

**ESSENTIALS OF A FUTURES-ORIENTED
PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COURSE¹**

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Many consider the ideal leader to be the person with the right qualities for the situation at hand. In 1944 Winston Churchill's bulldog tenacity and ability to stay the course made him an ideal prime minister for wartime Great Britain; a couple of years later he was no longer considered the right leader for a nation tired of war and sacrifice and ready to kick up its heels and enjoy its victory. The key to grooming and choosing the right leader is to anticipate the times ahead and seek candidates who have or can acquire the assets necessary to cope with them. The only way to do that is to teach leadership candidates how to study the future and develop proactive policies to make the most of what is ahead. Such a strategy is particularly important in the field of public safety, where the very future of civil society is at stake.

In 2005, after 20 years of recommending that the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy needed a leadership development program, this author received a call from Spears Westbrook to discuss starting just such a program. A former graduate assistant knew Spears was searching for a person to develop the program and knew of my interest. It only took a few minutes at the meeting to see this was an almost perfect situation—a chance to start a program and try out all the ideas accumulated from more than three decades of teaching the Future of Policing/Public Safety for more than 200 groups/academies across North America and a previous decade as a media crime and investigative reporter. Ending 20 months of “retirement” after 30 years of university teaching, it was back to work with a passion.

Lessons learned from the experience of starting a futures-oriented public safety leadership development program could be helpful to others wanting to accept the challenge. This chapter is written to detail some of the challenges encountered in South Carolina and how the author and others have worked to craft a successful futures-oriented leadership development curriculum.

Start with a Plan: Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Develop a strategic plan beginning with a mission statement, goals and objectives, and progressing through learning goals and objectives for each section. For example:

- Mission: To develop proactive future-oriented public safety leaders.
- Initial goal: Design and initiate a development program to serve 20 leadership candidates in the first year.
- Learning objectives: (1) Learn futures research methods via an eight-hour block of instruction; (2) Develop strategic planning skills via a six-hour block of instruction plus a three-hour simulation exercise; and (3) Demonstrate leadership skills via planning and administering a full-day emergency preparedness exercise.

In South Carolina we adopted a mission to produce futures-oriented, proactive leaders for the public safety field and an overall goal “to identify, implement, and internalize the leadership style and qualities needed to be a leader in the field of public safety.” (For learning objectives, see “The SC Experiment.”)

Determine the Clientele

When do you believe leadership begins—the first day on the job, above the rank of sergeant, captain? The answer to this question will determine whether you need a series of development programs—beginning with basic training and progressing through the ranks—or a single program delivered at a specific point in the candidate’s career. If you choose an executive program, do you invite chiefs, sheriffs and department administrators (today’s top officials) or lieutenants and captains (soon-to-be top officials)? Do you offer the program to police only or corrections only or do you open it to the full public safety spectrum? In South Carolina, even though we worked for the “Criminal Justice Academy,” we determined from the outset to seek to develop leaders for the total public safety spectrum in the same classroom. Our belief was that cross-fertilization and joint communication among police, corrections, emergency services, and other public safety domains was necessary to “proactively” identify and prevent emerging problems and to truly protect the citizens served. We also decided to conduct classes at three levels—supervisory, mid- and executive. Being in charge of the

executive level, I decided we needed some top executives, but emphasis was on tomorrow's leaders—the rising stars in agencies across the state.

Seek a “Dedicated Stream” of Funding

Trying to fund a quality leadership development program with existing funds can be difficult and even if possible for one year may leave the program in limbo the next year or when budget shortages occur. To provide a quality program on a continuing basis requires a “dedicated stream” of funding. One of the most frequently used “streams” is court costs assessed with fines. A legislatively mandated percentage of those court costs or a special court assessment for the program provides a steady (although somewhat fluctuating) source of funding. Among other possibilities is a portion of the fines themselves or a public safety tax or special assessment. Obtaining this stream requires legislation at state or local levels and will depend on political skills and development of effective partners in the effort. In South Carolina, we failed to acquire this funding and the result was that after two years money destined for the executive leadership program was partially diverted, and the executive class was delayed indefinitely. With dedicated funding, this postponement could have been prevented, and diversion of funds would have been much more difficult.

Seek Creative Input before Program Development

Developing leaders is considerably different from other personnel development programs in public safety agencies; it cannot be accomplished via a traditional academy training program. Indeed, leadership development is NOT training. That was the first and possibly most important input we acquired from asking questions of other leadership development programs across the nation. Looking at other programs' content indicated leadership is more art than science, and thus mentors and role models are essential to the development process. Classroom material must emphasize advice and examples from proven leaders as well as skills training needed by tomorrow's leaders. After extensive consultation, choose carefully the persons you bring to the development program, and design activities that give the candidates opportunities to both learn and demonstrate their leadership skills.

To a large extent this step requires “futures research,” especially use of literature searches, Delphi techniques, and bellwether methods. An Internet search for “creative police leadership,” “proactive law enforcement,” “futures-oriented public safety,” etc. will result in thousands of possible individuals/organizations to contact. Soon a group of cutting edge individuals can be identified to serve as a Delphi panel to answer questions about preferred directions to develop a proactive, futures-oriented leadership development program; additionally, a group of cutting edge agencies will be identified and they can provide a bellwether of what is already underway to deliver this type of leadership development.

In our case, we relied heavily on groups including Police Futurists International (PFI), cutting-edge police across the world; PFI-FBI Futures Working Group (FWG), researching future public safety dilemmas with an eye to suggesting best practices; as well as efforts of major command colleges in the field (FBI National Academy, California Command College, Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute, Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, etc.). From these sources we learned what was currently cutting edge and what was being forecast for the future in the field.

Structure and Outline a Full Program

Once the major portion of the input is acquired (input is circular, thus it never ends), it is time to outline the full leadership development program. A beginning point might be a checklist developed during the creative input phase. Put activities in a logical order (e.g., overview, definition of leadership presented by “leaders,” basic characteristics of leaders, basic skills necessary to effective leadership, discussion of emerging leadership challenges in public safety, futures research and strategic planning skills development, partnership/coordination development skills, research skills development, basic communication/presentation skills development, ethical considerations by leaders, crisis management simulations, research project and presentation, etc.). Determine the structure of the program, based on the circumstances of your jurisdiction. While it might be possible to operate a compact three- to six-week program without interruption, leadership development seems best served by a series of shorter meetings (e.g., three- to five-day modules), followed by a period of synthesis of new

ideas/skills into daily activities with several other modules to follow. Each module might have an overall theme with activities designed to meet the specific learning goals of that particular module. The final module might be designated the candidate's opportunity to demonstrate their leadership skills via planning and executing the total program for the module.

To accomplish this goal in South Carolina, we started with a needs assessment specific to public safety in the state. Small in area with a population just less than 4.5 million, with the capital city, Columbia, almost in the center of the state, any public safety officer could reach the Academy within three hours from anywhere; most were within a two-hour drive. In addition, most agencies were small, with a few exceptions—those being state and local agencies in the Columbia area (30 minutes or less away)—and most had severely limited budgets and manpower deficits. We simply could not ask agencies to give up their best candidates—those either in top leadership positions or aspiring to them—for one, two, or three weeks at a time.

We decided to structure the classes so students could spend Monday in their agency, drive to the Academy to begin class at noon on Tuesday, then all day Wednesday and end at noon on Thursday. This would leave time for attendees to return home for attention to agency business on Friday. We believed we could provide a substantial program by offering five modules based on this schedule, with modules approximately six weeks apart, for a total of 80 hours (increased to 120 in the second year of the program). A syllabus was developed with students being required to write a Reflection Paper (a summary of what was learned and how it can be used) after each module and take part on panels, in class exercises, and prepare and present research to the class to obtain "leadership points" necessary to pass the class. Each presentation was to be accompanied by a PowerPoint program plus a list of references/resources found on the Internet and/or copies of resource papers. These student items were included in a workbook prepared for each module, which also contained PowerPoint and reference material provided by all instructors/guest panelists/guest speakers. Grades were assigned—A to C and U (Unsatisfactory), with students missing more than two days (or partial days) being dropped from the class. Assigning homework and grades was a first for the Academy, which before had previously used only a pass/fail system. (See The SC Experiment for more details.)

Choose Creative Instructional Staff/Consultants

Realizing that leadership development cannot be scripted into a class that can be taught by any instructor given a lesson plan, seek out a creative lead instructor supplemented by a series of creative speakers, panelists, presenters—each chosen to provide specific input to the process. For example, you might want to begin the first module with a panel chosen to serve as role models of effective leaders. During the creative input stage, you should have identified individuals and organizations that provide quality leadership to the public safety field. These are the people you now want to seek out as guest panelists, speakers, presenters, etc. As noted, in our program we identified Police Futurists International, the National Academy of the FBI, the California Command College, the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, and several other programs as providing cutting edge leadership development, and identified individuals who could serve as the excellent role models and content specialists we needed. Hearing from proven leaders about what they have learned and how they lead is critical to proper leadership development.

Ensure Creative Evaluation of the Program

The evaluation process begins at the same time as the program development process, as only by designing the two together can we be certain the necessary interconnections are made and critical data is collected and analyzed. Mission, goals, and objectives establish the criteria for evaluation. If the mission is to create effective futures-oriented, proactive leaders, then the criteria for evaluation must be designed to provide and analyze data that measures that outcome. Since the best criteria would involve measurement of pre- and post-performance, creativity is essential to choosing appropriate behaviors/activities to evaluate the impact of the leadership development program on job performance. To date, the failure to develop such criteria, collect relevant data and measure it empirically has been a serious impediment to establishing reliable models for leadership development.

An example of creative evaluation can be seen in a National Institute of Justice-funded neighborhood crime prevention program to reduce apathy and increase knowledge of crime prevention methods by the citizenry. To measure the impact, before the program started,

1,000 citizens in the jurisdiction were chosen randomly and mailed a crime prevention questionnaire. The mail return within the two weeks allotted was 10% and the score on the 100-point test averaged 50. The program was designed to decrease apathy by at least 50% while increasing knowledge of crime prevention methods by at least 50%. After the program (home and business security surveys and TV-pamphlet information distribution) was completed, the same questionnaire was mailed to another 1,000 citizens randomly selected. Two weeks later, 17% had been returned and the average score was 75. Thus apathy, measured by return of the questionnaire, was reduced by more than 50% (170 returned versus 100) and knowledge of crime prevention, measured by scores on the questionnaire, was increased 50% (average score of 75 versus 50).

Constant Reevaluation

One critical trait of proactive leaders is the ability to foster and lead their agency/community through constant change. To accomplish this, the development program must be fluid, with the flexibility to change the lesson plan even in the midst of a planned activity. If change is to be embraced and assimilated by the leadership candidates, the development program also must welcome it when circumstances require it to enhance the effectiveness of the program. Thus, evaluation must be a constant process, with findings leading to reevaluation of the program from mission and goals to methods and outcomes. Changes in the program may require rethinking evaluation methods and measures, also part of the ongoing planning procedure—another reason the curriculum cannot be scripted and handed to an instructor to teach. Futures-oriented, proactive leadership development changes constantly and requires creative development skills on the parts of the administrators, instructors, and participants to be most effective. (See the SC Experiment for more examples.)

The South Carolina Experiment

The following chronicle of the first two years of the experimental public safety leadership development program at the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy provides an

example of how one small group structured and carried out its program, dedicated to providing futures-oriented, proactive leaders for the public safety field.

Class One: 2006

Substantively, we decided to have a theme for each module, with a set of objectives that supported our overall mission to produce futures-oriented, proactive leaders for the public safety field and an overall goal “to identify, implement, and internalize the leadership style and qualities needed to be a leader in the field of public safety.” Module One was titled “Overview: The Leadership Challenge” and had three learning objectives: to identify the leadership style and qualities needed in a 21st century public safety leader; to apply leadership skills in identifying trends that will challenge 21st century public safety; and to apply leadership skills in identifying strategies to maximize benefits while minimizing threats from trends. The concept was to introduce the students immediately to the difficulty of defining leadership, followed quickly by introducing them to a panel of top leaders in the public safety field who discussing their perspectives on leadership. On the second day, students were presented with an overview of futures thinking and research methodologies and then conducted their own assessment of future trends for South Carolina Public Safety. On the final day of Module One, the author of the textbook used for the course spoke via teleconference on the major themes in the book. As author of a chapter on “future” leadership in the text, I followed by discussing 10 principles of leadership deemed necessary to succeed in 21st century public safety agencies.

The homework assignment was the first Reflection Paper, in which each student in 3 to 5 pages was to (1) tell what he/she learned in the module, (2) describe how he/she would use what was learned at work and at home, and (3) state a problem/situation at work that he/she would attempt to solve using what had been learned as a base. Above all, the executives (ranging from lieutenants to chiefs of police, state highway patrol superintendents, detention center directors, probation district supervisors and public safety officers—i.e., cross-trained for police, fire, and emergency services) liked having top executives interact with them on questions about leadership and the ethics of leaders. They also learned from the Millennium

exercise that leaders must look to future trends and develop strategies—do research and strategic planning.

Module Two focused on futures research—The Visioning Concept Applied to Public Safety—with learning objectives: to inculcate the need for visioning/planning in decision making, to apply visioning and futures research methods to problem solving; and to develop creative skills in managing change and problem solving. This was a working session to learn the methods/skills of futures research and how they could be applied to public safety. The philosophy of futurism and the findings of futurists about the alternative future worlds evolving were discussed, along with the future of crime and methods of coping with crime—from high tech (e.g., cybercrime and biotech offenses) to the perennial youth-at-risk problem. Methods taught included literature review, future facts, bellwether, Delphi, brainstorming, trend extrapolation, opinion polling, and scenario development, as well as examination of the change process and the creative process applied to public safety leadership. This time the students began to express their enthusiasm for “being futurists” as prerequisite to being competent leaders. Their Reflection Paper projects began to take a futures focus—a developing problem/dilemma that could be headed off by a proactive approach.

Things really began to gel with Module Three—Coordination and Partnerships: Keys to 21st Century Leadership. Having taught for more than 20 years in the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT), I had become a believer in the teachings of LEMIT Module II that a prerequisite for futures-oriented leadership was development of partnerships and cooperative agreements between public safety leaders and city managers, county administrators, state and local agencies, and anyone who could facilitate the public safety mission. A highly seasoned public safety educator accepted the role of coordinating Module Three. We asked students in advance to bring with them a list of both formal and informal cooperative agreements their agencies had with other entities. This became the bases for a number of discussions of the need for and value of such arrangements, including a panel of top public safety administrators and their political superiors (e.g., city manager, state agency head). We ended the three days with a presentation and discussion of the necessity for understanding the complementary relationship of the news media and public safety leaders (with an

internationally-known former news reporter turned public safety agency information director as the moderator, and newspaper, radio, and television reporters a panel). The Reflection Papers began to include phrases such as “this is terrific” and “why haven’t we been exposed to this before?” Projects blossomed and by the end of the program several had instituted new policies, created new partnerships, and/or established new cooperative agreements to facilitate meeting their agencies’ mission statements.

Module Four—The Growing Impact of Technology on Leadership—gave us an opportunity to discuss the rapid pace of change and how it is already affecting/effecting leadership in the public safety field. One of the country’s leading experts on the matter (a high-ranking member of a state police force) took the class through a discussion of emerging technologies, with applications to public safety at every turn. Then he talked about how this technology could be used to create new crimes and new methods of crime control, followed by a discussion of the ethical issues raised by the technology and how the technology could threaten civil liberties (which he firmly admonished had to be protected as a matter of constitutional necessity). An open discussion of how to develop a technology-use policy for an agency came after a half-day exposition by vendors of developing technology in the public safety field.

It had become clear as the class progressed that the leadership students needed and wanted to take an ever increasing role in the procedures. Thus Module Five—Future Issues Challenging Public Safety Leadership—gave class members a chance to demonstrate their new leadership skills by researching, presenting, and leading a discussion on a challenging issue. Topics such as “Melding Boomers/Xers/Millennials in the Public Safety Workplace” and “Embedding Ethics in the Public Safety Agency” were complemented by student panels on topics such as “What We Have Learned That We Can Take Home to Improve Our Agency” and “What We Have Learned That We Can Incorporate into Our Leadership Style.” In between, topics such as the future of homeland security at the local level and how to recruit and train high-level personnel were interspersed with a session on how to develop the courage to “do the right thing.”

On the last day, a full-fledged graduation (with class shirts, class picture, luncheon, speaker, honor graduate award, etc.) was held and students created an alumni association to continue their leadership education and networking. Only one student—a police chief who had an officer killed during a module—dropped out of the course. All 21 others passed with grades of A or B and one C. During the class we were able to arrange three hours of college credit for the course (with an additional test and term paper) which three students earned. All graduates received Academy continuing education credits.

Reflection, Evaluation and Revision

In the final Reflection Paper, students were encouraged to evaluate the total program—what worked, what didn't, what should be kept, what should be discontinued or changed, what should be added—and to list recommendations for change. Now the hard work began as we started our own evaluation—guided by student comments and our observations during the nine months of the program. The student evaluations were invaluable here, pointing out some changes that needed to be made but which we had not recognized, but more often citing needed changes that confirmed our observations.

Major changes included:

- (1) Adding instruction in communication skills to facilitate more professional presentations and panel/exercise participation. An eight-hour block was added to help participants understand how to research and present material; this included researching via by the Internet, developing and following an outline, effectively presenting to an audience, and preparing PowerPoint to enhance a presentation.
- (2) Requiring each student to be a mentor or mentee. As good leaders need to inspire and teach, the executive student would choose a fellow officer or partner in the public safety field to either mentor or be mentored by, keeping a journal to record notes on each meeting and reporting to the class on the total experience.
- (3) Adding a two-hour block on strategic planning and a two-hour strategic planning exercise based on budget and demographic data each student collected on his/her jurisdiction.

(4) Adding a session on trusteeship theory and the servant leader concept tied in with systems theory applied to public safety service and delivery; this included both classroom instruction, as well as practical consideration only implementing the theory at the agency and community levels.

(5) Enhancing the Youth-at-Risk exercise by having SC Dept. of Juvenile Justice leaders discuss the approach they took to the problem and having juvenile inmates and parolees talk with the class and answer any and all questions posed to them by executive students. This became even more intense as the juveniles served dinner to the executive students in an institutional dining room and joined them in an exercise to develop a plan to alleviate the Youth-at-Risk dilemma.

(6) Including student panels/presentations in Modules Two through Four and having students plan and execute Module Five as a demonstration of the leadership skills they developed during the program.

Class Two: 2007

Many smaller changes were integrated into the 2007 class, which was extended to 120 hours—still five modules of three days each, but beginning at 10 a.m. on Tuesdays, including a 6-8 p.m. session on Wednesday evenings, and ending at 4 p.m. on Thursdays (adding 8 hours per module for a total of 40 more hours). Also added was a pre-class Orientation at which the course and all its requirements were fully explained to all students. Decorum requirements included being prepared and on time for all classes and class activities (“a leader sets an example and is always prepared”). It also required appropriate dress (defined as dress shirt/blouse and slacks/skirt) for class and for making presentations or serving on panels, plus no talking while others were presenting, no cell phones ringing (could put on vibrate), and no checking email or surfing the internet while class was in session, except when working on an in-class research assignment. The orientation served its purpose—to be sure each student fully understood the commitment he/she was making and the conduct of the class. It was also emphasized that networking with each other and others in the field was expected and would be the most important lasting outcome of the experience.

PFI members proved invaluable for the Leadership Challenge Panel to kick off Module One. A police chief presented the participatory leadership teams he pioneered in his agency and, in keeping with the increased student participation, an open discussion was held on class views on leadership. A panel—Leading a Community-based Agency—was followed by a presentation by leaders—including a graduate of the 2006 first class of Executive Leadership—of the largest sheriff’s department in the state on COMPSTAT from a Leadership Perspective. One outcome of this latter event was a surprised reaction by many students to the intensity and perceived “harshness” of the in-your-face COMPSTAT leadership style. Two officers in the class from a smaller agency with a COMPSTAT program mentioned that they had a very different approach; two modules later they provided a presentation on their “kinder, gentler” COMPSTAT, leading to a class discussion of how to tailor this proactive crime control model to the needs of the specific agency/community.

Module Two again focused on visioning and futures research along with creative thinking and the change process, all applied to public safety. The expanded youth-at-risk exercise proved to be possibly the most eye-opening experience of the class for most executive students, as they went home determined to implement changes in their agencies/communities to better identify and help these children in their jurisdictions. Module Three again focused on servant leadership and partnerships and coordinated effort, with added sessions presenting and discussing the work of the PFI/FBI Futures Working Group, and a student presentation on how problem-based learning could be used in both recruit training and executive development in the public safety field.

Module Four focused on technology and leadership, including ethical concerns in leading a public safety agency in the emerging high-tech era. A student roundtable considered the use of technology in South Carolina agencies—what already exists, what’s on the horizon, and what leadership policies/issues must be considered. A class member volunteered to take responsibility for directing Module Five, soliciting and scheduling student-developed panels, presentations, and a debate (whether a college degree should be a prerequisite for employment in the public safety field). Other discussions included servant leadership in public safety in South Carolina, leading three generations in the SC public safety workplace, the most

important leadership traits to take home and practice, leading a direct supervision detention center, and the efficacy of military leadership development for public safety agencies. I finished up with a “Blue Sky Thinking” presentation/discussion to encourage creativity and thinking in terms of alternative futures—being flexible enough to lead under any circumstances. All 20 students also reported on their mentoring experiences and in a class discussion that followed agreed that mentoring can play a valuable role in creating a futures-oriented, proactive public safety agency.

The final Reflection Paper was an evaluation students worked on throughout the final module and submitted (most via email) at mid-day on the last class day, less than an hour before graduation. It is this information that will be invaluable in modifying the program to meet the needs of the students as future classes are held.

Conclusion

Integrity was always cited as the number one trait required by a leader, as no one wants to follow a person who is not trustworthy, who is not dependable, and who will not stand up and accept responsibility when under pressure. The second most cited trait of leaders was vision. No one wants to follow a leader who has no idea where he/she should be leading. There really is no true leadership without vision; thus visioning must be included as a key element in any leadership development program, and this is where the approach of the futurists is vital. Even though most agree that leadership requires attitudes/skills appropriate for the times, futures-oriented, proactive leaders are better prepared to accept and perform the leadership role under most circumstances by adopting the philosophy/methods used by futurists in their daily lives. There was unanimous agreement in the evaluations that thinking as a futurist provided competence and confidence to cope with whatever might lie ahead.

Thinking as a futurist, using futures methods of research, applying insight and foresight to considering the path forward, providing a vision for the agency/community, instilling confidence and optimism in colleagues—all of these are necessary traits for a futures-oriented, proactive leader. Whereas some hold leaders are born, not bred, we set out to provide the best development program we could envision, determined to instill the qualities we deemed

necessary to provide the type of leaders needed to lead the public safety arena in the 21st century. There was general agreement that when any officer (police, fire, emergency services) arrives on the scene of an incident, that officer is expected to take a leadership role in handling the situation. Thus leadership potential should be assessed as part of the employment process and basic leadership development should begin with basic training and continued throughout continuing professional development in the field. Every officer is indeed a *potential* leader.

Endnote

1. In 2005, Dr. Gene Stephens was hired by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy to create and be lead instructor in its first Executive Leadership Development Program. The following is based on his two years of experience in starting from a blank sheet of paper and developing a program with one overarching purpose: to develop futures-oriented, proactive leaders for the public safety field.