to the Rampart Division CRASH unit.

The March 2000, the LAPD *Board of Inquiry into the Rampart Area Corruption Incident Public Report* indicated that reduced standards presaged the Rampart scandal:

It is important to note that the July 9, 1991, Report of the Independent (Christopher) Commission ...all but predicted that a weak application of hiring standards was allowing risky candidates to become Los Angeles Police Officers (LAPD, 2000, p. 9).

The Board of Inquiry also noted that shortcuts were taken in applicant vetting processes:

However, a 1997 internal audit disclosed that a “short form” background check format was being used in lieu of the more detailed background investigation narratives. We were never able to pinpoint its origin, but it appears that the short form originated during the 1994 or 1995 accelerated hiring periods in order to meet the increased demand for large Academy classes. As a result, the investigative paperwork may not have contained the same emphasis or detail needed to properly evaluate a marginal candidate (LAPD, 2000, p.14).

And finally, the Board interviewed 204 LAPD employees (probationary officers through sergeant and non-sworn employees of various classifications) who “overwhelmingly pointed to the department's lowered hiring standards as a major factor in the breakdown of integrity and ethical standards” (LAPD, 2000, p. 317). While efforts to achieve diverse and racially balanced police departments are to be encouraged, the process of hiring acceptable candidates should not be rushed or compromised. Hiring should be based on merit, not quotas. “As one analyst explains, the problem is not ‘...diversity per se, or the qualifications of any particular group, but the standard-lowering procedures by which diversity is often achieved’” (O’Malley, 1997).

Inadequate Training & Supervision

In addition to sharing rushed hiring under lowered standards, MPD, PPB, and LAPD had other shortcomings in common:

- Insufficient or nonexistent training of mid level managers and front line supervisors
- Inconsistent and inadequate supervision of young officers.

Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), 1989-1990

MPD's training academy was geared to handle 300 trainees per year. With the hiring push, the academy began operating double shifts—with no increase in instructor staffing—graduating 1,500 recruits in two years. Trainees received as little as 322 hours at the academy, two-thirds less training hours than neighboring academies in Prince George and Fairfax Counties. Some course work was dropped entirely; other courses such as media relations and dealing with intoxicated individuals was assigned for home study only. Defensive and high-speed pursuit driving was cut back to just a few hours (Harriston, 1994, p. A1). Notably, MPD police-involved traffic accidents rose from 500 in 1988–89 to 597 in 1990 and 632 in 1991 (Trautman, n.d.).

Another outcome of poor training and supervision observed by prosecutors was that the officers were ill-prepared to testify at trial.

Bad officers make bad witnesses, and whether officers are bad because they broke the law or bad because they are poorly trained, they are a handicap that prosecutors don't need (Flaherty, 1994, p. A1).

Juror's perception and confidence in police are eroded when officers' reports are incomprehensible due to poor spelling, grammatical errors, factual discrepancies, or inaccurate statements. Report writing was barely addressed during academy training and supervisors made little effort to guide officers. Further reflecting inadequate academy and on-the-job training, one prosecutor lamented that the officers were not astute observers and had little understanding of the law.

A lack of training was not just a problem at the academy; supervisors also were not receiving the training they needed. One commander commented that he had not had any updated legal training on, for example, search and seizure, in nearly a decade. Still, the lieutenant was tasked to provide guidance to subordinates on search and seizure. Already overworked prosecutors found themselves forced to provide advice to officers on report writing, proper courtroom attire (no sunglasses or shorts), and giving testimony, simply because the officers had not received that training in the academy. It was impossible to calculate how many criminal cases were dismissed or overturned, either because the officers themselves had been implicated in criminal activities or because the officers appeared incompetent and

provided weak testimony. Replacement and training costs skyrocketed. MPD spent \$3 million to train new officers to replace those who had been dismissed from the department due to criminal involvement (Flaherty, 1994, p. A1).

Pittsburgh Police Bureau (PPB), 1994-1995

The city of Pittsburgh never admitted to wrongdoing, so most of what is known about failure to train supervisors and new recruits is anecdotal. One PPB Assistant Chief's comment, however, is revealing: "Rookies were training rookies" (Shepardson, 2003, p. 11A). Terms of the consent decree called for more training, especially for young officers. PPB was required to develop a million-dollar computerized "early warning system" to track officer's performance and flag for closer review for possible violation such things as citizen complaints, use of force, and traffic stops. Officers with three "flags" were sent for counseling or retraining. Changes were to be made in handling of citizen complaints. It is notable that the Early Warning System, developed under the command of PPB Chief Robert McNeilly provides for systemic analysis of line officer conduct, and was touted as the key change most beneficial to PPB for the long term (Shepardson, 2003, p. 11A). History may be doomed to repeat itself in Pennsylvania. According to the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, it does not appear as if some political leaders do learn from past mistakes:

State Rep. Edward Wojnarski, D-Cambria, has introduced a bill to allow municipal police officers in 53 third-class cities to retire with full pension benefits after 20 years on the force, regardless of their age (Barnes, 2007).

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) 1999

The LAPD Board of Inquiry found that inconsistent or poor supervision was a factor leading to the Rampart corruption scandal. It emphasized that there was a critical need for timely training. Calling for correction, the LAPD Board of Inquiry admitted, "Newly promoted sergeants frequently do not attend sergeant's school until months, and in some cases years, after their promotion." The Board also recognized the inexperience of mid-level managers, pointing out that there was insufficient training on job procedures, most of which was on-the-job training and "predicated on the knowledge of the one doing the training" (LAPD, 2000, p. 351).

Instead of having the very best officers and supervisors, the CRASH unit and other specialized entities were now staffed by a pool of officers and supervisors with limited tenure and experience. The specialized units often had new, untested sergeants and either very young officers or officers who may not have been selected into the units had a larger selection pool existed. In some cases, probationary officers were assigned to CRASH in order to fulfill their personnel needs. These inexperienced young officers were simply unable to distinguish effective police work from patterns indicative of potential misconduct. (LAPD 2000, P. 57)

To remedy the training deficits, the LAPD Board of Inquiry recommended:

A one to three day introductory course should be developed for new sergeants, detectives II and non-sworn supervisors. It should be given the first working day(s) of each deployment period, regardless of the number of personnel to be trained, and no one should be permitted to work as a supervisor until he or she attends the course (LAPD, 2000, P. 351).

It was suggested that the training focus on roles and responsibilities of police supervisors and be designed to “increase courage on the part of supervisors to make the tough decisions necessary to avoid ethical breakdowns in the future.”

Preparing for the Exodus

What lessons can be learned from the case examples described above? Leadership failures occurred at every level. Civic leaders failed to appreciate the short-term economic benefits of implementing early retirement programs weighted against the long-term consequences of replacing hundreds of experienced, senior officers with poorly vetted, inadequately trained and largely unsupervised recruits. In a prescient memo to the mayor of Washington DC, then MPD Chief Maurice T. Turner, Jr. wrote, “without addressing these issues of personnel shortages and insufficient recruitment, crime will undoubtedly rise and the department's image will be tarnished and its influence diminished” (Harriston, 1994). His forewarning went unheeded. Police leaders failed to candidly advise politicians as to potential consequences of retiring large numbers of experienced veteran officers, or failed to strategically plan for veterans’ mass departures. Activist leaders’ insistence that police departments implement affirmative action hiring policies regardless of availability of qualified minority and female applicants placed impracticable compliance burdens upon beleaguered

police departments.

In addition, police leaders permitted corruption of hiring standards, background investigations and psychological examinations. There was systemic failure of middle managers and front line supervisors to train and guide new officers in ethical conduct. The Board of Inquiry's analysis summed up LAPD's leadership failure as a loss of integrity that infected the department at all levels:

It is very clear that many of these officers allowed their personal integrity to erode and their activities certainly had a contagion effect on some of those around them. We, as an agency, must learn from what they did and establish systems to prevent and detect similar patterns and activities should they occur in the future. This scandal has devastated our relationship with the public we serve and threatened the integrity of our entire criminal justice system. Distrust, cynicism, fear of the police, and an erosion of community law and order are the inevitable result of a law enforcement agency whose ethics and integrity have become suspect. Clearly, public safety in this City has been harmed and it will take strong resolve by Department personnel, along with equally strong support from our City's leaders, to correct the problems that allowed this breakdown (LAPD, 2000, P. 331).

In the coming decade, police are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past unless steps are taken to plan for the exodus of Baby Boomers, to prepare the next generation of supervisors and field training officers to lead with integrity and to instruct young officers to be accountable and responsible.

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