

6.12: Current Issues - Internal Affairs and Discipline

Internal affairs (IA) exists to hold officers accountable for their actions. Whenever there is an issue, either brought forth by another officer, a supervisor or a member of the general public, the IA division of the police department is responsible for conducting a thorough investigation into the incident. Members of the IA division work directly under the Chief or Sheriff.

In the 1960s the overwhelming number of riots revealed the problem of corruption and misconduct in policing- one of the most significant issues centered around citizen complaints against officers and the lack of proper investigation into the complaint. Most officers back then were found exonerated (not guilty) when a complaint ensued, and this did not bode with the public. ^[1]

Supervisors in Policing Example

As a young girl, I never had dreams of one day being a supervisor in the police world. In fact, I didn't even want to be a cop! However, life would direct me towards policing, and after years of testing, I found myself hired as a police officer in Las Vegas. The life of an officer is full of wonder and excitement, but it is also full of stress, and a lot of pressure! After I completed the police academy, field training, and probation I soon learned that all supervisors (sergeants and lieutenants) were not created equal. I received my first police officer annual evaluation and found that I ONLY met standards in the areas evaluated. How could that be, I thought? I had never worked harder! I always stayed late, I wrote amazing reports, I volunteered and helped out my community, I engaged in constant training, I did everything I knew AND was trained to do. Yet, I still only met standards. Now I wasn't delusional. I knew that I was a new police officer and had many things to learn, but why was my sergeant failing to mentor or recognize me for my above average efforts in many areas? I was even told by a female sergeant, that she had to work harder than any other police officer because she was a female, so I should have to do the same. Where was mentoring? Where was the training offered by supervision? I soon learned it did not exist and the only way to create it was to test for promotion myself and enter the world of supervision as a sergeant. Don't get me wrong, throughout my tenure as a police officer I did encounter some amazing supervisors, but they were rare and an exception to the rule. I did the test for promotion, and I was promoted to sergeant. My goals were to change the way officers were supervised at my department. I worked hard to create a sergeant training program that ensured future supervisors received the knowledge and power of how-to mentor and train their employees. Three years later I tested and promoted to lieutenant. I took advantage of my new position in administration to mentor many young officers and help them to succeed in their careers.

Discipline

Police departments are paramilitary organizations or a semi-militarized force whose organizational structure, tactics, training, subculture, and (often) function are similar to those of a professional military, but which is formally not part of a government's armed forces. Therefore, the handling of discipline is serious business. If an officer is accused of a minor infraction, such as the use of profanity, the officer's immediate supervisor will generally handle the policy infraction and note what occurred in the officer's file and counsel the officer of the following: 1- Inform the police officer why the conduct was wrong 2- Inform the police officer how to stop engaging in the conduct 3- Inform the police officer when the conduct must stop 4- Inform the police officer the time elapsed after the conduct and a scheduled meeting to review and ensure the conduct is still not occurring. Depending on the conduct, the supervisor may require the officer to attend training to assist the officer.

Another answer was to create external civilian review boards to hold police accountable for their actions by reviewing all use of force incidents. With the onset of the 21st century and new technology, came new tools in policing. One such tool was a new program called IA Pro. This program followed individual officers throughout their entire career. A scheming grass or meat eater officer could bid on a new shift each year, gaining a new supervisor who would be oblivious to past infractions. IA Pro ensured any, and all infractions by an officer were recorded and followed through upon by the applicable supervisor. If an officer used profanity, the program would require the officer to attend training. If the officer used profanity a second time within the prescribed time limits, the officer would be placed on an timed employee development program and could face discipline up to termination. IA Pro was not a panacea, but it would significantly lower the number of officers allowed to continue to operate as grass or meat eaters.

If an officer is accused of a more serious infraction, such as excessive use of force or lying, the officer will immediately be placed on administrative leave and The Internal Affairs Division of the department will investigate the incident. The Internal Affairs Division will offer a finding of 1- Sustained Complaint 2- Not-Sustained Complaint 3- Exonerated Complaint 4- Unfounded Complaint. Once one of the above complaint dispositions is assigned, it is then forwarded to the Command Staff (Chief or Sheriff

and Assistant Chief/Sheriff, Deputy Chief/Sheriff, and Captains) for review and discipline. Discipline can include time-off up to termination.

When an Officer Does Something Illegal Example

I was a lieutenant over two sergeants and dozens of officers when I received the dreaded phone call. One of my officers was being placed on administrative leave by Internal Affairs due to a horrendous allegation. The officer had been pulling over female drivers for 'so-called' traffic violations and offering them an 'out' if they performed some sort of sexual activity. My heart sank, how could this have happened and on my watch? After weeks of investigation, I learned that the officer had been engaging in this illegal activity for months. It took several brave women to contact our Internal Affairs Division and tell their stories, to stop it. I racked my brain as to what I could have done to prevent the officer. Did I miss the signs? Should I have been sterner? What could I have done? Even years later it tears at my soul. What those women had to endure. How scared they must have been. It must have been their worst nightmare come true. I have played many scenarios in my head as to what I could have done or should have done to stop this officer's actions. And I finally learned that some people are just ethically and morally corrupt. No matter how hard we, in supervision, try to identify them through the L.E.T. Process or keep tabs on them when they engage in such acts, sometimes they slip through the cracks and are allowed to spread their evilness. This is what happened with this officer. The officer was smart enough to engage in this activity while alone on patrol, knowing that he could stop this action if another officer or supervisor assisted on the traffic stop. His actions were scary and should send a message to every police department and every supervisor that they must always be on the look-out for those officers that are corrupt and will use their power to engage in illegal and horrendous crimes. This was a hard lesson for me to learn, but an eye-opening one that would forever change the way I supervised those officers in my command.

1. Goldstein, H. (1977). *Policing a free society*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger. ↩

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