

# Managerial Perspectives in the Development of a Physical Fitness Program

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## *Abstract*

*Law enforcement agencies around the country are comprised of men and women who are willing to subject themselves to injury and death, while protecting the rights of a free society. The number one killer of police officers is not a criminal's bullet, but heart disease. Heart disease is brought on by the stress of the job, shift work, improper diet (fast foods), and little physical exercise. Although this fact is widely known, few agencies have initiated mandatory physical training requirements. This paper argues that mandatory physical training is essential in police work, helping officers stay alive on the streets, reducing absenteeism and lowering turnover rates. Studies revealed that many line officers are in such bad physical condition that they are a statistic waiting to happen. The paper also describes the physical fitness program of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, which uses reinforcement and motivational techniques to keep officers active.*

## Introduction

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, like many law enforcement agencies in this country, is constantly attempting to identify and reduce areas of high occupational stress within the agency. Scientific studies have established that occupational stress has a causal relationship with disease, and increased stress has led to poorer physical and mental health. Police work has been ranked second only to Air Traffic Controllers as the most stressful occupation and some researchers rank it first. The suicide rate for police officers is two to six times the national average and the divorce rates are twice as high (O'Neill & Cushing, 1991).

The toll exacted by stress-related illnesses and conditions in the United States is staggering. In 1988, the American Heart Association reported the total estimated cost for cardiovascular disease alone to be \$83.7 billion (Rippe, 1989). As the work environment becomes more complex and demanding, the sources and consequences of stress proliferate. Alcoholism, high blood pressure, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress disorder are but a few examples of common stress disorders with serious consequences (Bryant, 1990).

The sources of stress for law enforcement officers are numerous and immediate. They include: (1) the wearing of a uniform and being "on display," (2) job under/overload; (3) economic pressures forcing the need for outside employment; (4) conflicting social values; (5) administrative pressures; (6) varying work shifts; (7) continued responsibility for others; (8) perpetual crisis situations; (9) fear of failure; and (10) family or social life sometimes perceived as unsatisfactory (Bryant, 1990).

The sources of stress are perhaps more compelling because they are often beyond the officer's control. A law enforcement officer may, however, face even more stress from internal sources, such as the officer's own inactivity and poor diet. Officers' fitness levels and diets can dictate the course of their careers and perhaps their lives as

well (Baumener, 1991).

On some level, most officers realize they are going to encounter external stressors such as workloads, hostile criminals, and administrative pressures. These problems are part of the job and most officers can deal with them constructively and effectively. Other officers however, for a variety of reasons, cannot. One demonstrated way of minimizing the effect of these external stressors is to emphasize physical fitness as a primary method of stress reduction (Bryant, 1990). The role physical fitness programs play in reducing instances of heart disease, hypokinetic diseases and orthopedic disorders is well known. Tracy (1992) has stated that these conditions are less likely to occur in physically fit individuals.

The health and fitness of police officers are most important issues, ones that can save lives and make them more satisfying and productive. Physical fitness programs give something positive to employees and improve morale. These healthier, more fit workers will then be more productive. The turnover rate as well as absenteeism can be reduced by implementing a physical fitness program (Rippe, 1989). Communication can also be enhanced by a physical fitness program within the department. Meeting, running and exercising with coworkers and supervisors give employees a chance to discuss work topics in an informal setting.

The establishment of a physical fitness program requires reinforcement and motivation. Skinner's theory (Peters & Waterman, 1982) asserts that regular reinforcement loses impact because it comes to be expected. Thus, unpredictability and intermittent reinforcements work better. Moreover, small frequent rewards are more effective than large ones. One example of a small reward could be the "awarding" of a designed tee shirt, proclaiming the officer's physical fitness achievements. Positive reinforcements can be successful. Yet, intrinsic motivation of the employee remains a key factor to a successful program (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

Management needs to be aware of the stress officers face and sensitive in dealing with them. Adding a physical fitness program that is run smoothly, fairly and efficiently can help officers deal with stress in a more healthful way. The program should emphasize proper diet and nutrition as well as exercise. Such a physical fitness program will enable workers and management to function more efficiently, both physically and emotionally, enabling all to lead healthier and happier lives.

### Managerial Perspectives in the Development of a Physical Fitness Program

Stress is a constant companion of a police officer whose day-to-day duties mean he or she must make decisions quickly. Police officers carry guns and make life or death sentences in a split second. Stress can be generated by merely wearing a conspicuous uniform and being "on display." Other factors that cause stress include the need for outside employment to pay bills, conflicting social values, administration, varying shifts, responsibility for others, crisis situations, fear of failure and poor family or social life.

Stress can be managed by learning to relax, taking vacations, scheduling proper exercise, paying attention to diet and sleep needs, counseling and "talking-out" anger and frustrations, setting realistic goals and tasks for the day, and employing biofeedback to control physical reactions to stress (Bryant, 1990).

On some level, most officers realize they are going to encounter stress,

understand they are part of the job and deal with them constructively and effectively. Other officers, however, cannot. Stress reactions can develop into physical and mental disorders. Alcoholism, high blood pressure, insomnia, and even more serious illnesses can develop if stress disorders are not dealt with appropriately.

Help for stressed officers is becoming more available through awareness of the signs and symptoms of stress, but not enough is being done. According to the National Institute of Justice, only about 100 of the 17,000 police departments in this country offer psychological counseling for stressed officers (Bryant, 1990). That statistic must change.

### Stress-coping Programs

A National Police Survivors Seminar is held annually by Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS). The seminar attempts to help survivors pick up the pieces of their lives and turn tragedy into personal/family fulfillment. There are explanations of the grief process and ideas on coping; counselors are available for one-on-one sessions. The seminar is for the surviving family of the police officer as well as the officer's friends and partners (Sawyer, 1990).

Various other counseling and support groups exist within individual police departments. For example, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office provides marriage counseling and alcohol/drug dependency programs.

Police departments also hold sporting and fitness events as stress reducers. Such events include an annual snow-skiing competition conducted for law enforcement officers from the United States, Canada and other countries. The racers compete against persons of the same sex, age and ability. The competition features both Alpine (slalom and giant slalom) races and Nordic (5K and 10K cross country) races. All sworn and retired law enforcement officers are eligible for the race ("Police Ski Championships", 1990). This competition not only gives officers an opportunity to display athletic ability; it also provides healthy, fun and stress-releasing activities.

Marksmanship competitions are held year-round, providing for stress release as well as a chance to improve shooting skills. The Bianchi Cup and The Masters Competition, for example, include both physical and accuracy components (Ayood, 1988). If competitions do not appeal to an officer, many departments have firing ranges. For example, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has a firing range which can be used for shooting practice.

The Police Olympics are held annually for law enforcement officers. Events include everything from weight lifting to horseshoes. The events are not only healthy, they prove to be great stress releasers for participants as they prepare for the competition throughout the year.

### Physical Fitness for Healthy, Productive Careers

In order for a police officer to survive in an overstressed/dangerous world, three key factors must be remembered: (1) Be and stay alert; (2) Trust your senses; and (3) Acquire the knowledge, skills and the equipment necessary to ensure that the officer has the advantage in a deadly force situation. Law enforcement officers may face more threats than the obvious array of criminals who may want to kill them. Their own inactivity and poor diet could do the same. The kind of shape officers are in and the kind

of food they eat not only dictates the course of their careers, but perhaps their lives, according to Baumener (1991).

Tracy (1992) maintains that being stronger helps the police officer on the street. An officer's competence in physical arrest techniques enhances survival skills. Injuries are less likely to occur in physically fit individuals. Individuals who are physically fit perform assigned duties and responsibilities with greater ease and take fewer sick days. Physical fitness can alter risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol, obesity, stress, smoking, and inactivity.

Self-esteem and confidence are improved by gaining physical strength, resulting in a decreased likelihood of physical altercation with a suspect. Muscular strength is also important in day-to-day activities. In later years, many people suffer loss of structural integrity, leading to reliance on devices such as canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, and greatly diminishing quality of life. Tracy (1992) believes that beginning a lifelong program of physical fitness training now can provide the officer a longer, healthier career and life.

Robert Bragg, coordinator of defensive tactics and physical fitness training for the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, and Gregg Jorgenson, a member of the U.S. Customs Service Contraband Enforcement Team, list five areas of fitness that relate directly to law enforcement:

- (1) Aerobic capacity, the ability to perform physical work for sustained periods of time.
- (2) Anaerobic power, the body's ability to produce or sustain a high level of energy output over a short period of time.
- (3) Muscular strength, the muscle's ability to develop tension or force in a single effort or contraction.
- (4) Muscular endurance, the muscle's ability to sustain tension or repeated contractions of less than maximum effort for a long period of time.
- (5) Flexibility, the amount of movement around a given joint, and is specific to that joint (1992).

These categories play a large part in the physical agility/fitness tests administered to law enforcement applicants as well as during the officer's career. Such tests are especially important for officers in special units such as the S.W.A.T. team, dive and rescue unit, K-9, mounted patrol and bicycle and foot patrol.

Such tests have not always been required. Recently, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office implemented a physical fitness plan for every member of the police force. Much research was conducted to develop a program to best meet the needs of the department. The results of the program have been studied in several other departments as well.

The program is being tested by employees on a one-year trial basis. Since its conception, several components have been changed or altered, partly because of legal ramifications. The test, according to state law, must consist only of tasks relevant to the

police officer's job tasks.

Prior to testing, a briefing is conducted and officers are asked to complete a health questionnaire. To determine if the officer should participate in the physical fitness test, his or her blood pressure is taken in a resting position and then after a three-minute step test. After the test, a performance evaluation is provided to each participant and a debriefing session is held to discuss the results.

A growing number of corporations have similar physical fitness programs for their employees and some companies have full-time fitness directors. It is time for law enforcement departments to follow the lead of such corporations to better prepare police officers for the tasks they face.

### Advantages of Physical Fitness Programs

First and foremost, the health and fitness of the police officer is the most important issue. Fitness saves lives and makes people's lives better and happier. Physical fitness programs give something positive to employees and improve morale. Healthier, more fit workers will be more creative and more productive.

A study of Teneco's corporate fitness program revealed that participants are less likely to leave the company than non-participants. Therefore, Rippe (1989) states that turnover rate as well as absenteeism can be reduced by implementing a physical fitness program.

While reduced absenteeism and lowered turnover rates are decided benefits, the important gain achieved by companies that have established fitness facilities is improved morale. Improved employee morale results at least in part on the fact that company fitness facilities provide a symbol of how employers feel about their employees.

Communications also can be enhanced by a physical fitness program within the company/department. Meeting, running, and exercising with co-workers and supervisors give employees a chance to discuss work topics in an informal setting (Rippe, 1989).

A less humanistic benefit can also be gained by an employee physical fitness program. A study of corporate programs conducted by the Washington Business Group on Health and Arthur D. Little found long-term savings on health costs amounted to three to six dollars for every one dollar spent on physical fitness programs.

The American Heart Association reports that in 1988 the total estimated cost for cardiovascular disease was \$83.7 billion. One heart attack costs as much as \$50,000 to \$60,000 and one by-pass surgery can cost approximately \$60,000. Obviously, helping an employee reduce the risk of developing heart disease can be a cost-effective strategy. Also, employees who exercise regularly use approximately half of the health care dollars that a non-exercising employee uses.

One of the main goals of implementing a physical fitness program within the police department is to reduce the number one killer of police officers. The No. 1 killer is heart disease. The United States Department of Health conducted a study of 149 occupations and ranked law enforcement highest in heart disease. It has been estimated that one in every four Americans has underlying coronary artery disease and that approximately 40 to 50% of the deaths due to heart disease occur before the age of 65 years. Although there has been a slight decline in recent years, it is estimated that more than 54 million Americans have coronary artery disease and do not know it (Rippe, 1989).

### Setting Up a Physical Fitness Program: Reinforcements and Motivators

Overall, the benefits of physical fitness appear significant, but there can be problems when a law enforcement agency seeks to implement a physical fitness program. One problem can be employee resistance. Most police departments offering physical fitness programs make participation mandatory. But many police officers, like employees elsewhere, display resistance not only to a "new" idea but a "do it or else" concept. Management is faced with not only designing and implementing a physical fitness program but enforcing it.

One method of managing such a program is to empower the officers. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office's fitness program was initially researched by the police academy staff, which is made up of police officers. This initial action, delegated by management, gave the officers responsibility to develop a program for themselves and their coworkers. This provided the officers greater control over their own careers and a sense of contribution to the department. Kanter (1983) has found that employee participation can be very important when an innovation is implemented.

Once the program is implemented, some type of positive reinforcement may be introduced. According to Peters and Waterman (1982), the reinforcement should have immediacy. A system of positive feedback mechanisms can take account of physical fitness achievements. Verbal commendations are common in the prestigious companies. Feedback also may come in the form of tangible rewards and incentives. Skinner's theory asserts that regular reinforcement loses impact because it comes to be expected. Thus, unpredictability and intermittent reinforcements work better. Moreover, small rewards are frequently more effective than large ones. Although the concept of positive reinforcement is important, intrinsic motivation of the employee remains a key factor to successful organization (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

Egoistic needs may be the best motivator of all. An egoistic need is when an individual has the need for a high evaluation of him or herself, and the term includes such needs as knowledge, achievement, competence, independence, self-respect, respect of others, status and recognition. To maintain a high estimate of ourselves, most of us never stop needing assurance that we are held in esteem by others. Thus, if we satisfy our egoistic needs today, we continue to seek satisfaction tomorrow and the day after. Sutermeister (1969) asserts that the continuing satisfaction of egoistic needs would seem to offer the best opportunity to motivate employees to better job performance.

Therefore, if the management of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office can provide opportunities for feedback during the physical fitness program, participating officers most likely will fulfill their egoistic needs.

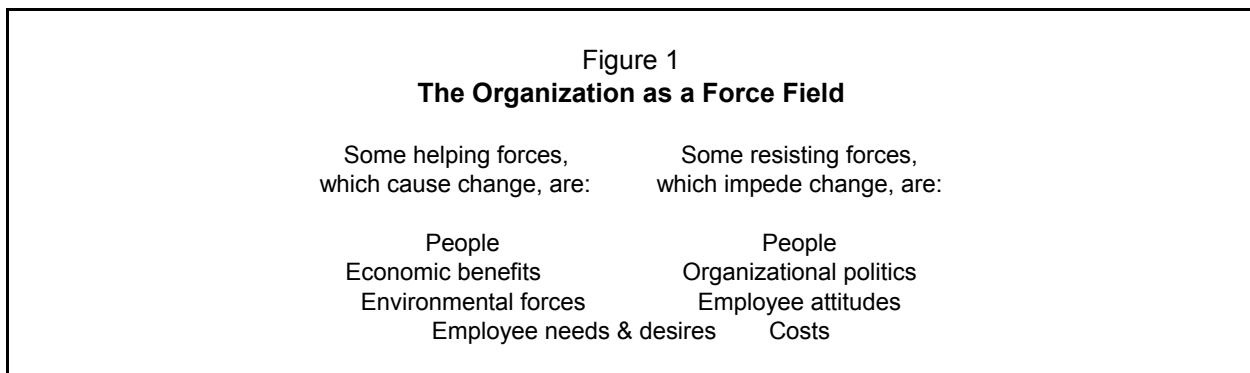
It is a well known but little used fact that a person will continue to engage in an activity which provides him or her opportunities to feel good about him or herself. It can safely be said that every normal human being wants to feel good about himself or herself, wants to stand well in the eyes of others as well as in their own, and wants the significance and potency associated with competence and achievement. A manager can foster the all-important commitment of the members in the organization by enabling them to find personal significance in what they do. Albrecht (1978) proposes that this basically means placing the individual worker and, collectively, all of the workers in job

situations where they can experience a sense of accomplishment.

This sense of accomplishment will lead to the development of high morale and self-esteem. If introduced and carried out properly, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office's physical fitness program can provide employees with the elements and tasks to obtain not only a sense of accomplishment but also a healthier body. This, in turn, can make the officer's job easier. A healthier officer may well live longer.

One key element of job design which can enhance the feelings of self-esteem is closure. Closure is the process of completing a task in such a way that one can see a well-defined final result which is of value. It involves responsibility for a complete process, and an opportunity to get feedback about its successful completion. By communicating the "big picture" to the employee and by defining the task in performance terms, the manager can offer the employee an opportunity to experience a sense of closure and to feel good about accomplishing something specific and worthwhile. In many ways, this is the strongest, simplest, easiest, and least costly approach to human motivation available to the manager.

Another simple but profoundly important factor about motivation is that most people tend to work hard and well when their morale is high. Managers who make a



habit of paying attention to individuals as human beings, in addition to giving them work to do and evaluating their results, tend to maintain relatively high levels of morale. Albrecht (1978) states that the accomplished manager can recognize the employee's need for human contact and can add a more humanistic quality to the organization.

### Management Concepts to Overcome Employee Resistance to Change

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office physical fitness program allows an individual officer to strive for his or her own goals within a predetermined scale. Therefore, while participating in the program, the individual employee has an individual goal versus a competing goal with coworkers.

Although meeting those individual goals will substantially benefit the officers, there can be reluctance to participate merely because the program changes the status quo. Much of the resistance comes from those who will have to work a little harder to reach the requested goal. Some severely out-of-shape officers, along with others, resist the idea of a physical fitness program for the following reasons:

(1) Fitness is a personal issue and as long as I do my job, I should not have to participate.

(2) I passed the pre-employment physical test, why do I need to do it again?

(3) It is not in my contract.

Unfortunately, it is especially the overweight and out-of-shape employees who desperately need a physical fitness program. Apparently, for one reason or another, they are not successfully improving their own health or career.

In studying the various ways of bringing about change, Levin has identified "helping forces," which act to facilitate the change in question, and "resisting forces," which act to impede the change (Albrecht, 1978). This kind of analysis clarifies the major change processes within an organization and suggests approaches managers can use to accelerate a desired change. (See Figure 1). Any change process involves a force field of helping forces and resisting forces.

This view of the nature of organizations suggests that top managers must do several things to bring about an adaptive change, according to Albrecht (1978). First, managers must have a clear and specific idea of the change they want to bring about. They must clarify the benefits of the proposed change, and they must be prepared to minimize the undesirable impacts the change may have.

Second, managers must combine their ideas and energies and concentrate their organizational resources to make the change come about. They must develop a strong sense of group commitment to a clearly stated goal.

Third, they must gain the general commitment of the work force to the prospective change. They must be prepared to compromise, to move at a controlled pace, to re-evaluate the objectives from time to time, and to develop employee attitudes which will help the change come about.

Fourth, managers must keep their collective attention focused on the organizational processes involved in the change and keep doing the necessary things until the change has become acceptable and permanent.

The fitness program at the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office is being implemented slowly. The initial fitness/agility test scores are for orientation purposes only for the first year. The scores are provided as a means to let the officer know his or her level of performance in comparison to the desired performance. This first year is a developmental year and is open to employees' critique of the program and possible changes. After each test, the sheriff or director meets with the officer to seek feedback about the test and ideas to modify the program. The officers also are asked for their ideas for rewards and incentives to keep employees motivated to perform well on tests. This discussion gives employees a forum to convey their ideas and opinions and allows management a chance to communicate with employees.

Once the program has been successfully implemented, the newer worker will meet future changes with less resistance. A University of Michigan researcher (Lawler, 1980) has determined that a "new worker" entering the work force for the initial start of a career has certain characteristics. One of these characteristics is that change and personal mobility are not feared. Another is that the new worker wants greater influence



in decisions, showing openness and a willingness to confront issues. Perhaps the majority of employees will adapt these attitudes once they realize the program creates positive results.

### Results of the Jacksonville Program

Our program for evaluating the physical fitness of police officers in Jacksonville has proven to be beneficial to the well-being of our personnel. It has resulted in positive peer pressure among our police officers to get in shape and maintain an effective and sustained personal physical fitness routine. We have determined that the composition of a physical agility test is not as crucial as its applicability and its job-relatedness. What we have found suitable and acceptable in Jacksonville might not be appropriate for other jurisdictions.

The components of our physical agility test are a body drag for 50 feet with a 175-pound weight, an officer mobility exercise, and a 440-yard run. These are conducted under timed conditions with different breakpoints for different qualification levels. A vehicle push and an obstacle course round out the physical agility test. The push is measured by distance and the obstacle course is measured by the number of obstacles surmounted.

The first year of the administration of our physical fitness testing produced the following results: 883 police officers attempted the test; 76 percent of the males passed and 61 percent of the females for an average of 70 percent.

Physical agility testing for 1994 will be enhanced to reward outstanding performance. This reward may range from a physical fitness uniform service pin to additional leave time. All officers unable to successfully complete the physical agility test will receive special guidance. Officers will be given a physical fitness program to follow and will be tested on a quarterly basis until the physical agility test is successfully completed. Officers not physically able to take the fitness test will be pulled off the street and put behind a desk. Nine out of 10 such officers have severe back problems but have been reluctant to notify supervisors because they didn't want desk jobs. But health, safety and liability reasons make it essential to provide them with different duties.

### Conclusion

A physical fitness program for police officers can benefit them physically and emotionally. Such a program can run smoothly and efficiently if handled with expertise and sensitivity as demonstrated by the management of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

A properly implemented program can teach officers techniques to relieve stress, provide diet and nutrition guidance and lead to better mental and physical health. The physical fitness program will enable workers and management to not only function more efficiently but also lead healthier and happier lives.

Such a fitness program should be mandatory in police work. Studies have revealed that many line officers are in such bad physical condition that they are a statistic waiting to happen. It is essential that police departments take steps help officers stay physically fit.

W.C. Brown is a lifelong Jacksonville resident and a twenty year veteran of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. Director Brown began his career riding a beat in the core city area and was soon transferred to the Detective Division where he served for several years as a Robbery/ Homicide Detective. As a sergeant, lieutenant, and captain, W.C. had the opportunity to serve in both operations and administrative positions. In 1989, Sheriff Jim McMillan appointed him to the rank of Chief where he has served as Chief of Traffic Special Operations, Chief of Patrol, Chief of Services and Deputy Director of both the Services and Operations Divisions. He currently holds the #3 position within the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office as Director of Operations. Director Brown is a graduate of Florida State University, the FBI National Academy and the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute.

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