

Enhancing the Leadership Capabilities of First-Line Supervisors

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Leadership training continues to be identified consistently as a priority need in law enforcement (Brand, 2010, p. 18). This need is especially acute for first-line supervisors who play a central role in efficient service delivery (Moriarty, 2009, p. 20). The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) (2008) has been responsive to this need for more than two decades through the Sherman Block Supervisory Leadership Institute (SBSLI). In June 2011, the Institute launched its 300th session.

SBSLI Development

In 1988, with the intention of developing the leadership abilities of first-line supervisors, POST introduced the “Supervisory Leadership Institute,” a 192-hour, eight-month leadership program (later renamed after the late Los Angeles County Sheriff and POST Commissioner Sherman Block). Genesis of the Institute was recognition by the POST Commission of the necessity for maximizing the quality of leadership within the rank overseeing the actions of the largest number of law enforcement employees and responsible for the greatest breadth of organizational activities—to include service in many agencies as second in command. At the same time, field research identified factors that could bolster the leadership skills addressed in the two-week Supervisory Course mandated for completion by all newly appointed supervisors.

The approach to forming the Institute’s curriculum was from an “inside out” perspective as the intent was to concentrate initially on the inner strength of the individual under the premise

that the leader must first possess appropriate values, motives, and commitment before acting to influence others (within the framework of the employing law enforcement agency). A broad-based steering committee of law enforcement officials identified essential aspects of leadership to be integrated into the Institute’s curriculum.

Framework and Curriculum

The SBSLI curriculum as currently constituted includes a wide range of learning and leadership theories and practices. The mission of the SBSLI is to provide leadership research and theoretical contributions that enable law enforcement supervisors to bridge the gap between scholarship and practice and to perform critical inquiry into contemporary organizational issues. The 24 students (all of whom are required to have completed two years of full-time supervisory experience) comprising each class cohort are expected to become a close-knit community of learners. The Socratic Dialogue method of inquiry and debate is employed extensively to stimulate critical thinking and clarify concepts.

The SBSLI curriculum, which uses the Bloom’s Taxonomy (2012/1956) as its underpinning, is designed to actively engage students in activities that promote experiential learning. The content of the curriculum is responsive to the dynamic environment within which law enforcement supervisors perform. As such, it is constantly evolving. The most current curriculum has been designed to enable students to

- discover leadership philosophy, theory, and practice as a source for leadership wisdom.

- identify the many and varied characteristics and skills manifested in effective leaders.
- communicate leadership assumptions and philosophy through enhanced self-awareness.
- expand their perception of leadership to include adaptive leadership.
- dialogue the complexities inherent in principle-based leadership.
- articulate their personal leadership principles, values, and ethics.
- demonstrate effective techniques and strategies for articulating a vision.
- understand effective goal setting.
- employ the processes involved in effective decisionmaking.
- recognize the different types of conflict and appreciate the role a leader can play in leading through conflict.
- express the methods leaders can use to initiate change and help others adjust to change.
- comprehend the concept of empowerment and the techniques effective leaders use to empower others.
- acquire effective communications skills for building an adaptive culture and supporting challenging conversations within the organization.
- develop a fundamental understanding of the changing conceptions and prevailing views of leadership through time.

The curriculum is delivered over eight consecutive months through highly skilled facilitators. Each month, SBSLI students reside at a designated host hotel for three consecutive days while attending their respective class session. All classes are scheduled to occur on Monday-Wednesday or Thursday-Saturday. Each session is protocol-based and focuses on key core learning concepts. The following is an overview of SBSLI's eight sessions and core concepts.

Session One introduces the SBSLI philosophy of lifelong learning and critical thinking. The curriculum's foundation in Bloom's Taxonomy is also explained. The concepts of choice, principles, values, accountability (versus blame),

and fact (versus assumption) are analyzed. The qualities of leadership and management and the supervisor's role are examined. The session also introduces the adaptive leadership project. This project requires students to assess their organizational environments for unresolved challenges and to apply the adaptive leadership model to the challenges.

Session Two is designed to encourage participants to gain clarity and alignment between their personal values and leadership actions. Students discover and examine their personal core values and value conflicts and recognize how dysfunctional ego conflicts can impact personal and professional life experiences. The concepts of virtues, self-deception, the moral imperative, "Golden Mean" (desirable middle place), influence, and authority are analyzed.

Session Three correlates personal core values to ethical decisionmaking. Given ethical dilemmas, participants are asked to apply appropriate, ethical decisions and to recognize and understand the risks/rewards of living a principle-centered life. The session examines how ethics, value conflicts, "code of silence," obedience to the unenforceable, self-identity, integrity, trust, and a leader's responsibility relate to the challenges of law enforcement.

Session Four explores the basic nuances of leadership styles and how each might impact organizational success. The importance of communicating a vision and understanding how effective goal setting translates into specific concrete actions and outcomes is discussed. Students examine how empowerment of constituents and selfish intent can impact organizational functioning and loyalty. Generational differences and their impact on leadership style are assessed.

Session Five focuses on organizational culture and how it influences behaviors such as skepticism, cynicism, and undermining. The concept of "group think" is analyzed as well as the dynamics of organizational change, dissent, and team dysfunction. Leadership skills

such as discipline, attention to duty, and delegation are dialogued, along with methods of conflict resolution that are needed to operate in a diverse environment.

Session Six is conducted at the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. The session examines the unique challenges facing law enforcement in an increasingly diverse society. The nexus between diversity and leadership is identified, analyzed, and dialogued with museum staff. The concept of tolerance is evaluated relative to the dynamics of racism, bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination in both historical and contemporary contexts. Also, organizational fear and accountability, guilt, and personal ego and their relationship to the formation of power and wider perspectives are examined.

Session Seven examines personal and organizational health. Each student's own well being, as well as that of their respective organizations, is evaluated. Politics of policing and "moral imperative" are dialogued. The importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace is covered as well as how supervisors can successfully use the knowledge acquired for successful leadership.

Session Eight is dedicated primarily to students' presentations of their adaptive leadership projects.

Facilitation of Learning

The SBSLI uses a unique presentation model which is based on adult experiential learning theory. Participants are required to continuously review previous concepts, values, and principles in various combinations of increasing complexity. Developing concepts such as responsibility, courage, maturity, perception, and supportiveness, the program enhances the leader's strengths, first at the personal level, gradually moving into the interpersonal level, and then through organizational relationships. Because many leadership attributes are best "discovered" by participants rather than imparted by traditional lecture, a number of

active learning techniques are used (e.g., case studies, scenarios, role playing, and group discussion). The SBSLI learning environment is analogous to a "learning laboratory," through which experimentation, synthesis, and analysis of ideas are fostered with the end result being improved supervisory leadership and organizational outcomes.

Since the inception of SBSLI, quality of classroom instruction has been a priority concern, and it was determined early on that participant-centered facilitation would best fit the nature of the curriculum. It was also determined that each class should have two facilitators. Each facilitator complements the other's style as well as balances the focus during classroom discussions. Too, while one facilitator is introducing a concept, the other one can offer additional observations and intervene as the need for clarification may arise. Additionally, having a second facilitator in the room allows one of the facilitators to focus on group dynamics while the other one addresses individuals in the group.

Facilitators undergo an intensive appointment process. Those chosen to perform in a facilitator role within an environment intended to stimulate personal growth, leadership, and ethical decisionmaking must exemplify those same qualities. All candidates for facilitator positions must have been a member of an SBSLI graduating class and have performed exceptionally as a student. Upon referral by a seasoned facilitator, the SBSLI Program Manager arranges for attendance at class sessions as an auditor. As an auditor, the candidate observes the dynamics of curriculum delivery and intermittently is given the facilitator reins. Following extended service as an auditor and demonstrating exceptional competence, the auditor may be enrolled in a Facilitator Assessment Workshop. The workshop, designed by an internationally recognized academician, consists of two three-day sessions and is the basic training course for facilitators. Instruction is provided collaboratively by educators with expertise in curriculum design, presentational techniques, and coaching. The training is

grounded in nonverbal communicative intelligence (e.g., paralanguage and proxemics). Following completion of the workshop, the facilitator candidate joins other candidates on a waiting list for service as a facilitator. These prospective facilitators are expected to continue to participate in curriculum development meetings and other scheduled meetings of active facilitators.

Emphasis is accorded cognitive coaching techniques (Costa & Garmston, 2002) and nonverbal communications. Cognitive coaching enables individuals to become self-directed. Self-directed individuals are self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-modifying. The SBSLI curriculum is designed to help supervisors maintain a sustained focus and generate increased momentum toward achieving their goals. An ingrained coaching skill set can equip students to address a variety of needs (e.g., from helping sort through career and life issues to working with an organization to integrate coaching into its internal development process). The nonverbal strategies provide facilitators with a skill set that accelerates learning and builds positive group dynamics to create a learning environment low in emotional threat and high in cognitive challenge.

Leadership Training for Supervisors Remains in High Demand

The desire for quality training on leadership beyond basic instruction appears to remain as strong today as when SBSLI was conceived. In spring 2011, POST surveyed 247 individuals who had completed the basic 80-hour Supervisory Course within the past two years. One of the questions was “Identify the topic that you found most valuable.” Among 18 topics comprising the Supervisory Course curriculum, “Leadership Styles and Behavior” emerged as the most valuable instructional topic, receiving almost double the votes of the runner-up topic (“Recognizing and Documenting Employee Performance”). Moreover, it was the lone topic receiving an “extremely valuable” rating when survey respondents were asked to describe the value of topics for new supervisors.

Interest in gaining acceptance into the SBSLI remains very strong regardless of strained training budgets and reductions in staffing resulting from the economic downturn in California. Graduates of the SBSLI return investments to parent agencies that far exceed the costs of their attendance. It has become commonplace at SBSLI class graduations to see large numbers—if not the majority—of the hands of audience dignitaries (agency heads and managers) raised upward when asked by the graduating class facilitators for a “show of hands” of past graduates. Perhaps the impact of the SBSLI is best assessed by the spontaneous comments of program graduates such as those recently conveyed to the Program Manager via e-mail (July 15, 2011) by a graduate of Class 286:

Having entered into the SLI program fresh out of graduate school, I was a little “done” when it came to reading and writing. Something strange happened, however. I was thrust into an area of law enforcement I thought I knew a great deal about and was quick to find I knew little about—leadership. Yes. I knew what it was like to be a good leader. Heck, I was one! In fact, there were few who measured up to my leadership and mentoring abilities. In peeling back that onion, I found it was just the skin. I was a great leader because I was well-liked and came with credibility based upon my work experience and ethic, but that was it! . . . Needless to say, I had a great deal of learning to do about *how* to be a leader.

The well-orchestrated blend of movies, texts, small group discussions, journaling, reflection, case studies, etc., was mind boggling. Mind boggling in that it was all put together for a purpose. It was composed with a great deal of thought for that individual with promise, an open heart, and mind to absorb. For the willing participant, there was opportunity, after opportunity, after opportunity to be the sponge—to soak up all that existed in the room. I could go on

and on but suffice it to say that experience was far more rewarding than all of my formal education. . . . I became that leader I always wanted to be yet had no idea existed. . . . Thank you so very much for allowing me that walk; I shall forever be changed. I shall forever be grateful.

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