

Emerging Best Practices in Police Management

by

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Introduction

In 2004, we started with a simple idea; determine if the lessons from one of the best selling business books published in the last five years apply in police departments. The book we chose, Jim Collins' Good to Great (HarperCollins, 2001), tracked the performance of 126 American Fortune 500 companies over a period of 30 years. Of these 126 companies, a mere eleven successfully made the transition from "good to great," averaging cumulative stock returns of nearly 7 times the general market over a period of 15 years from the start of their transition. It is these companies and the practices which made them great which are profiled in the book.

We found the framework of concepts examined in the book, especially those that concerned Level 5 Leadership, Confronting the Brutal Facts, The Hedgehog Concept and A Culture of Discipline, to be a useful template in evaluating what distinguished great police departments from their peers. While these four elements were central to our inquiry at the beginning of our research, it was clear by the conclusion that the police agencies we examined had successfully taken these concepts and reshaped and refined them into ten crucial practices. These ten practices and how they are manifested, not only in the five police agencies which made our initial cut, but in other police agencies which have joined the journey, are the subject of this report. We were aware when we started this project that it was and will remain a work in progress. Every year we are fortunate to work with and learn from hundreds of police personnel from dozens of police agencies in the western United States. New "best practices" are uncovered and revealed every day. It is our desire that both our original research and frequent updates to it, whether from us or our readers, will help maintain a high level of currency in our knowledge about cultural transformations necessary in contemporary police management.

We began by looking at 12 police agencies and narrowed it to five. The five police agencies included Chula Vista, CA, Sparks, NV, Clovis, CA, Upland, CA and Paso Robles, CA. In addition to the ten practices, we also found other shared commonalities. Lower than average Part 1 crime rates, low vacancy rates and high levels of community and city council support were shared by all. All of these chiefs enjoyed long tenures and in all but one instance were replaced by internal successors upon retirement.

THE PROFILE

Humble Leadership

We did not find gruff, profane or egocentric George S. Patton type leaders in the five agencies we studied, nor have we seen them in the other agencies we have worked with who are on the path from good to great. It appears among police leaders there is a growing awareness that what passed for effective management and leadership in the past will not work today. A number of factors have contributed to this shift. More young officers than ever are entering the profession with college degrees. They consider their education an asset and expect it to be utilized by the department in problem solving and decision making. The educational system has taught them to

work in teams, to value ideas and to trust character traits more than rigid hierarchical structures. POST'S Supervisory Leadership Institute (SLI) has obviously had an impact on the leadership philosophies and styles of first line supervisors, just as the Command College and the FBI National Academy have influenced higher level managers and executives. The results are departments with a more relaxed militaristic structure, where humility and servanthood trump ego and power. In the five police departments we studied, managers are encouraged to connect with staff humanly, not by rank or the number of stripes on their sleeves. Respect is earned.

In the Clovis PD we were told, "Sergeants who rule by fear are stepped on, hard and fast." Fear puts everyone on edge and compromises trust, communication and truth telling. The chain-of-command is a tool and not an obstacle to employees who desire to make positive change. Leaders in these agencies are open minded, flexible and courageous enough to admit mistakes and change direction when necessary. Execution, doing what you say you will do, is important and the role it plays in building trust is acknowledged.

In each of these agencies there is an openness, accessibility and transparency which characterize management's relationship with employees. POA leadership is regularly included in important strategic meetings. Chiefs are routinely out of their office and manage by walking around (MBWA). In Chula Vista, Chief Rick Emerson circulates among officers at shift change and in Upland, Chief Steve Adams exercises, runs and trains with officers. A lyric from the theme song of "Cheers" seemed to sum up this aspect best. Over and over we heard, even in Chula Vista with over 350 employees, "everyone knows your name."

Ideas to Ponder

- A new circular organizational chart has replaced the traditional hierarchical chart
- Visual tokens of rank have been minimized
- Ethical personal values based on Josephson Institute principles are emphasized
- Leadership promotes a relational team philosophy
- Command staff knows all employees by name
- Leaders have a cohesive chemistry and are driven toward common goals

Selective Hiring

Like most police agencies, these departments seek to only hire the "best". What sets them apart from other agencies is that they do not settle for less. Because of their reputations, these agencies select from the cream of the crop. An officer in Chula Vista, a lateral from a much larger agency, said, "Chula Vista is a proud organization and one of the main reasons is it only selects the best." We heard similar comments from officers in the other agencies we examined as well. The leaders in these organizations have learned and applied a fundamental truth of human nature: the more selective the hiring process, the more attractive the position.

In Upland, only 10% of interviewees are actually hired. A recommendation from an FTO to terminate employment of a new hire is nearly always acted on and is paramount to "getting the right people on the bus." Clovis is even more selective, hiring only 6 of every 100 potential new hires. To strengthen its ability to hire the best, the police department has assumed 100% control over the hiring and promotional process and has reduced the time required to hire a new officer from an average of 247 days to less than 40 days.

Just as importantly, because these are departments where officers desire to work, they tend to stay. At the time of our initial study the vacancy rate in these departments was about five percent or less. Since each of these departments was nearly fully staffed, officers could take time off when they wanted or needed to accommodate a family emergency. Employees were also able to flex their schedules to allow them to return to school or coach little league. This was an extraordinary finding. At the time of the study, many of the agencies we were working with had vacancy rates between 25-30 percent. The only way employees were able to take time off was by calling in sick.

Ideas to Ponder

- Only hire great people; don't settle for less
- The department controls hiring and promotional process
- Provide a generous salary and benefits package
- The department maintains an open recruitment for all qualified candidates
- The department pays finder fees for employee referrals

Education and Training

All five of these agencies, as well as many of the other law enforcement agencies we have recently worked with, place a premium on education and training. As we have already mentioned, more young officers than ever are entering the profession with college degrees. In Clovis over a third of all of their sworn personnel have a BA degree or above. In departments which have attracted new hires with college experience, management has observed that even those with as few as 60 units tend to be more adaptable to change, have broader exposure to more disciplines and are less married to traditional police culture. Some studies have shown that officers with college experience get fewer personal complaints and are less likely to use excessive force.

We have observed a definite trend to increase minimum education requirements for both entry-level appointment and promotion in the five good to great agencies as well as in many of the other law enforcement organizations in which we work. To underscore the importance of education, many of the departments have sought to increase both tuition reimbursement and/or educational incentives. The Paso Robles PD reimburses tuition up to \$3,000 a year, which is adequate for employees pursuing upper division coursework. In El Segundo, the police department has taken it a step further by reimbursing employees 100% of tuition and fees at a public university and 80% of costs at a private university. The Reno Police Department has one of the most generous educational incentives we have seen (6% for an AA, 8% for a BA and 10% for a MA). All of these strategies are consistent with emerging industry standards as departments seek to elevate the professionalism in police management.

Field training (FTO) and in-service training are also important priorities in the five agencies we examined. In each of the departments in-service training exceeds POST mandates. In Chula Vista, every Friday is a training day where one-fourth of patrol officers receive updates and learn new skills. In these departments, the Supervisory Leadership Institute is standard for all sergeants as is the Command College or FBI National Academy for higher ranks. The FTO program in Chula Vista is considered the most rigorous in San Diego County and is a source of pride for many of their officers. In the Reno PD, the Police Training Officer (PTO) program,

with its emphasis on adult learning theory and measurement of emotional intelligence, is perceived to be enormously effective in the post academy training of new officers.

The vital importance of mentoring and succession planning is not lost on the five agencies we studied. Since we started this project in 2004, the chiefs in Clovis, Paso Robles and Sparks have retired. In each case new chiefs were promoted from within. All had been mentored, developed and prepared for their new roles. Within the past several years, the Clovis PD had three captains retire within a month of each other. Included in the newspaper article which summarized their careers, were the profiles of the three lieutenants who had been developed to replace them. While most police leaders acknowledge the importance and urgency of developing succession planning and mentoring programs, the number of departments which have effectively implemented them at all ranks is small.

Ideas to Ponder

- The department has developed and encouraged nationally recognized in-house instructors
- The department utilizes a 360 degree evaluation for all supervisors and above to help perfect leadership skills
- The department looks for and cultivates future leaders. Everyone is mentored with a focus on those who show particular promise.

Equipment and Technology

All of the agencies pride themselves on the fact that when it comes to equipment and technology, bigger departments do not have anything better than they do. We found in each of the five departments and in many of the other departments where we have worked, a direct correlation between equipment and technology and officer pride. The common refrain we heard from many officers was that high quality, state-of-the-art equipment implied they were important. Good equipment and technology manifested both management's support of employees and management's expectation of superior work and performance. We find precious little of this pride in departments where police facilities are poorly maintained and equipment is old, obsolete and inadequate for high level performance. A Clovis PD officer said, "I have more good equipment than I could ever use." Another officer reported, "When I started I was given all new equipment. At my old department I had to buy some of it myself."

All of these departments regularly replace computers and patrol vehicles. At one point, the Paso Robles PD was replacing computers every four years and patrol vehicles every two years. Digital video systems and in-car computers have been installed in all patrol units. In Chula Vista, MDTs are in all patrol units, all officers are equipped with tasers and Palm Pilots are available to officers who want them. In all of these agencies new technology is tested by end users before it is purchased. Just as importantly, they are quick to walk away from new technology that does not work. The Upland PD abandoned a \$50,000 payroll management system that hindered employees more than it helped.

These departments have also found ways to utilize the high tech skills of many of their younger employees. Aside from including them in purchasing decisions, some departments have created high tech crime units to focus on identity theft, computer forensics, internet safety for kids and internet hate crimes.

Of the five agencies, three (Chula Vista, Clovis and Paso Robles) were in relatively new facilities. It was obvious that both management and employees took pride in their new facilities. Floor tiles and windows gleamed, carpets were without tears and stains, cardboard storage boxes and clutter were nowhere to be seen. The lobby area in these facilities is warm and inviting, unlike many PDs where the lobby is little more than a walk-up window. One, Chula Vista, had a mounted flat screen television and a children's play area. In Clovis, the lobby features large display cases to showcase old police and fire photos and memorabilia. The Paso Robles PD lobby is more reminiscent of a corporate law office than a police department. The Sparks and Upland police facilities, which are over 20 years old, are exceptionally well maintained and in better condition than many newer police facilities we work in.

Ideas to Ponder

- Test all new technology with end users before purchase
- Officers and special units are provided with analytical support to understand crime trends at a deeper level
- Officers decide what weapons to buy

Employee Empowerment

These are not departments where employees are micro-managed. Officers are expected to make decisions, to make arrests and to use force when necessary. They are given generous latitude to solve problems, implement solutions and request resources from other units in the department or other city departments when needed. An officer in Sparks commented, "We are empowered to make decisions and as long as they are sound and made for the right reasons, supervisors will support us." An officer in Clovis reported, "there is very little limit to what we are able to do." In Upland, officers are encouraged to proactively pursue the aspects of the job which appeal to them, a practice Chief Steve Adams calls "letting the horses run in the direction they are running."

In Paso Robles, the department has instituted a one page issue paper to encourage employee participation in organizational improvement. As most ideas have been implemented the number of suggestions has increased exponentially. In the Clovis PD officers are expected to create innovative programs and solve problems. Risk taking is encouraged. Chula Vista is a forgiving organization if a "good try" fails. In Sparks, a manager commented, "Employees are allowed to 'fail forward' as long as the intentions are right."

Ideas to Ponder

- Let the right people do the right things (align the required skill set to the task)
- Officers are involved in decision making on issues regarding workload, innovation, customer service and training
- Multiple less lethal options are provided to all officers not just supervisors
- The Department created discipline review board with POA involvement

Innovation

All departments on the path from good to great are passionate about both management and street level innovation. Officers are encouraged to be passionate about issues and search for new ways of doing business. The mantra is “if it might work try it.” In the Clovis PD a patrol officer, not a motor cop, revamped the uniform for motors to enhance officer safety. In both Upland and Clovis the “geeks” in the department investigate computer crimes and participate in high tech purchasing decisions. In Chula Vista, the 18 school resource officers are given a high level of autonomy to create new programs, including training on internet safety and bullying prevention. In Los Gatos, the police department is committed to meeting every new citizen who moves into the city. Eventually, they intend to know every household in a city with a population of 30,000.

The Reno PD, which has enjoyed a reputation as one of the most innovative police departments in the country, is ratcheting up its efforts to enhance innovation in the workplace. Innovation Boxes, which they call I-Boxes, have been installed around the department. Employees are encouraged to submit ideas for improvements and efficiencies which are forwarded to a newly created Police Innovation Team which reviews and approves those with merit.

In these challenging economic times, police departments are discovering new and creative ways to utilize volunteers. In the Lincoln PD, Chief Brian Vizzusi has found a way to assign volunteers (some of whom are retired CEOs and attorneys) to every unit in the department. Operational efficiency will be the mantra of the future. Not to do the same with less but to do more with less. This will challenge all of our best creative and innovative impulses.

Ideas to Ponder

- Identify and implement new ways to creatively utilize citizen volunteers
- Utilize the “geeks” in the department to investigate computer crimes and make high-tech purchasing decisions
- Be creative in developing new ways to fund needed programs or to meet special needs
- Visit other departments outside the region to identify new ways of doing business

Customer Service

Like many of the other law enforcement agencies we work with, these five agencies understand the importance of customer service. At the time of our study all five still responded to all calls for service, including non-injury traffic collisions. In Clovis, officers understand that to the victim, a bicycle theft is as important as a vehicle theft. In Sparks an employee said, “Our service goes above and beyond. We take courtesy reports for crimes that happened in Reno.” In Paso Robles, cultivating community support is a significant focus and is expected of employees at all levels. In all five departments partnerships with community and faith-based organizations, schools and businesses are necessary avenues to improve service and strengthen community support. An officer in Clovis put it best, “When I am at work it is not my time. It’s the community’s time. Calls for service do not waste my time; I am here to serve the community.”

When it comes to customer service, no department has carried it further than the Upland Police Department. They emphasize customer service and have established the “wow factor” as a clear, distinct organizational value. The “wow factor” is the ability of all employees to deliver a level of service that exceeds the public’s expectations. “Never fail to engage and astonish our citizens

with the wow factor” is painted on the main hallway of the police station. “The wow factor starts here” is painted on the wall in dispatch and highlighted with spotlights. One Upland employee put it this way, “We are the Nordstrom of Police Departments.”

Outstanding customer service and citizen satisfaction enhance community support. Both the Clovis and Paso Robles PDs attribute the passage of sales tax overrides to build new police facilities to their untiring efforts to put customers first. In each of these departments, officers’ attitudes, behavior and comporment have made the crucial difference between success and failure.

Ideas to Ponder

- The department conducts an Annual Community Assessment to track community perceptions about crime and citizen satisfaction
- The department has created a Customer Service Team to conduct community education programs on ID theft, holiday safety and juvenile driving
- The department is sensitive and respectful toward the community and tailors programs to meet specific community needs
- The Department engages the community through community meetings, programs and proliferation of positive media
- The “wow factor” has been integrated into the performance evaluation process for all employees

Results Orientation

Results matter and count in the five agencies we studied. Each have identified numerous methods to measure success without the typical business metrics of profit, share value and financial returns. In Clovis and Upland, management acknowledges response times matter to reporting parties; these two agencies regularly measure their response times and make adjustments when necessary. Both the Chula Vista and Sparks PD operate with strategic business plans with detailed result, output, demand and efficiency measures.

These agencies and many others we have worked with have moved beyond traditional police measures (arrests, citations, and FIs) to focus on outcomes. In both Clovis and Upland vehicle stops are as important as citations. In Clovis, officers are encouraged to have a heart and not beat up on the public. In Upland, although traffic citations have plummeted so have the number of collisions.

When there is a failure, these agencies do what it takes to correct it. In Paso Robles every breakdown, error or performance discrepancy is debriefed to facilitate communication, understanding and learning. When the county juvenile probation department failed to provide adequate supervision of juvenile probationers in Clovis, the PD trained and deputized youth officers to serve as juvenile probation officers.

This results orientation extends to the promotional process as well. Candidates are not rated solely on how they score on written examines and oral interviews. At promotion time these agencies look at what people have done around the department, what contribution have they made. The focus on results begets accountability and raises performance at every level in the

organization. Just as Compstat drove down crime rates in New York City by focusing commanders on results and proactive enforcement, this same orientation has influenced how officers approach their jobs in many of the agencies we examined. One officer in Clovis said, “We are expected to take care of the root problem on every call.”

Measurement, the deliberate tracking of both quantitative and qualitative results, is pervasive in each of these departments. Nearly all conduct frequent community surveys to track citizen perception and satisfaction with police services. Response times, crime rates and closure rates are monitored and routinely compared to agencies of comparable size and demographics. Results are shared with the community through the publication of annual reports, community meetings and print and broadcast media outlets.

Ideas to Ponder

- The department management instills in employees that is not acceptable to be mediocre
- Officers and managers are encouraged to be results oriented vs. process oriented
- The department does not use statistics to evaluate personnel

Family Orientation/Supportive Culture

Management in each of the five departments genuinely care about their employees. We have found this high level of caring to be present in other departments walking the path from good to great. This level of caring is also an essential trait of the most effective police leaders we have worked with over the past 30 years. We have found that creating and maintaining a strong family orientation and supportive culture is a multi-faceted phenomenon, influenced by a host of both crucial and nebulous factors. In many cases, it is the small things that supervisors and managers do which influence organizational culture the most.

Whatever you call it, the most effective law enforcement leaders acknowledge their most important role is providing the highest level of support to enable their employees to carry out the organization’s mission. This support includes clear goals and performance expectations, regular and effective training, coaching and all the tools, equipment and technology to make employees productive.

Aside from the foundation described above, there is no pat formula for how leaders create a strong family orientation and supportive culture. The methods are as different and diverse as the leaders themselves. In most of the agencies we studied salaries and benefits are competitive and in many cases higher than neighboring departments. In Chula Vista, officers are under a five-year contract. An officer commented, “I know what I will be making in 5 years. It’s huge to the troops because it helps you plan your life.” While salary and benefits are important, many less tangible practices carried tremendous meaning for employees.

In Upland, Chief Steve Adams meets with all new hires and their families. In all of the departments, management calls employees when they are sick and visits them when they are hospitalized. The Clovis PD maintains a no questions asked mental health program, as well as peer counseling, a chaplain program, informal bible studies and financial counseling. The organizational culture promotes civility in the workplace, the elimination of artificial stress caused by dysfunctional management behavior and the maintenance of healthy friendships.

In the Sparks PD, management celebrates an employee of the month, distributes recognition coins and holds regular employee award ceremonies. One Spark's patrol officer commented, "We have a kids Christmas party, a summer picnic and you can get time off when your family needs you. Kids and family members are seen frequently around the department." One more persistent theme: in each of these departments civilian employees feel valued and included. When we were in Chula Vista dispatchers were hosting a pancake and waffle breakfast for employees. In Clovis, dispatchers are the only employees with a second story view of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Personal fitness and wellness are also priorities. Each of these departments have state-of-the-art fitness and exercise rooms as well as generous fitness incentives.

Ideas to Ponder

- The department provides "birth bags" to officers or their spouses upon the birth of a child
- The department maintains positive working relationships through labor/management and employee appreciation luncheons
- Alternative scheduling is available to support officers in school or to accommodate family commitments
- The chief sends a gift to employees when they have a baby
- A mentoring program has been established to support all new employees. The chief meets with all new employees one-on-one, as well as with the officer's spouse and family.

Distinct Organizational Culture

Examined in their totality, all of the best practices present in the five agencies have produced a distinct and unique organizational culture that sets them apart from many other police organizations. Where the leadership in some agencies is ineffective, inappropriate to the changing times and autocratic, the chiefs and command staffs in the five agencies we examined are relational, team-oriented, humble, fair and ethical. The ones promoted to chief from inside were nurtured and mentored by their predecessors. Now, in turn, they are mentoring their successors for even greater success.

Fear, the kind that abounds in paramilitary organizations with their rigid, faultfinding rank structure has been replaced by respect for all employees, sworn and civilian alike, and fun! Selective hiring, frequent and rigorous training, competitive wages and benefits and state-of-the-art equipment, technology and facilities have made employees in these agencies know they are supported and special. Nearly all of the officers we rode with had an unmistakable pride in their respective agency. None of them said their agency was perfect or without fault. None of them are. What they said, to paraphrase what many officers told us, was this: "It's a family here. We have everything we need to do our job. Management appreciates the job you do. While not perfect, there are many, many things very right about the department and I would not want to work anywhere else." Pride breeds loyalty, a trait many police executives complain the new generation of officers does not appear to possess in any significant degree. What we learned in these five agencies is simple: make them proud and they will stay. It helps explain their low vacancy rates and why officers who work in neighboring departments desire to work in them. This loyalty has paid off in other ways as well. In the current economic downturn, the Clovis

POA has agreed to a nearly ten percent salary cut to avoid layoffs of fellow employees, not just in the PD but across the entire city organization. Because they know they have the right people on the bus, they do not want to lose anyone.

There was another equally important dimension to pride which struck us too, and it had to do with the relationship between pride and performance. The officers in these agencies expected and did not resent that management held them accountable. These are high performance organizations where results matter and count, where customer service is paramount. Employees in the five organizations understand that mediocrity is not acceptable; that management and their peers value hard work, smart work and effort. These are employees who perceive themselves as “champions”.

Conclusion

We started out to determine what best practices in police departments truly make a difference in changing organizational culture. We believe these ten do. The exact formula in each of the five agencies we examined are a little different, as they must be if the organization is to retain its uniqueness, that blend of vision and values which make it special. There is, however, considerable overlap in the ten practices identified in the five agencies and within many of the others with whom we have recently worked. We believe they are strong, powerful and prescriptive. What’s more, especially in light of the current recessionary economic climate, most do not require additional resources as much as they do a fundamental shift in how we lead police organizations, deploy staff and measure results.

For those desiring to learn more about these principles, in addition to Jim Collins’ original book, we recommend Good to Great in the Social Sectors, a 35 page monograph also by Collins and “Good to Great” Policing, published by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

While the original research for Good to Great was rooted in the private sector, the contributors to this PERF monograph believe “Collins has given us the dots. Our challenge is to find ways to connect them in the context of our own organizational puzzles” (pg. 52). Our hope is this report helps you begin to connect the dots.