



# LEADING COPS

Decision-Making for the Law Enforcement Leader



Gerald W. Garner

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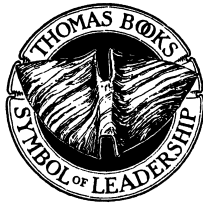
# LEADING COPS

**Decision-Making for the Law Enforcement Leader**

*By*

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*To*  
*Sandi*



## PREFACE

The sergeant in today's law enforcement organization has the best job in America. I am convinced of it. After spending 15 years of a 46-year (so far) career in policing, I know that sergeants have more fun, and more impact on the success of the police organization than just about anyone else. Chiefs of police (like me) can jump up and down until they turn purple in the face. If the first-line supervisor does not translate desires and directions into action, nothing will happen. The sergeant is everything.

However, good sergeants do much more than that. They relay critical information up and down the chain of command. They train their employees. They praise and correct them, as appropriate. They evaluate their subordinates' job performance. Perhaps most important of all, they lead and role-model the positive behavior they expect of their people.

In doing all of these things, law enforcement supervisors are constantly making decisions. They often make them with precious little time for careful deliberation. Many times they make them under tumultuous and even confusing field conditions. Sometimes they make them without the opportunity to seek the advice of others. Decision-making, then, is a critical part of the supervisor's work life.

This book's purpose is to provide the first-line leader with practical, time-proven guidance for making decisions that can range from the seemingly mundane to the life-critical. It is intended to assist the supervisor in dealing effectively with troubled employees, angry or confused citizens, challenging bosses, organizational survival, assessment of employee performance, officer safety, and a good deal more. It explores the sergeant's role in directing law enforcement operations. Always, it emphasizes the importance of sound decision-making.

The text also highlights the importance of common sense applied to good decision-making. It provides today's first-line leader with the insight and experience of a lot of law enforcement supervisors who have gone before him. It is something he can read today and reference again next week, or next



year when a new problem (or a new wrinkle in an old one) arises. It can, and should be a long-term companion for the street-wise supervisor. The ultimate goal is to help him become a better decision-maker, and thereby a more effective leader of law enforcement personnel.

Decision-making always will be an imposing presence in a law enforcement supervisor's world. It is time to get on with the task of making it easier, better, and more personally rewarding.

G.W.G.

## INTRODUCTION

This book is short on theory and long on practical advice. That advice flows from the hard-won and sometimes painful experiences of a lot of law enforcement supervisors spread across a lot of years. There is not a law enforcement agency in the nation that has a surplus of competent decision-makers. By learning from what has gone before and applying his or her own good judgment and common sense, today's law enforcement leader can join the ranks of those excellent decision-makers.

In an effort to help law enforcement's first-line leader become a better decision-maker, the text is logically divided into chapters that cover specific challenges and the talents and skills needed to meet them. Chapter 1 inventories what the new (or not-so-new) leader will need in his or her decision-making toolbox. Chapter 2 explores the tests the leader will face when he finds himself with a collection of new employees. Chapter 3 looks at the other end of the spectrum when the first-line leader is confronted by a group of veteran (and perhaps jaundiced) troops.

Chapter 4 seeks to help the leader handle the questions and complaints that will come his way from the citizenry. It also will aid him in investigating these issues and responding to citizens and employees alike. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 will aid the leader in responding to his own people when they feel aggrieved, or are otherwise upset. Chapter 6 follows with advice for the top-notch supervisor who wants to set a great example for his officers, while Chapter 7 will help him evaluate the work of those same officers when it is performance review time. There are some very tough decisions to be made here, too.

Chapter 8 provides the leader with sound advice for correcting poor, or otherwise improper behavior by an employee while leaving that employee's pride and self-esteem intact. The following chapter will provide the supervisor with the tools necessary to deal with employees' personal as well as job-related emotional issues. Once again, the importance of sound decision-making in such delicate matters is stressed.

Chapter 10 will assist the first-line leader in detecting and correcting unsafe behavior in his people, an absolute must if he is to attain every good law enforcement leader's goal: everyone goes home safe at the end of watch. Chapter 11 deals with yet more operational decision-making. It furnishes the first-line boss with some guidelines for responding safely and effectively to a number of high-risk, on the street scenarios. Then, Chapter 12 equips the leader with a decision-making template for the tasks that must be accomplished quickly following the use of lethal force by an officer. The chapter also details the leader's key duties and responsibilities to his people and his organization when the nightmare scenario of a badly-injured or slain officer becomes tragic reality.

Chapter 13 will help the leader make the quick decisions he must handle when members of the news media invade his crime or incident scene. It also provides him with practical advice for responding professionally on-camera and on the air. Communication difficulties are the topic of Chapter 14, and the text offers the leader some time and experience proven advice for helping get the message across when the lines of communication get tangled.

Chapter 15 provides all-important advice on how to work for someone, even when that someone displays more than his or her share of relationship challenges and eccentricities. Chapter 16 follows with a vital discussion on how the supervisor can survive and prosper in the jungle of his own agency's politics. There are important decisions to be made here, too. Next, Chapter 17 offers some suggestions on what to do when there is not a textbook or directive on what to do next. The value of common sense and mining the collective wisdom of colleagues is examined. Finally, Chapter 18 offers some advice on sound decision-making for planning one's next career move—or the next several.

This is not a "one and done" book. It should be read and re-read throughout a successful leadership career. The lessons it teaches can benefit the newly-minted supervisor and veteran leader alike. After all, who has more vital, life-affecting decisions to make than today's law enforcement leader?

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## **LEADING COPS**



## Chapter 1

# GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

As a law enforcement leader you make a lot of decisions. While all of them are important, some doubtlessly feel routine and not all that difficult. You may, for instance, have to decide on a daily basis which of your officers is assigned to which beat, or which detective will catch a particular case. You may decide which form your employee must complete in a given situation or which charge to file in a particular criminal episode. All of these can be important decisions, but none of them is exactly earthshaking.

At the same time, at virtually any moment you may be called upon to make a decision in a life or death crisis. You may without warning be tasked with a decision, or a whole string of them that will at the very least affect the remainder of someone's life, or the lives of a number of people. Those individuals could be your employees, innocent citizens, criminal offenders, or any combination of them. You may, for instance, be called upon to decide almost instantly whether or not a door should be kicked in. You may have to order a high-speed vehicle pursuit stopped, or allowed to continue. Lives often will hang in the balance.

Others will have days, months or years to review and second guess the call you had perhaps seconds to make. Experience has taught you that these "others" will not hesitate to criticize your decision-making. They may range from members of the news media to elected officials to hungry attorneys. Your own bosses may be part of the crowd of critics, as well. Likely, you already have come to accept that harsh reality as part of the life of a law enforcement leader.

The good news is that there are things you can do to make the decision-making easier and the decisions even better than they already are. The rest of this chapter and the remainder of this book will explore just what those things are.

## WHY DECISION-MAKING IS IMPORTANT

Among the other talents and skills for which you are valued, you are paid by your employer for your knowledge and experience in the field of law enforcement. You are valued and paid because of your demonstrated abilities to lead. All of these things contribute to something else your organization values highly in you: your ability to make good decisions.

Line-level employees, your subordinates, certainly make plenty of decisions of their own every day. Many of them are of the “nuts and bolts” variety of decision-making. Your officers may have to decide what goes into a report, which questions to ask a suspect, and how to go about it. They may have to decide where to stop a suspicious vehicle, or when to use force on a recalcitrant offender.

Your decision-making often takes place at a higher level. Your decisions will, on occasion, involve complex and high-liability issues including legal, personnel, and policy matters. Your decision-making may have a direct bearing on the safety and well-being of your employees and the citizens you all serve. Your decisions may determine whether a criminal episode is interrupted or allowed to continue. They may create or limit civil or even criminal liability for your people, your organization and yourself. Your decision-making is often, in a single word, *critical* in importance.

Your department counts on you for your technical competency, knowledge of the law and personal courage. Those are all extremely important components of your leadership toolbox. Above all else, your bosses want and need you to be an excellent decision-maker. As such, you will help chart the future of your subordinates and your organization for better or worse. It will be up to you to assure that it is for the better.

## WHAT IS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Certain talents, skills, and abilities are required of an effective leader. He or she needs these things to lead others successfully. Oftentimes, they contribute heavily to something called command presence, or the ability to guide others' actions and behaviors by setting an exceptionally positive example. It should not surprise you to learn that many of these same things are to be found in a good decision-maker. They include the following:

**In-depth knowledge of your profession.** To make good decisions you will have to know your field, backwards and forwards. You must have a solid grasp on the technical aspects of your job, and an appreciation for the people part of the equation. You probably would not have the background knowledge required to make good decisions in the field of medicine; neither would a doctor have the necessary grounding to make consistently good calls in yours. Stay current in what is happening in your profession. Your decisions will be all the better for it.

**Credibility.** If your people are to trust and follow you, they must know that you tell them the truth. Your boss has an equally strong demand for believability on your part. The acceptance of your decisions also depends on your reputation for straight-shooting. As in so many other aspects of your job, an earned reputation for truthfulness is everything. Trusted decision-makers are truth-tellers.

**Reliability.** As a leader you are expected to be reliable. When you say you are going to do something, you do it. The same holds true for decision-making. When you say you are going to make a decision, you must decide. You must do it in the called-for or promised time frame. Also, your decision must cover the ground, or solve the problem that you said it would. Your decision-making must be known to be as reliable as you are.

**Personal courage.** Decision-making is not always easy. Sometimes your decisions will disappoint, or even anger others. You must make the call that the facts tell you to make, anyway. That takes courage, something that you have in good supply as an ethical, effective leader. You can be justly proud of that particular character trait. Some would-be leaders lack it.

**Integrity.** If you are to retain the respect of others (as well as keep your own self-respect), you must make the right decisions for the right