

POLICE CHIEF 101

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Having retired twice, the Chief came out of retirement to lead the police department in Corinth, Texas.

Second Edition

POLICE CHIEF 101

**Practical Advice for the Law
Enforcement Leader**

By

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*Chief of Police
Corinth Police Department
Corinth, Texas*



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To Kathy

PREFACE

There is not a job in the world like being the police chief. The chief must be part personnel manager, part politician, and wholly a role model for the people he leads. While being many things to many people, first and foremost the chief must never forget what it is like to be a cop. As any veteran chief will attest, the highs of the job can be truly exhilarating; the lows deep enough to send the unwary into deep depression.

This book will serve the new, veteran or wannabe chief equally well. Authored by a police chief with 50 years of law enforcement experience, it provides practical, commonsense advice for doing the multitude of jobs the chief faces with effectiveness and efficiency. It furnishes sound advice intended to help the chief retain his physical, emotional and ethical health while leading a professional law enforcement agency. This volume accomplishes all of this at a time when too many people appear to have lost their moral compass, or their ability to be effective as leaders.

While written especially for the CEOs of small- to medium-sized law enforcement agencies, the book will prove very useful to the leader of any law enforcement organization as well as those in the top ranks who aspire to head the agency one day. Its advice is just as relevant for the state police superintendent or county sheriff as it is for the chief of police in a city of 90,000. The author is well aware that the challenges faced by all these professionals are similar. He also recognizes that the solutions to their problems are often similar, as well.

The author calls upon the experiences of many veteran law enforcement leaders in identifying common problems and offering practical solutions. This experience-based knowledge often comes from lessons learned the hard way by real people facing real tests and challenges. The author's intent is that readers can benefit from the trials of others in order to avoid previous mistakes and build on the body of knowledge that constitutes professional law enforcement leadership.

Chapter One offers the new or relatively new chief advice on taking control of his new department and putting his agenda in place. Even long-term chiefs can take advantage of the chapter's points to ascertain that they have

done everything necessary to establish control and direction of their agency. Chapters Two and Three provide solid advice for leading a great law enforcement organization and emphasize the extreme importance of role modeling the behavior that the leader expects of his people. The “little things” that a successful leader does are featured as prominently as the major accomplishments of the effective CEO.

Chapter Four sets out the requirements for a productive relationship with the chief’s top staff. It also delves into what is required to bolster an inexperienced staff and further strengthen a solid one. Chapter Five and Six explore the multi-faceted relationship a chief has with his employees. They delve into what is needed to keep those relations as positive as possible through good times and bad. They also cover thoroughly the law enforcement chief executive’s responsibilities to his people.

Chapter Seven provides the chief with some guidelines for managing his relations with the various factions that make up the community, while the following chapter discusses one of the toughest mandates of all: getting along with the boss. One veteran law enforcement leader put it succinctly. “It’s all about how you accomplish your personal and organizational goals without getting fired.” The experiences—good and bad—of a lot of law enforcement leaders have been tapped for this key chapter.

Chapter Nine explores discipline in its various facets and emphasizes the chief’s role in this vital process. Sound advice is proffered to help the police boss make the really tough calls when much is on the line. Next, Chapter Ten contains help for deciding on a course of action when things go wrong, as inevitably they will. The death of a police officer, officer-involved shootings, major misconduct within the department and “bad press” are among the organizational disasters discussed here. Organizational recovery from each must be the chief’s ultimate goal, and the book presents sound advice for accomplishing just that.

Few chiefs have long survived by maintaining a hostile relationship with the news media. Chapter Eleven is targeted on helping the law enforcement leader maintain a good working relationship with the ladies and gentlemen of the press without giving away his soul or damaging his organization in the process. The chapter contains time-proven techniques for helping the chief keep his department’s best foot forward in the eyes of the media. But it also tells him how to respond effectively when the news is not so positive.

The importance of personal ethics in the chief’s personal and professional life is the focus of Chapter Twelve. The necessity of a periodic, ethical self-exam is noted. The chapter offers a simple conclusion: the chief must never abandon his personal integrity for political expediency or even job survival. Meanwhile, Chapter Thirteen summarizes the real-world experiences of successful law enforcement bosses in navigating the political minefields of the

job. This discussion makes it obvious that while the chief should not be a shameless politico, neither can he be unknowledgeable about the power of politics.

The chief will find potentially life-saving advice in Chapter Fourteen. This section of the book offers common sense guidelines for staying emotionally, mentally and physically healthy in what could otherwise be a killing job. Chapter Fifteen is intended to help the law enforcement leader guide his or her department safely through a modern-day fog of anti-police rhetoric. Finally, Chapter Sixteen attempts to help the chief decide for himself when it is time to leave the position and perhaps the profession. It also reminds him that there is life—and the potential for a very good life—after being the boss. A couple of final notes: the text regularly refers to the chief in the male gender. This is for ease of reading only, as women have long since proven themselves equal to their male counterparts as effective leaders. Also, on occasion the reader will encounter repetition of points made previously in the text. This is not accidental; some key principles apply in more than one area of discussion and merit the emphasis of repetition. They are that important.

In the final analysis, the world does not have nearly enough truly effective law enforcement leaders. This book is targeted on vastly increasing the number. With that goal set, it is time to get on with its fulfillment.

G.W.G.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i>	vii
Chapter One: When You're the New Chief	3
Do Your Homework Before You Start	4
Know Why You Were Chosen	5
Size Up the Department and Its Challenges	6
Assess Your Staff	7
Meet the Employees	8
Be Sure You're on the Same Wavelength with Your Boss	9
Meet the Players in the Community	10
Establish a Checklist and a Time Frame	11
Establish Your Agenda and Communicate It	11
Meet the Press (Advertise Yourself)	12
Deal Quickly with Major Issues	13
Otherwise, Don't Move Too Quickly on Major Changes	14
Examine the High-Risk Areas	14
Score Some Small, Early Victories	16
Communicate You're In It for the Long Haul	17
Summary	18
Points to Remember	18
Chapter Two: Leading a Great Organization	20
Be Proud of Your People and Organization and Say So	20
It Won't Happen Overnight	21
Culture Change Takes Years	22
Remove Those Opposing Positive Change	23
Be Relentless in Seeking Your Goals	24
Expect Setbacks and Advance Past Them	24

The Value of Role Modeling	25
Don't Accept "Good Enough"	26
Have a Group of Peers for "Second Opinions"	27
Stay in Touch (Management by Walking Around)	28
Everyone Must Know the Mission and Goals	29
Never Criticize Your Own Department in Public	31
Consider an Employees' Advisory Council	32
Maintain Surveillance of the Problem Pits	32
Don't Hoard Information Your People Need	33
Share the Road Map of Where You're Going	34
Don't Be Afraid to Be Different (Innovate!)	34
Borrow and Loan Good Ideas	35
Never Stop Trying to Get Better	36
Summary	36
Points to Remember	37
 Chapter Three: On Being the World's Greatest Role Model	 38
Treat It Like Your Personal Business—It Is!	38
Remember That You Are Never Invisible	39
Pass the Video Test	40
Be Active in Your Community and Profession	40
Don't Do Things You'd Punish Your People For	41
When You're Wrong, Say So and Apologize	42
Don't Forget How to Be a Peace Officer	43
Your Off-Duty Conduct Is As Important As What Happens On-Duty	44
Your Employees Look to You and WANT to Be Proud of You	45
Don't Accept Favors Denied to Your People	45
Never Cheat or Fudge on the Rules	46
The "Little Things" Are Important, Too	47
Look and Sound Like What You Want Your People to Emulate	48
Summary	48
Points to Remember	49
 Chapter Four: Leading Your Staff	 50
The Right People in the Right Places	50
Don't Get Too Cozy Too Quickly	52
Endless Restructuring Is Not Good	53
Hiring and Promoting: When in Doubt, Don't!	53

Don't Mandate "Yes" Men	54
Find Out Why the Failure Happened, But Don't Kill the Messenger	55
Delegate but Hold Accountable	56
Don't "Dumb Down" Your Expectations	57
Start Preparing the Next Generation of Leaders	58
Develop a Reputation for Trust and Reliability	59
Don't Assume That Your Staff Knows What You Know	59
Look to Your Staff's Training	60
Performance Reviews Are Important	61
Don't Allow Personal Friendships to Affect Your Decision-Making	63
Remove the Liars and Plotters—They Won't Get Better	64
Sometimes Culture Change Means Some Staff Must Go	65
Summary	66
Points to Remember	67
Chapter Five: Your Relations with Your Employees	68
Don't Try to Be a Superhero	69
Don't Attempt to Please Everyone, All the Time	70
Don't Try to Fix Everything Anyone Ever Complains About	70
Seek Respect, Not Love	71
Realize Some Will Support, Some Will Oppose, Many Just Don't Care	72
Don't Become Invisible When the News Is Bad	74
Wear Your Uniform a Lot	75
Respond on Some Calls, But Stay Out of the Way	75
Maintain Contact with the Union, But Don't Pander	76
Realize the Importance of Officer Safety and Good Equipment	77
Meet All Your People—Set Expectations Early	78
Don't Implement Change More Quickly Than Your People Can Absorb It	79
Take Time to Listen	80
Don't Forget the Personal Touches	81
Be Friendly, Be Approachable, But Don't Sell Used Cars	82
Summary	83
Points to Remember	83

Chapter Six: Priority One: Your Employees' Welfare	85
Officer Safety Is Vital	85
Role Model the Safe Behavior You Expect	86
Make Safety Equipment a Priority	87
Fulfill Your Role as a Risk Manager	88
Defend Your People When Necessary	89
Advocate in the Community for Your Peoples' Welfare	90
Employees' Emotional Health Is Important, Too	91
Realize the Value of "Little Things"	94
Walking the Tightrope Between Your People and Your Boss	95
Remember What Concerned YOU as a Frontline Cop	95
Never Stop Trying to Improve the Lives of Your People	96
Summary	97
Points to Remember	98
 Chapter Seven: Managing Your Relations with the Community	 99
Set Up a Kitchen Cabinet of Well-Connected People	99
Accept Every Invitation You Can	101
Don't Get Lazy as Your Tenure Grows	102
Be Out Front When Controversy Erupts	103
Don't Limit Access Unreasonably	104
Don't Become Allied with a Faction or Fringe Group	105
Listen to Concerns: Don't Be Too Quick with Pronouncements	106
You Don't Have to Fix Everything	107
Don't Play Favorites	107
Maintain a High Profile—Appropriately!	108
Answer Most Phone Calls and E-Mails Yourself	109
Let Them See You're Not an Ogre	110
Stay as Involved in Community Activities as You Can	111
Live Where You Work	112
Summary	113
Points to Remember	113
 Chapter Eight: Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Your Boss	 115
Will a Contract Help?	115
What Your Boss Wants from You	119
What Role in Organizational Politics Should the Chief Play?	120

Surviving the Boss from Hell	122
The Dangers of Getting TOO Cozy	123
The Young Boss vs. the Old Lion	124
Never Embarrass or Surprise Your Boss	125
Share Your Glories with Your Leader	126
Your Relationship with Your Boss Will Help Determine Whether You Succeed or Fail	127
Your Boss Is Unlikely to Change to Suit You, So	128
Pandering to Your Employees Will Cost Your Boss's Support	129
Don't Fret Excessively About What Your Boss Is Thinking	130
Prove That You Can Be Believed and Trusted	131
Never Show Fear or Self-Doubt	132
Let Your Boss Know You Will Take Care of Him	133
Determine What Your Boss Knows About Policing and Educate Him	134
It's OK to Volunteer	135
Your Goal: Make Your Boss's Life Better	136
Summary	137
Points to Remember	138
Chapter Nine: Handling Discipline Well Is Vital	139
The Best Discipline Is Self-Discipline	140
Be a Role Model Here, Too	141
A Reputation for Fairness Is Your Goal	142
Not Dealing with the Bad Will Cost You the Good	142
Mistakes of the Head vs. Mistakes of the Heart	143
Discipline as a Teacher	145
Get It Done	146
Bounce Tough Calls Off of Your Peers	146
Mean What You Say	147
Disciplining "Outside the Box"	149
What to Do When Your Discipline Gets Undone	150
Handling Your Own Negative Discipline	151
Summary	152
Points to Remember	153
Chapter Ten: When Things Go Wrong	154
Officer-involved Shootings	155
The Death of an Officer	156

The Chief's Responsibilities	158
Recovering from a Tragedy	160
When Your People Make Tragic Errors	161
When You Played a Role in the Disaster	162
Handling Personal Reversals	163
Be Highly Visible When Things Go Bad	164
Know the Facts Before You Respond	165
Keep Everyone Current in a Developing Crisis	166
Be Careful with the Blame Game	167
Summary	168
Points to Remember	169
 Chapter Eleven: Managing News Media Relations	 170
The Value of Credibility	171
Your Personal Relationship with the Press	172
What NOT to Do	174
Handling Bad News	175
Leading a Successful News Conference	176
The Value of News Releases	178
Some Media Pitfalls to Avoid	180
All Your Employees Must Understand	182
Taking a Reporter into Your Confidence	183
Don't Spout Off Before You Know the Facts	184
Don't Hide Your Agenda	185
Don't Pick a Fight with the News Media	186
Don't Forget the Value of the Internet	188
The Value of a Good Public Information Officer (PIO)	189
Summary	190
Points to Remember	191
 Chapter Twelve: The Ethics of Your Job	 192
Maintain Enough Financial Independence to Walk Away	193
Never Compromise for Political Expediency	194
Don't Believe Your Clippings	195
Follow Ethical Rules for Relating to Other Officials	196
Pick Carefully the Hills Worth Dying On	197
Find Out What Happened to the Last Guy	198
Don't Get Complacent When Things Are Quiet	199
Never Surrender Your Ideals	200

One Slip Doesn't Mean You're Headed for Hell	201
Perform an Ethics Self-Exam from Time to Time	202
Summary	204
Points to Remember	204
 Chapter Thirteen: The Chief as a Player on the	
Political Scene	206
Talk to Everybody; Believe a Select Few	207
Realize the Danger of a Close Alliance	208
Don't Compromise Your Ideals for Acceptance	210
Be Willing to Trust When Trust Is Earned	211
Never Break the Rules for Anyone	212
Have a Mentor to Pose Your Dilemmas To	213
Don't Confuse Apathy with Support	214
Remember That You Are Everyone's Chief	215
Listen to the "Out" Groups, Too	216
Summary	218
Points to Remember	219
 Chapter Fourteen: Surviving the Job	220
Family Comes First	221
Save Time for You	221
Exercise Regularly	222
Watch the Diet and the Booze	223
Curb Your Ego; Admit It When You're Wrong	225
Watch Out for the Badge Bunnies	226
Don't Be Where Common Sense Says You Shouldn't Be	227
Avoid Becoming a Workaholic	229
Have Friends Away from Police Work	230
Keep Reading and Learning Always	231
It's Vital to have a Confidant, or Several	232
Know That There Will Be Disappointments	233
Realize That Most Crises Have a Shelf Life	234
Summary	235
Points to Remember	236
 Chapter Fifteen: Leading in an Era of Anti-police Rhetoric	237
The Environment Today	237
What You Can and Must Do	239

What Is Your Message?	241
Summary	242
Points to Remember	243
Chapter Sixteen: When It's Time to Go	244
The Signs That It's Over	245
It's OK to Ask How You Stand	246
Don't Make Big Decisions When You Are Emotional	248
Leaving on Your Own Terms	249
Keep Your Resume Current	250
Realize When It's Not Fun Anymore	251
Avoiding the Role of Lame Duck Chief	252
The Meaning of a "No Confidence" Vote	253
What Are You Willing to Do to Save Yourself?	256
There IS Life After Being Chief	257
Summary	258
Points to Remember	259
<i>Appendix: Advice from the Chiefs</i>	<i>261</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>265</i>

POLICE CHIEF 101

Chapter 1

WHEN YOU'RE THE NEW CHIEF

Even if he or she had been a law enforcement chief executive before, most experienced chiefs will acknowledge the day they took the reins of their department was not one they will soon forget. For the novice chief taking on his first CEO position, the memories are even more intense years down the road. The truth is that there is not another job on earth exactly like leading a law enforcement agency in the twenty-first century. The demands are great, the challenges and frustrations are many. Yet for the man or woman who went into law enforcement “to help people,” the opportunities to do just that are legion.

Every law enforcement “Big Boss” was once a rookie chief and has experienced at least some of the doubts and concerns that you, the new chief, are feeling today. At one time or another, most doubted that they had made the right choice. Most were unsure at some point if they really could do the job, or still wanted to. The good news for you is that most of these good people found that they did indeed want to lead the personnel behind them. They did so successfully, each in his or her way.

It is true that every law enforcement leader, like every human being, is just a little different from everyone else and from every other leader. It is a good thing that leadership allows for differences in style and personality. There is not one and only one way to do the job correctly.

The budding police chief does not have to be a clone of anyone else. At the same time, however, experience has taught that there are personal traits and practices that help one leader to be stronger or more effective than another. There are things which can be taught and learned that will make you a better law enforcement chief executive. Those things are what this book is about. Assembled from the experiences of a great many leaders over a great many years, this common sense advice will serve to make the attentive reader better at doing his difficult job.

Although targeted on the new or wannabe chief at a medium-sized police agency, the volume’s advice will prove helpful to you if you are a vet-

eran chief or upper management law enforcement leader in a big city or small town. Effective leadership skills work as well in a rural sheriff's office as they do in a big, metropolitan police department.

The truth is that law enforcement can never have too many very effective leaders. It is time to get on with the task of creating more.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE YOU START

As a law enforcement manager, you already know how to do research. As an investigator you likewise know how to gather information from diverse sources. You will need to utilize those skills as the newly appointed leader of a law enforcement organization.

No doubt you assembled a lot of data in preparing to compete for the chief's position. You already should know a great deal about the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the organization, at least as seen through the eyes of the reporters, editorial writers, bloggers and letter authors whose views you have examined via the local media. Perhaps you have talked to members of the department and residents of the community as an important part of your information-gathering efforts. If you have not done so already, now would be a good time to organize and review what you have learned from these sources. In examining what you have recorded, watch for consistent themes that may tell you work is needed in specific areas: leadership, policies and procedures, customer service, integrity and so on.

Now that you are officially the new chief, you will be able to gain even more information from sources you likely did not reach when you were a contestant for the job. The list of those you might talk with is practically endless, but there are a number of people you certainly will want to contact. If your appointing authority has no objection, it would be helpful to sit down with each of your council or board members and get their insights on the department's strengths and weaknesses. You are there to listen to them talk. This is not the time to make big pronouncements or promises. Stay alert for any consistent, major issues that the speakers bring up. Do not be surprised if their opinions of what is important vary widely. If anyone has an ax to grind with the department or its former leader, the complaint is likely to surface at this time. Listen carefully and do not be too quick to respond. Realize that you may be getting incomplete or even inaccurate information in the mix of opinions.

Take your leadership staff's opinions on the organization, its problems, its strong points and its weak areas. Have your staff put their views in writing. Not only will you gain insight on how well they grasp what is going on in the agency, you will see how well they communicate with the written word.

You will want to collect the opinions of your mid-managers and supervisors, both cops and civilians, early in your tenure. Sit down with the leaders of any unions or other employee associations in the agency. Again, you are there to listen and take notes, not argue or make promises. You are still in the information-gathering stage; the formulation of action plans and responses can come a bit later.

Your fellow department heads also may be able to help you by sharing their observations on your organization and your boss. Law enforcement officials such as the district attorney and the sheriff should be able to provide their own insights on your agency and its reputation in the community. Other community leaders should be willing to contribute their observations, as well. But first you have to ask.

Take sufficient notes about what you learn. There is a lot of information out there but realize that you are only human and will have neither the time nor the energy to get it all. Do the best you can. Know that this is a very busy time for you with your many other responsibilities but at least try listening to every soul in the community who has something to say.

Don't forget that you can learn a lot from your agency's own documents, too. Look at the most important sections of your department's rules, policies and procedures. You are seeking to educate yourself, but you also are looking for weak spots that need shored up immediately. Ethics, evidence handling, vehicle pursuits, officer safety and use of force guidelines top the list of subjects that merit your close scrutiny.

Doing your homework now could save you a lot of frustration later. It will enable you to make good decisions as you begin to put your stamp on your organization.

KNOW WHY YOU WERE CHOSEN

An important part of the homework to be done by a newly appointed chief is finding out why he was chosen over the competition. In some cases, the reason may be relatively obvious. Hopefully, you have been keeping up with the jurisdiction's news media in the months preceding the selection process. If not, review past stories on the department now. You should know, for instance, if there has been bad press about corruption, lack of leadership or poor customer service in the department. You should know if the last chief is departing because of a scandal or other personal ethics lapse. You should know if the vacancy was created by an evidence-handling or minority relations disaster. Whatever the case, it will be your job to demonstrate quickly that you know how to fix the problem and will do so as rapidly as possible.

There is another way of confirming why you were hired and what you are expected to accomplish: ask. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the appointing authority once the job offer has been made precisely why you were selected over the other candidates. Whether you have been selected by a mayor, council or board, city or town manager, you need to be clear on what it is you are expected to accomplish. Ask.

If things are going relatively smoothly and the employees, citizens and local officials appear reasonably content, the new guy or gal may be expected to keep the current course without rocking the boat too much. If things have not been going well, you are very likely expected to implement a course change in quick order. Whatever the case, you need to know what is expected so that you don't fire off in the wrong direction or commence fixing something that is not seen to be broken. Observing, listening carefully and asking some direct questions of the right people could save you time and grief while allowing you to focus your energy in the right areas.

SIZE UP THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES

It is doubtful that there is such a thing as a flawless police department, even though a few perpetually dissatisfied cops may wander through their careers looking for one. As the new Big Boss, you will have to evaluate your "business" (for that's what it is) as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Any serious or dangerous problems you discover should be addressed right away. That category of issues could include officer safety lapses, illegal or unethical conduct and the improper handling of drugs and money.

You should have plenty of help in the evaluation process from the people you already have been talking to within the community, local government and the department itself. Generally, the more often you hear the same concern mentioned, the more likely it is that a real problem exists. After a while you should be able to pick up on certain themes that dominate your interviewees' concerns. You probably won't be able to deal with all of them simultaneously, so unless you have a truly exceptional memory you should make notes for reference later. Closer examination may convince you that some of the "issues" will not need addressed at all. Prioritize what you hear and divide the concerns into those that can wait and the ones that must be dealt with immediately.

While your early days on the job will keep you very busy observing and evaluating, remember this is a process that should continue throughout your tenure as the agency's leader. Circumstances change in an organization, as do the concerns and attitudes of its members. New and unexpected challenges will arise. You cannot afford to be surprised too often. Keep your eyes