

Altamonte Springs Police Department: Career Development Plan for Ten Years and Beyond

Chris Willett

Abstract

In ten years, eighty-three percent (83%) of the supervisors at the Altamonte Springs Police Department will either be retired or have enough service time to be able to retire. This paper explores the current career development and mentoring practices of the Altamonte Springs Police Department. A survey was sent to non-supervisory officers with less than 25 years of service. The data was analyzed and recommendations were made to improve the career development practices and to enhance the mentoring policy to include all members of the department regardless of rank or tenure so the next generation of leaders can be properly trained to increase their chance for future success.

Introduction

The profession of law enforcement is going through many changes. One of these changes is the generational change, out with the old, in with the new. Recent changes in the economy and retirement legislation have brought about unexpected vacancies in the upper management of many police agencies. "Leadership in public safety agencies is at a critical crossroads. In many communities, early retirement incentives have enticed experienced personnel to leave their departments in large numbers and many police leaders are approaching retirement age" (Michelson, 2006). This is especially true at the Altamonte Springs Police Department (ASPD). Currently, ASPD is comprised of ninety-nine (99) sworn officers. Of these sworn officers, eighteen are in supervisory positions, to include six Command Staff officers. Within the next five years, half of the Command Staff will be required to retire due to their participation in to the Florida Retirement System's Deferred Retirement Option (DROP). In ten years, fifteen of the eighteen supervisory officers, eighty-three percent (83%), will be retired or eligible for retirement. Michelson warns "... many agencies are replacing veteran leaders with younger candidates who have not had the length of service in the field and have little experience in leadership positions" (2006). The solution to this rising problem is that agencies need to have a strategic plan which incorporates succession planning and career development. The future leaders of ASPD need to have a roadmap to leadership so they can be successful in carrying on the values and continuing to meet the goals of the agency.

The articles reviewed in researching this topic all had similar themes. First, there is a growing need for agencies to start looking at a succession plan. Current leaders and supervisors will soon be retired and their successors must be properly prepared or they will be put in a position of authority without the requisite knowledge to effectively manage and lead their personnel, creating a difficult path to success. The articles go on to inform leaders that these succession plans need to be strategic in nature. "The past

has shown that law enforcement has left the development of future leaders to an amalgamated process of individual interest, unaffiliated trainers, and chance. This recipe contributed to today's crisis of leadership" (Henchey, 2005). Agencies need to focus on creating a plan that identifies the human resource needs of the department in the future. In the International Journal of Police Science & Management, S. Murphy writes:

In order for the participating organization's succession management to be truly strategic in nature, it must move from a reactive to a proactive stance, and this shift requires greater value being placed on strategic planning. ... In so doing, the organization will ensure that a clear link exists between succession planning and the strategic objectives of the organization. (2006)

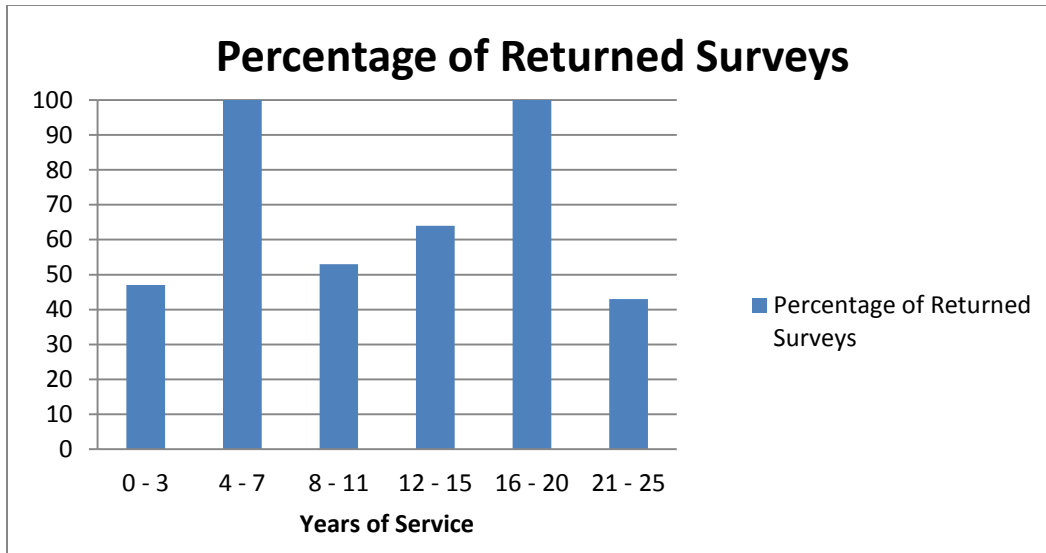
This paper is intended to lay out the groundwork towards a Career Development Plan for ASPD that will identify non-supervisory officers with aspirations of becoming supervisors, identify the current mentoring practices, perceived positives and negatives of being a supervisor, and finally recommendations to successfully prepare the next generation of leaders.

Method

To collect the data needed, a nineteen question survey (attachment A) was sent out to all non-supervisory sworn officers with less than 25 years of service. The survey gathered background information to include the officer's tenure, rank, and the anticipated length of service remaining with ASPD. Additional questions were asked regarding mentoring, professional deficiencies, and perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a supervisor. Seventy-six (76) surveys were given to supervisors who had officers meeting these criteria. The returned surveys were anonymous.

Results

Of the seventy-six (76) surveys handed out, fifty (50) were returned, sixty-six percent (66%). The surveys were entered into an Excel spreadsheet so the data could be analyzed. The data was separated various ways to determine the background of the officers who returned the surveys. The data was first separated by years of service. A master list of officers was used to determine how many surveys went out per data category. The returned surveys were then compared to the number of surveys handed out to come up with a percentage. The officers with 4 – 7 years of service and 16 – 20 years of service had a one hundred percent (100%) survey return. The other categories ranged from forty-three percent (43%) to sixty-four percent (64%).



Next, the data was sorted by the rank of the person taking the survey. The percentage of returned surveys by rank was as follows:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Sent</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
• Officer	12	8	67%
• Police Officer First Class (PFC)	24	19	79%
• Senior Police Officer (SPO)	27	14	52%
• Master Police Officer (MPO)	13	9	69%

When asked about their anticipated length of employment remaining with ASPD, ninety-eight percent (98%) of the surveys from officers with fewer than twenty (20) years of service indicated employment of at least another eleven (11) years.

Education is a priority with ASPD. To be eligible for the rank of Lieutenant, an officer must obtain a minimum of a two-year AA or AS college degree. To be eligible for the rank of Commander or above, an officer must have a minimum of a four-year BA or BS college degree. The surveys returned showed that fifty-four percent (54%) of the officers do not meet the minimum of a two-year college degree. Of those fifty-four percent, twenty-eight percent (28%) stated they are not working towards a degree. Interestingly, the City of Altamonte Springs provides educational reimbursement up to \$1300 a year. Fifty percent (50%) of the surveys returned state that the officer is working towards some type of college degree. However, of those fifty percent, only forty-four percent (44%) are utilizing the Educational Reimbursement Program.

Mentoring was another category the survey inquired about. Of the returned surveys only twenty-six percent (26%) stated the officer currently had a mentor. Of those twenty-six percent, sixty-one percent (61%) did not believe the mentor was helping to develop their career, or had no comment. The breakdown by rank of the officers that had mentors was four officers, six PFC's, two SPO's, and one MPO. The survey also asked if the officer was mentoring someone. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the returned surveys indicated they were not currently mentoring anyone. The officers that were being a mentor were one PFC, one SPO, and five MPO's.

Personal development is also an important part of an officer's career. The survey asked what steps the officer is taking to help advance up the Operational Career Path. The following are the responses:

- Going to college 49%
- Advance Training Courses 69%
- Consulting with mentor/supervisor 37%
- Transferring to different assignments 47%
- Nothing 8%
- Other (Plans for college, experience) 16%
- More than one category 59%

Officers were asked what areas of supervision they feel they need to personally improve. The following are the responses:

- Leading others 24%
- Conflict resolution 28%
- Knowledge of laws 28%
- Knowledge of Policy/Procedures 42%
- Administrative duties 68%
- Functions of different Divisions 26%
- Time management 20%
- Organization 26%
- No areas need improving 4%
- Other 4%

The officers were asked what they perceived were the advantages of being a supervisor. Thirty two (32) responses were received. The following is a summary of the responses:

- 4 referenced pay
- 16 referenced mentoring and molding younger officers
- 9 referenced having an impact on the agency
- 7 referenced leading others
- 6 referenced personal development

The officers were asked what they perceived were the disadvantages of being a supervisor. Thirty-one (31) responses were received. The following is a summary of the responses:

- 9 referenced increased responsibility or liability
- 5 referenced politics, being "caught in the middle"
- 8 referenced increased hours and more paperwork
- 5 referenced personnel issues
- Other responses included movement in schedule and no time for exciting police work.

The final question asked if the officer would be willing to participate in a follow-up survey on career development. Eighty-one percent (81%) of the surveys stated they would participate in another survey. Four percent stated they would not participate in another survey. Fifteen percent stated they were unsure.

Discussion

The data collected revealed several interesting points. The first observation made was the length of service officers were anticipating on staying with ASPD. This shows that generally, officers with fewer than 20 years of service are planning on being a part of the agency for another decade or more. Second, most of the respondents are actively doing something to help advance their career. Mostly, however, they seem to be deciding on their own what steps should be taken instead of utilizing the experience of other officers. And lastly, the survey revealed the personal perceptions of being a supervisor, both of advantages and disadvantages.

The returned surveys show that most officers are dedicated to a career at ASPD. Also, seventy-seven percent (76%) are striving to obtain the rank of Lieutenant or above. Currently however, only forty-six percent (46%) currently have a two-year college degree, which is required to obtain the rank of Lieutenant. The City has had an Educational Incentive Program for many years. Of the twenty-five (25) respondents who say they are currently pursuing any type of degree, only eleven (11) are taking advantage of this program. Further follow up will need to be done to determine why others are not taking advantage of this incentive.

The data showed that ninety-two percent (92%) of the respondents are taking responsibility on their own to advance up the Operational Career Path. Currently, there are no guidelines or recommendations on what is needed to progress up the career path, other than the requirement of a college degree and varying time-in-service requirements. For example, administrative duties are an important part of being a supervisor. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the respondents stated they were deficient in this area. Further follow up will need to be done to determine what current supervisors and leaders are looking for in an individual that will help them advance and succeed. Once this is determined, officers can be guided towards beneficial training and courses that focus on professional and personal development training. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents stated that they lacked in the knowledge or work experience of other divisions. Currently, ASPD has a six-year rotation for specialty positions, which are any positions other than Patrol. Although there are opportunities, sometimes these are few and far between for officers wanting to learn more and become more “well rounded” in their knowledge.

Perceptions of being a supervisor were also explored. Fifty percent (50%) listed an advantage of being a supervisor was being able to mentor and mold other officers. Currently only fourteen percent (14%) of respondents are currently being a mentor and only twenty-six percent (26%) have mentors. Twenty-eight percent (28%) believe that when they become a supervisor, they will have an impact on the agency. Of the negative perceptions, twenty-nine percent (29%) listed increased liability and responsibility. Sixteen percent (16%) listed politics within the agency as a negative.

Officers of the Altamonte Springs Police Department seemed committed to make an impact on the agency and take the steps to improve career development within the agency. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents stated they would participate in a follow up survey on career development. Areas such as mentoring, personal development, and career development should be addressed to maintain this dedication and commitment for the next generation of leaders.

Recommendations

Career development involves professional and personal development. The professional development should revolve around knowledge of the different aspects of the agency. While there are some opportunities for transfers, often officers don't take advantage due to the unknown aspects of the different positions throughout the agency. It is not until a person is promoted that they are "forced" to undertake unfamiliar job tasks. One option to increase members' familiarization of varying job tasks could be brief periods of job shadowing. For example, an officer in Patrol can schedule to shadow a traffic officer for a shift or two. This would provide the officer with a basic knowledge of the traffic officer's responsibilities and the overall operation of the Traffic Division. This would also create a positive effect by sharing their experience and provide explanations on why things are done the way they are in Traffic, which would facilitate a harmonious work environment between the units. For personal development, a set of basic skills should be determined for an officer wishing to pursue a future supervisor rank. Training should be offered to these officers who feel they are deficient in these areas. For example, if administrative duties are a basic supervisory skill, in-house training should be offered in areas such as Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint. Other training could include basic business writing skills such as memos and requisitions.

Mentoring is another important part in preparing the next generation of leaders. Currently ASPD has a mentoring policy for new officers through their first year of probation. This policy needs to be evaluated for its effectiveness. Furthermore, the policy needs to be expanded to include mentoring for any officer in the department, regardless of tenure or rank. There should be a department wide training session on mentoring, which could be incorporated into one of the semi-annual block training sessions. This training should focus on the importance of mentoring at all levels, not just at the supervisor level. For example, the two-year employee should feel empowered to mentor a new officer on their squad to help them succeed. This training should also educate officers on their responsibility to find a personal mentor or mentors. Many times officers feel they can only be guided by one mentor, when actually they can be guided by many mentors focusing on different aspects of their development. An official mentor program should also be implemented. This program would involve advanced training to interested officers. This would allow for a "bank" of mentors with various levels of expertise and knowledge. For example, if an officer was preparing for a promotional test and needed assistance with writing an operational plan, the mentor program coordinator could provide the officer with a list of mentors to choose from that would have advanced knowledge in writing operational plans. This is just one example; other examples would

be in areas of report writing, public speaking, time management, etc. Mentors would benefit by continually learning, having the satisfaction of helping fellow officers, and preparing themselves to advance up the career track.

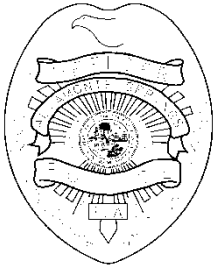
In conclusion, follow up surveys need to be conducted to fine tune the results of this paper. Leadership traits and abilities need to be determined so training can be focused on the areas for development. The mentoring policy needs to be expanded and a strategic plan should be in place to implement the practice of department-wide mentoring. And finally, current leaders need to communicate their role to their officers so any negative perceptions can be discussed, which should result in an increase participation in advancing up the career track.

Lieutenant Chris Willett has been in law enforcement for 25 years. He started his law enforcement career with Ocoee Police Department in 1985. In 1990, he joined the Altamonte Springs Police Department. Through the next 22 years he has worked road patrol, traffic enforcement and community policing. He is currently the watch commander for the Uptown District Bicycle Patrol Unit and the Community Oriented Police Services Unit.

References

- Henchey, J. P. (2005, September). Ready or Not, Here They Come: The Millennial Generation Enters the Workforce. *Police Chief Magazine*, 72(9).
- Michelson, R. (2006, June). Preparing Future Leaders for Tomorrow: Succession Planning for Police Leadership. *Police Chief Magazine*, 73(6).
- Murphy, S. (2006). Executive Development and Succession Planning: Qualitative Evidence. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 8(3).

Attachment A



Survey Senior Leadership Program July 2012

Non Supervisor, under 25 yrs service



Introduction

Lt. Willett is writing a research paper on Career Development in the Altamonte Springs Police Department. This survey is being conducted to gather information on our current practices. The results will be compiled by Lt. Willett to formulate a recommendation on a plan to properly prepare the next generation of leaders. The comments in this survey will be anonymous. Please place your completed survey in Lt. Willett's mailbox in Barbara's Office by July 20th.

1. How long have you been employed by the Altamonte Springs Police Dept?
 - a. 0 – 3 years
 - b. 4 – 7 years
 - c. 8 – 11 years
 - d. 12 – 15 years
 - e. 16 – 20 years
 - f. 21 – 25 years

2. What is your current rank?
 - a. Patrol Officer
 - b. PFC
 - c. SPO
 - d. MPO

3. How much longer are you planning on staying at ASPD?
 - a. 0 – 5 years
 - b. 6 – 10 years
 - c. 11 – 15 years
 - d. 16 – 20 years
 - e. Over 21 years

4. What is the highest rank you are striving to obtain during your career?
 - a. PFC
 - b. SPO
 - c. MPO
 - d. Lieutenant
 - e. Commander

- f. Deputy Chief
 - g. Chief
5. Do you currently have an Associates, Bachelors, or Masters degree?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 6. Are you currently pursuing a degree?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 7. Are you currently, or have you ever, utilized the Educational Incentive Program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know about the Educational Incentive Program
 8. Do you currently have a mentor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 9. If the response to question #8 is yes, "My mentor is helping me develop my career at ASPD."
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Slightly Agree
 - c. Slightly Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Comment
 10. Do you currently mentor someone?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 11. If the response to question #10 is yes, "How many times have you contacted the person you mentor?"
 - a. Once a week
 - b. Once a month
 - c. Once a year
 - d. Other _____
 12. What personal steps are you taking to advance up the Operational Career Path? Check all that apply:
 - a. Going to college
 - b. Taking advanced training courses
 - c. Consulting with a supervisor/mentor
 - d. Transferring to different assignments

- e. Nothing
- f. Other _____

13. The Altamonte Springs Police Department adequately prepares officers to advance within the Operational Career Path.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Slightly Agree
- c. Slightly Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree
- e. No Comment

14. If you were to become a supervisor now, what area(s) do you feel you would need to improve? Check all that apply:

- a. Leading others
- b. Conflict resolution
- c. Knowledge of laws
- d. Knowledge of Policies & Regulations
- e. Administrative duties (Payroll, memos, budget, etc)
- f. Knowledge of the functions of different Divisions
- g. Time management
- h. Organization
- i. No areas of improvement would be needed
- j. Other _____

15. How would you prefer to receive career development training? Check all that apply

- a. Electronically - Self study
- b. Hard copy books / manuals – Self study
- c. Classroom setting
- d. One on one training with a mentor/instructor

16. What do you think are the advantages of being a supervisor?

17. What do you think are the disadvantages of being a supervisor?

18. Do you have any additional comments about the current practices of career development at the Altamonte Springs Police Department?

19. Would you participate in a follow-up survey on Career Development?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure