Leadership in Records

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If you have attended my *Building a Model Police Records Section* seminar you know that I am a fan of change. Change is a good thing so long as it makes sense and is needed. However problems can arise when change is made simply for the sake of change or for other selfish reasons. Too much change in too short of a time period can also be overwhelming for employees. Nonetheless, in the police records unit where technology is rapidly enveloping our jobs, change is inevitable. For this reason it is important that efforts are taken to make the transition to new ways of doing business easier to accept. Employees should be involved in the process of change. Doing so provides a sense of pride, ownership, and accountability.

Some of the things I teach in *the Building a Model Police Records Section* course would be considered "pushing the envelope" at some agencies. I can't stress enough that indeed in those departments where the organizational culture includes overly strict controls or domineering personalities, change will seem nearly impossible. But I caution you not to fall victim to the self defeating prophecy of thinking change is impossible. Doing so means the end of a good idea before it even gets off the ground. Fight the fight (respectfully), charge forward, meet those challenges head-on, and work every minute of every day to make your records section the best it can be! You will not only become a better person for it, you will also make your department better and your employees better all the while winning the respect of those around you. Good leaders challenge the process- they don't accept the status quo! The key however is doing so in such a way that doesn't involve irritating your superiors, your peers or in a way that involves breaking the rules.

In records, we are sometimes confronted with less than desirable performance such as excessive talking on the phone or use of the internet. Some employees may take too

many breaks or elect to take way too long to complete their assignments. These are all things that translate into decreased service for our customers- the public, other agencies, and our own coworkers who often need fast access to information.

Good leaders deal with these issues but don't spend too much time trying to figure out why they are happening. While it is important to query problem performers about the source of their underperformance before attempting to deal with it, try not to dwell on it. Work towards determining if there are legitimate reasons for a downturn in performance then move on. The answer may provide some insight into how to handle it.

Someone recently shared a story with me about an employee who was having too many personal phone conversations at work. The question becomes "what is too much" and "what should the policy state that deals with this issue"? Most policies simply prohibit *"excessive"* personal phone calls. Thanks a lot to whoever wrote that one! Yet, while vague policies at face value may at times be difficult to work with, they can actually work to your benefit if you put your leadership skills to work. Leaders seize on such occasions as an opportunity- an opening to determine themselves what is appropriate at the moment based on the given situation at hand, historical perspectives, and simple common sense. They also see such occasions as an opportunity to craft what I call TBR's (the boss's rules). In other words the answer is <u>you</u> determine what is excessive, put it in writing, and hold the employee accountable to that specific number. If they violate it, proceed with corrective action via coaching, counseling, contracting through performance improvement plans, and lastly with discipline if necessary.

All too often we as employees rely on policies to make decisions for us. Those agencies however which have the foresight to design policies that intentionally give some leeway are the agencies who understand the importance of developing leaders, trust, and creativity. When an answer is not found in a policy, an employee is essentially forced to make a decision- another essential quality of leadership. It is when an organization implements overly restrictive policies that progress is impeded, creativity is stifled, and dependence on others to get things done dominates. Policies are important to have so long as they make sense! Don't overdo it and don't neglect their importance. Balance is key in everything we do. Be strong but supportive, decisive but flexible, progressive but balanced, firm but fair, and above all else, build relationships first then proceed with change….if it makes sense!