

# Downsizing: A Leadership Challenge for the Future of Law Enforcement

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## *Abstract*

*Law enforcement leaders face a myriad of problems in the future. They must maintain adequate staffing to ensure response is sufficient to meet public demand. However, downsizing of the work force looms on the horizon. New management techniques must be explored and developed to lead a smaller and more diverse work force. The probability exists that minimally motivated employees will have to be led to provide quality service to their respective communities. This research examines future obstacles for law enforcement leadership in the downsizing era. Additionally, the opinions of law enforcement leadership about these issues is investigated.*

## Introduction

Trends in the private sector are eventually adopted in government. The trend of major corporations in downsizing work forces and attempting to reduce over head and increase profits was a warning sign that government was soon to follow suit. However, little helpful information for law enforcement agencies is available. It became apparent that research should be conducted and the results published to assist those in the profession to meet the challenges of the future.

## Literature Review

The current management styles and practices of law enforcement leaders must change to face the future. Many of today's trends of fat budgets and better than average staffing are quickly disappearing. The statement, to do more with less, was futuristic; today it is the way of doing business. Daily, the media covers stories of hiring freezes, layoffs, cutbacks and budget cuts. The law enforcement profession must act quickly to ensure its future.

This paper explores some of the obstacles that will challenge law enforcement leaders in the future.

Downsizing drives the issue of doing more with less, this will have a significant impact on the work force in many ways. "Rapid technological changes, coupled with fiscal constraints, dictate that future organizations must shift from a hierarchical structure to one with fewer layers" (Bentz, 1995.) Employees must become decision makers at all levels within the organization. This empowerment will challenge leaders to trust employees and their abilities to make competent decisions.

Demographically the work force is changing. Captain David Bentz (1995) states, "By the year 2004, the first of the baby boomers will be 57 years old, and many of those in law enforcement will be eligible for retirement. That same year, the first of the 'echo boomers' will be eligible to enter the law enforcement work force at the age of 21" ( p. 14). Long term trends indicate more women will enter the work force by the year 2000. It has been predicted 59.9% of the future work force will be women (Bentz, 1995). Will this trend hold true for law enforcement as well? The authors of this report point out that

between now and the year 2000, 63% of the new employee entering the work force will be women. Future managers must be ready to lead this new and different work force.

Fiscal constraints will also drive law enforcement to become more creative. Programs must be developed that reduce expenditures or that generate revenue. Programs that are not effective must be eliminated and emphasis must be placed on those that provide the most benefit. Agencies that fail to manage their resources will find themselves fighting for their existence. Privatization and consolidation will offer jurisdictions the opportunity to reduce their law enforcement expenditures and, therefore, will become very lucrative options to politicians.

The Wyatt Company, an international consulting firm, published a report of 531 companies that had downsized (Franklin, 1994). Less than half of the companies said downsizing led to greater profits. Fewer than one third reported an increase in competitive advantages. Sixty-one percent reported it was not as effective as they had hoped.

The many factors that impact the downsizing of any law enforcement agency must be carefully analyzed to ensure the final result is not destructive. Many examples of the wrong way to downsize are available in the private sector. One common approach is to offer buyouts to employees eligible for retirement. This appears to be a very humane way to reduce the work force. The assumption is, the right employees will retire. This is rarely the case.

The Postal Service downsized by offering an unrestricted buyout for employees with 25 years or more of service. That buyout resulted in 48,000 employees retiring; however, only, 14, 000 of those were middle managers. The rest were experienced mail carriers and sorters who have the most direct impact on delivery services. Mail service declined all across the country, and collapsed in some cities. Postal service in some cities such as Chicago and Washington, DC almost came to a standstill. In Chicago, investigators found that 30% of mail was overdue on any given day. Newspapers were filled with horror stories of undelivered mail. The absence of experienced workers crippled mail operations. These employees were replaced with new inexperienced employees. The new employees needed extensive and costly training. The number of postal employees today is 15,000 above the staffing level before downsizing. The bottom line, it cost the Postal Service between \$900 million and \$1.5 billion to become more top heavy than it was before the downsizing began (Franklin, 1994).

Hiring freezes are another example of potentially disastrous attempts to downsize. The New York City Human Resources Administration, the agency that handles services for the more than one million residents below the poverty level, has had a hiring freeze in place for many years (Franklin, 1994).

There are approximately 25,000 residents who can not receive service because of the hiring freeze. Hiring freezes can have short ten-n positive effects. However, agencies must have fresh ideas from new employees to flourish and prosper. These are the very employees that are locked out of the system during long ten-n hiring freezes. It becomes very easy for an organization to lose its vision and stagnate when new blood is restricted from flowing through its veins (Franklin, 1994).

Many governments and businesses have made across-the-board cuts. In other words, every department within the structure is considered equally fat. To reduce the work force equally, a percentage for reduction is determined and applied equally to each

department. The harsh reality is some departments are functioning without fat. These types of cuts result in some critical operations being severely impacted. The Gore Plan to reduce the federal government is directed in this manner. (Vice -President Gore's Plan requires all governmental agencies to reduce their staff by 12%). This reduction may cut too much from some agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration. A severe cut in this agency could result in hazardous flying conditions and thereby result in more airline crashes. A more logical approach is to look for departments that no longer provide valuable services to the public. Services or programs that do not provide critical services to the public should be eliminated (Franklin, 1994).

Current research in the psychology field demonstrates that those left behind, those remaining in a downsized work force are having difficulty dealing with the new work environment. As work loads increase and job security is jeopardized, stress levels begin to soar. Work performance is hindered and creates an environment filled with low morale and decreased quality work. This directly relates to the surveys in which company executives indicate they did not accomplish the results or increase profits as they expected by downsizing (Franklin, 1994).

Law enforcement must be very careful in its approach to a reduced work force. We must carefully analyze the procedures used by others, dissecting and remolding theirs to best fit our needs. Reducing street level officers negatively impacts Community Oriented Policing, a concept that many agencies are currently embracing. This style of policing is very labor intensive and therefore requires more personnel at the line level to be successful.

The literature review revealed a lack of information and research concerning downsizing issues in law enforcement. This research narrows that gap by examining these emerging issues in the profession of law enforcement.

## Methods

The initial phase of this project was a review of literature published regarding downsizing. It included studies of organizations that had experienced an actual reduction in their work force. This was done to identify problem areas and those techniques that were successful.

A series of questions was then developed to conduct interviews of current law enforcement officials (See Appendix A). The questions were developed to be open ended and to probe for thought and discussion of the profession's future. Those interviewed were selected from the Senior Leadership Class conducted by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Each candidate was a member of Senior Leadership Class Four. They were selected by their respective departments to attend this course because of their leadership potential for the future. Therefore, the author felt they would have insight about future law enforcement problems and could offer solutions to management problems of the future.

A total of 15 interviews was conducted telephonically. Subsequent interviews were conducted in person during the February, 1996 session. This session was held at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement headquarters in Tallahassee, FL. Those interviewed were selected in a manner to insure the panel was demographically and geographically diverse. They also ranged from first line supervision to upper

management. This was done to represent all levels of management in the law enforcement profession, and to provide a large cross section of opinion.

The telephone interviews varied in length from 15--45 minutes. The subsequent in person discussion also varied in length from 10--30 minutes. The conversations were recorded by the author making notes of each respondent's opinions.

The information provided in the interviews was assembled and analyzed to project the majority's opinions as to the best methods and recommended order of methods that could be used to bring law enforcement agencies into this new era of management.

## Results

The interviews with 15 future law enforcement leaders from all over the state of Florida revealed that everyone strongly believes downsizing is a concern for the industry's future. Many had horror stories of events that have and still are occurring in their departments. Employees who have dedicated their life to law enforcement and public protection have been forced to retire. Ranking positions have not been filled. Work of upper management is pushed to lower levels within the organization. However, those now responsible for the decision making have not been adequately trained to do so. Therefore, poor decisions or no decisions are being made. This stifles an organization and deteriorates morale.

There are many options to consider when addressing this business of reducing the work force. The first consideration must be how quickly the department must reduce its staff. Obviously, the shorter the time frame, the more drastic the measures. In a situation where it is critical that staff is reduced immediately, buyouts may be offered. This process is effective however, an immediate reduction of many employees may cripple an organization as was the case with the Postal Service. The majority of those interviewed leaned toward attrition as the first choice if time allowed. They felt this to be less traumatic to operations and to the remaining employees. This allows an organization to place employees in more critical positions and allows those relocated the time to be properly trained in their new assignment.

A microscopic look at operations could lead to new ways of doing business. For example, it may better serve the organization to replace sworn staff with lower salaried civilian staff.

Positions such as training officers could become civilian training coordinators. They could call on training officers from throughout the organization to conduct the actual training. The coordinator could arrange for the needed supplies, facilities, and maintain the training records. Many organizations have already civilianized the Communications, Identification and Property sections. All of these work very well. Crime prevention officers could be reassigned to the field. Civilian staff could organize their meetings and assign a trained crime prevention officer to attend if needed. Crime analyst and intelligence positions could also be civilianized. Many balk at the thought of civilians managing intelligence. Certainly those hired must go through an extensive background and have a high security clearance. This is currently done with large governmental agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Specialized programs should be reviewed and their success measured. If they are not producing desired results, they could be abolished and the officers reassigned.

Programs such as community oriented policing were discussed in my interviews. Of the 15 people interviewed, 11 felt this program would be affected adversely.

Some thought the program would be abolished completely as the first responsibility of a law enforcement agency was maintenance of order and response to calls for service. Three felt this program was too hot politically and would not be impacted. One thinks this program is the answer to operating with a reduced staff because the community problems would be reduced on the front end and therefore reduce law enforcement's need to respond and resolve neighborhood issues.

One hundred percent of those interviewed felt morale would be impacted. Ninety nine percent felt a reduction in staff would have a negative impact on morale. The remaining employees would feel an increase in their workload as they began assuming the duties of others. Promotional opportunities would become extremely limited, thereby further reducing the motivation to performance at an exceptional level. Reduced opportunities could create severe division and hostility between employees competing for positions and further reduce operational effectiveness. Certainly the fear of being terminated or retired would be a continual thought and create additional stress on the remaining employees. Obviously this will reduce the effectiveness of individuals throughout organizations.

The harsh reality of downsizing and the work force changing so rapidly requires planning now for future management.

#### Discussion

Law enforcement leaders face a myriad of problems today and in the future. A changing society, increasing law suits, a more diversified work force, ever changing crime types, (computer crimes), budget reductions and downsizing are just a few. Those in leadership roles must begin to strategically plan for the future. Change is the law of life according to John F. Kennedy. Those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. Leaders must predict the future and seek out technologies that will reduce the burdens of today's operation. It is imperative that cross training be conducted to increase the value and self esteem for the employees. Those placed in leadership positions must be carefully selected and upper management must represent the diversity of the demographic make-up of the organization. Departments need to reflect the demographics of the community they serve. This will help to ensure harmony within the community, and reduce tensions in traumatic events. It is imperative that managers carefully scrutinize their entire organization to determine which programs and positions can be reduced or eliminated.

#### Conclusion

New ways of conducting business must be found, such as forming partnerships with other law enforcement agencies, private industry, and the community. All of these challenges must be met while incorporating a total quality focus on the customer. Every employee needs to be focused on the department's need to provide a high quality service to the community they serve. Harrison (1996) points out that organizations must be focused, aligned, totally involved, continually improving and have leadership committed to survive in the future. To be aligned, every employee must understand the organizational mission and the plan to accomplish the goals and objectives of the department.

Alignment is both internal and external. Internal alignment insures that customers each employee understands the mission and how their work product assists in accomplishment of the goal. External alignment insures the customers needs are met in a timely and effective manner. Total involvement requires managers to allow decisions to be made at lower levels throughout out the organization. The result is a much more democratic or participate style of management. Management must be totally committed to continuous improvement in the service they provide and develop an environment in which employees can successfully meet the needs of those they serve. Current paramilitary organizations will find it difficult to survive in the future. Leaders that can adapt and instill a total quality management philosophy throughout their organizations will best be prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

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