



Police Leader Transition Guide

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Transition guide necessity

The Police Leader Transitions Guide is designed to help police leaders plan and execute a successful transition to a new position. Although most law enforcement agencies regularly reassign supervisory and command personnel, there is no formalization of this significant event in its leader development process. The leader transition occurs every time a supervisor, sergeant, lieutenant, manager, or command personnel assume a new position.

Assignment transfers occur for a variety of reasons; promotions, retirement, discipline, development, to avoid corruption or just to avoid stagnation. Sometimes the need for a transition is obvious and has been brewing for years, but only takes place after the departure of a key leader or a scandal. Locally, the Miramar Florida Police Department assigns personnel to their Street Crimes Unit for a two year maximum. Assignments to their Detective Bureau are two years per unit (Bureau has three units) with a six year maximum.

The need for a formalized transition system is not limited to the United States. An example is the Caribbean island of Saint Maarten- Saint Martin, half the island is Dutch and the other half French. On the French side, police officers have a six month rotation assignment to the island from mainland France. This short term assignment limits the ability of the officers to learn the culture or address the open air drug markets. The head law enforcement officer assignment is a maximum of two years.

External structural change tends to occur more rapidly than internal change in individuals. Like runners in a marathon, internal transitions can stretch out at different speed for different people. The senior most persons tend to adapt to change much faster and must be reminded to over-communicate to bring others along. The leadership transition is a shift in roles and responsibilities which causes challenges to leadership.



At times, an outgoing leader may “over-identify” with their command. If the outgoing leader has implemented successful changes or worked with a specific group for a long time he may have an emotional connection; therefore it may be difficult for him to detach from the situation. The outgoing leader may sabotage the incoming leader. This sabotage is often unconscious, but causes frustration that distracts the organization from its mission. Whether the new command was successful or not, an incoming leader should be prepared with a plan of improvements.

The Police Leader Transitions Guide provides leaders with a process for assuming a new command starting from the time the leader is notified of the new assignment to the first 90 days. It is important that the leadership transitions occur efficiently and effectively particularly during organizational change or conflict. Time will become a limited resource when assuming a new command. Thus time should be used wisely. Most successful organizational transitions have clear goals and a specified timeframe.

The organizational change should occur in six essential phases;

1. Preparation from time of notification to first day
2. D-Day- what to do on the first day.
3. Assessment- days 1- 30
4. Team Building & Mission Focus- days 31-60
5. Establishing Routines- days 61-90
6. Sustaining- days 90+

Preparation (Notification to Day 1)

For a successful leader transition, preparation is the key. The leader should gather information that will be useful in developing a sense of the mission and how it is achieved before starting.

Assignment Functions

- Gather organizational charts & mission statements
- Read operating procedures which pertain to command
- Staffing (personnel, picture roster, review past evaluations, Internal Affairs files, reputations, capabilities).
- Required reports and expected results
- Performance (statistical performance reports, clearance rates, workload, etc).
- Equipment and property inventory (vehicles, weapons, computers, etc)
- Budget (past expenditures including overtime, open accounts)
- Maintenance rosters
- List of key contacts
- Culture

Interview Key Personnel

Identify key personnel and learn about the future command. Questions of key personnel should center on what they do, explanation of their job and what they value in the command. The list below describes information to obtain from internal and external personnel to improve understanding of the environment.

1. Immediate Supervisor- Discuss expectations, goals and receive initial guidance from your supervisor.
2. Outgoing Leader- Introduce yourself and ask for ideas about what should be done to prepare for the new position. Learn as much of the new position from the outgoing

leader as possible. Establishing a good dialogue with the current leader is essential for a seamless transition.

- An important item to obtain from the current leader is current important issues.
 - Information on the organization from the outgoing leader's perspective and explanation of the issues (why it was important and why these had not already been resolved.)
 - Ask for copies of helpful documents from the outgoing leader. Getting electronic copies of reports will help in the first few months. Avoid having to recreate forms initially until you can develop your own style.
 - Ask for previous event history and information on the command from the outgoing leader's perspective and explanation of the issues. Ask for this information in writing and it should be prepared in a format that answers questions helpful to taking over as leader.
 - Incoming leaders should be wary of unwittingly adopting outgoing leaders' preconceptions about abilities, previous performance and/or past mistakes of subordinates.
3. Peers- Network with colleagues and acquaintances to learn what they know about the command. The main goal during this step is to gather as much valid and relevant information as you can to help assess the state of the command. Discuss different ideas and programs with peers.
 4. Subordinate Supervisors- Meet initially to discuss systems, processes, communication, SOPs within the command.
 5. Line Level- Meet with everyone under your command to introduce yourself.
 6. Ask subordinates to provide a list of their duties. Gather the job descriptions of jobs under your command. Human resource usually maintains these files. A review of the literature by the General Accounting Office (GAO) of 9/11, Pearl Harbor and Katrina indicated that supervisor who failed to act said they were not aware they possessed the authority to make the required decisions.

D- Day (First day)

Who the incoming leader spends time with on the first day will signal what is important to him or her. The incoming leader should spend the first day with his or her supervisor. If he or she is not available, then time should be spent with highest ranking subordinates.

All personnel should be seen in the first 48-96 hours – ask predetermined questions relevant to the command. On the first day of the leadership change over, avoid over-scheduling.

1. Say hello & good bye to everyone
2. Ask gentle probing questions
3. Show you're a good listener
4. Be Positive All Day

Handover Plan

Schedule the turning over of access and equipment on a specific date. Be present when keycard access or locks are changed. Inquire who else may have access to the items you are signing for. Try to ensure that the outgoing leader leaves you with the organizational equipment necessary to do your job.

1. Schedule audits with the department financial officer if money is involved. For example purchase of evidence and/or information accounts (PE/PI).
2. Remember to inspect equipment assigned to your new command.
3. Does the inventory control match items present?
4. Is the equipment operational? Who is the equipment assigned to?

Determine what areas of the new command you already understand. Focus on areas to learn or rely on subject matter experts. Remember; ask if you don't know something, this is better than making incorrect decisions.

Ceremony

Some law enforcement agencies have a ceremony for change of commands of certain ranks, for example the head of the agency. The change of command ceremony is rooted in military history dating back to the 18th century during the reign of Frederick the Great of Prussia. At that time, organizational flags were developed with color arrangements and symbols unique to each particular

unit. To this flag and its commander, the soldiers of the unit would dedicate their loyalty and trust. When a change of command was to take place, the flag was passed to the individual assuming the command. This gesture was accomplished in front of the unit so that all could see and witness their new leader assuming his dutiful position. He who held the flag also held the soldier's allegiance. This symbolic tradition has survived throughout military history. The author has taken part in several change-of-command ceremonies while serving in the United States Army.

Assessment (Day 1 – Day 30)

The situation dictates the approach taken during the first 90 days. New leaders should conduct an assessment prior to taking over and continue for the first two to three weeks. Keep an open mind.

Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (S.W.O.T.)

Conduct S.W.O.T. analysis of your new command.

- What are the commands strengths?
- What are the commands weaknesses?
- What are the commands opportunities and potential initiatives?
- What are the commands threats?
- Where must the organization assume risk?
- What is the current culture?
- What should we anticipate near and far term?
- What are the top three things you would like to communicate to the new leader?

Interview Subordinates

Meet with subordinates to assess climate, needs and recommendations from line personnel. These meetings serve two purposes;

1. Relieve subordinate speculation and anxiety by allowing them to develop an impression of the new leader.
2. Allows the leader to quickly gauge the command climate and avenues of receiving information.
3. Designate roles and responsibilities while remaining open to redistributing these roles equitably with the mission in mind.

Interview Internal & External Stakeholders

Meet with other units, sections, divisions or internal departments which are interrelated or dependant on one another within the governmental system.

External stakeholder partners may include companies which can provide equipment or services. These stakeholders can become cheerleaders to your organization if handled correctly.

1. Internal units may consist of Case Filing, Legal, Property, etc.
2. City Department partners (Public Works, Human Resources, Water Department)
3. Other law enforcement agencies (municipal, county, State, Federal)
4. Customers (community, victims, business owners)
5. Vendors (Records Management company, camera company, security company, Computer Aided Dispatch)
6. School administrators or staff
7. Business Leader
8. Elected officials
9. Neighborhood watch/ block clubs/ associations
10. Youth organizations
11. Community based organizations
12. Community activists
13. Probation/ parole/ pretrial services
14. State Attorney/ District Attorney
15. Faith community
16. Social service organizations
17. Media
18. Charitable organizations

At each meeting, ask the group to help “bring you on board” as the new leader by answering some basic questions such as:

- What does this organization do well?
- What does this organization do poorly?
- What would you change if you could?

Time in field

Ride with officers in the field on all shifts and spend time with subordinates doing their jobs. By spending time with subordinates, inefficient or ineffective policies may be realized.

Observe subordinates every chance you get to determine their knowledge, skills, ability and

morale. Understanding their strengths, weaknesses, competence, developmental needs, motivation and issues can help the new leader understand how to improve their effectiveness thus improving the organization.

Leaders must quickly decipher what needs to be sustained and what areas of interest need immediate attention. To expedite your learning process, involve key personnel in the process. What may be obvious to you may not be obvious to others. Use the opportunity to improve the organization and teach co-workers that creativity and research of best practices are embraced.

Team Building & Mission (Day 31 – day 60)

Leadership Initial Statement

Talk to all subordinates as soon as possible after the leadership transition occurs. A way to establish trust is for the new leader to discuss what is important to them. A story from your background that provides the basis for your beliefs can be a compelling way to engage subordinates. Write expectations for the new command and provide it in a memo to subordinates. Topics to consider are; commitment to integrity and safety, mission and expectations,

Mission

Mission focus requires the new leader to ensure that subordinates understand the direction that the organization needs to go and are committed to achieving its goals. Subordinates, who understand the big picture, are collectively aligned and are committed to the mission. Sometimes the best way to achieve alignment is to change (reorganize) the structure of the organization so that it more directly matches the purpose and functions that you have established.

Try not to show favoritism for any individual, group or unit. Discuss action to be taken and the reason (who, what, where, why).

How do we intend to get to our destination? What do we need to do well to reach our goals? How do we measure?

Every command needs to create a sense of alignment and focus which must have a single top priority within a given period of time.

Establish Key Milestones

Determine resource requirements for subordinates to do the job. Initially, focus your resources on the quick wins to ensure their success and build momentum. Subordinates should have an understanding of expectations.

Set milestones that are S.M.A.R.T.

Specific - how much, who, by when

Measurable - both quality and quantity

Achievable - what circumstances, what are challenges

Relevant - set goals in only the top 20% of job tasks

Time Frame - a goal without a deadline is just a dream

Establish a Sense of Urgency

Leadership transitions and change usually means heightened anxiety. There is an opportunity to capture creativity and insights brought forth by this anxiety. Exploit this opportunity to establish a sense of urgency and maximize this window of opportunity for strategic alignment and team building. Build a climate of honesty and integrity. Clarifying vision and securing early victories all work toward creating a sense of mission and urgency.

Eliminate Needless Constraints

Assess what functions, systems and meetings are not directly related to the organization's vision, mission, goals, objectives and milestones. Eliminate the unnecessary ones. Build coalitions to reduce redundancies and gain efficiencies.

Establishing Routines (Day 61 – Day 90)

To monitor progress, gather feedback and determine changes needed. Decide on acceptable communication methods(emails, memorandums, text, etc). Another useful tool is to have a calendar for planned events. This facilitates access by employees to events taking place and staffing changes. Monthly or weekly progress reports are important to measure outputs. Measurements such as:

- Weekly Crime Statistics
- Monthly Productivity Reports
- Problem solving initiatives

Sustaining (Day 91 and beyond)

To sustain the change and improvements, plan for the long term. Focus on building pride and commitment. Other areas to focus on:

- Culture- Monitor the organizational culture and continue to assess through organizational venues (meetings, training events, and counseling sessions).
- Strategic plan- Assess, understand, plan, prepare, execute and revise strategy. Leaders should continually refine strategy to match changing circumstances. This ensures the organization remains relevant and prepared to meet the evolving challenges.
- Succession- Develop subordinate leaders in your command and replacements for personnel who are specialists or subject matter experts. Prepare a continuity book that contains information the new leader will need to know.

In closing, this guide provides a step-by-step process for assuming a new leadership role starting from the time the leader is notified of the new leadership position to the first 90 days and beyond. The process should allow the leader to gain a deeper understanding of the way the new command operates and its role in the overall organization. Major leadership transitions can be chaotic or smooth and professional, depending on the character of the leader. Preparation is the key to a successful leader transition.

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