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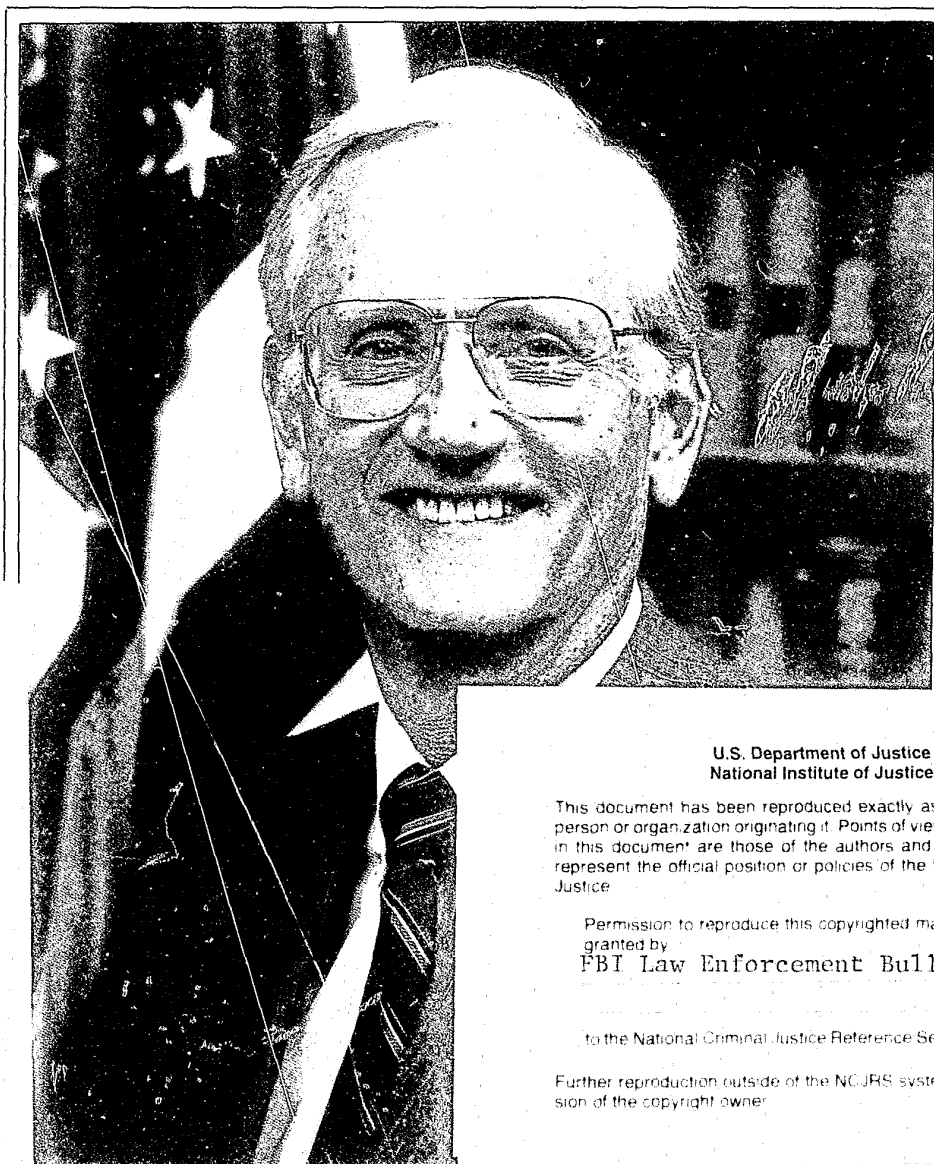


# FBI

December 1987

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

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# Contents

December 1987, Volume 56, Number 12

- 108706  
Management
- Crime Problems
- Identification
- Legal Digest
- 1 Introducing the New Director
  - 2 Transformational Police Leadership  
by Donald C. Witham
  - 7 The "Bobby Joe" Long Serial Murder Case:  
A Study in Cooperation  
(Conclusion)  
By Gary Terry and Michael P. Malone
  - 14 On-Line Exchange of Fingerprint Identification Data  
By Dennis G. Kurre
  - 17 Look But Don't Touch: The Plain View Doctrine  
By Kimberly A. Kingston
  - 24 Book Review
  - 25 1987 Index
  - 31 Wanted by the FBI

# FBI

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

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William S. Sessions, Director

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# Transformational Police Leadership

***“Upgrading the quality of American law enforcement has been an important national goal over the last 2 decades.”***

By  
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During the past decade, two seminal works on leadership have been published. In 1978, James McGregor Burns wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book entitled *Leadership*.<sup>1</sup> Burns wrote that leadership is one of the most observed, but least understood, phenomena in the world. In 1985, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus authored another important book, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*.<sup>2</sup> Bennis and Nanus built upon Burns' idea of a transformational leader, and they describe the essential roles that leaders and executives play with respect to organizational success and performance. According to these authors, the distinguishing talent possessed by transformational leaders is the ability to envision. They are capable of seeing the entire organization, the complex environment, and the interaction of the two as a single entity. Further, they are able to project this view into the future and describe a favorable future for the organization. They articulate this vision to others and provide them with a sense of meaning. Also, they inspire trust in others—partly because of their steadfastness to their vision.<sup>3</sup> These works

have significantly advanced our understanding of the subject of leadership and brought tangible insights and guidance to students and practitioners of leadership.

This article will examine the background and preparation of police leaders in America, and it will speculate as to how these experiences may relate to their ability to envision. In particular, four areas of their preparation will be highlighted—range of police and managerial experience, level of formal education, extent of professional development or training, and involvement with community and other groups outside law enforcement. The author believes these factors are important developmental elements for successful police leadership.

## **Law Enforcement Executives**

The literature on law enforcement has long been critical of the inadequacies of police executives as they attempt to discharge their responsibilities. Raymond Fosdick's classic book, *American Police Systems*, was published in 1920, and even then, nearly 70



Special Agent Witham

years ago, he criticized the performance of police executives:

"Far more than to any other factor, the irrational development of American police organization is due to inadequate leadership. To the lack of trained and intelligent administrators, obtaining and holding office on favorable conditions, much of the confusion and maladjustment of our police machinery is ascribable."<sup>4</sup>

Upgrading the quality of American law enforcement has been an important national goal over the last 2 decades. A number of task forces and commissions have developed a host of recommendations. Interestingly, few of these recommendations relate directly to police leaders. The bulk of the suggestions pertain to setting standards for police recruits in areas such as training and education. Such a bottom-up approach will eventually result in improvements in law enforcement.

Perhaps, however, a more immediate approach to upgrading law enforcement would focus upon police leaders and executives. Although no single group can bring about enhanced law enforcement competence, no other group is better positioned to effect this transformation than police administrators.

Virtually every study or commission to examine American law enforcement since Fosdick's time also has been quite critical of law enforcement administrators. Despite an awareness of the complexity of the law enforcement executive's position and an awareness of the historical inadequacies of law enforcement leadership, and furthermore, despite substantial

efforts in the last decades to upgrade American law enforcement, there has been practically no comprehensive research on this subject. This article will describe some selected findings of a recent study of law enforcement executives contained in *The American Law Enforcement Chief Executive: A Management Profile* published by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) in 1985.<sup>5</sup>

#### The PERF Study

During 1982 and late 1983, nearly 500 police chief executives from throughout the United States participated in a major PERF study. The executives headed the larger State, county, or municipal departments in the Nation (i.e., a minimum of 75 full-time employees). Every State in the Nation was represented by at least one executive, with the exception of Vermont. The extremely high response rates achieved by the two surveys (88% and 90% respectively) added greatly to the quality of this research. At the same time, the response rates indicate the high level of conscientiousness of the administrators and their dedication to quality policing in America. Chart 1 contains some profile data on police executives.

#### Discussion of Selected Findings

This section will describe those findings believed to relate to the executives' ability to become transformational leaders. First, the mean age of the participants was 49. In the chart, items 1-5 under Heading A—THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE—are all statistical means of the data. Readers interested in a more detailed description of the methodology

or statistical analysis can find that information in the book, *The American Law Enforcement Chief Executive: A Management Profile*. The respondents were not young, impressionable men, but veterans of nearly 25 years of policing. In fact, since over 90 percent of the respondents had prior police experience

and the entire group averaged over 17 years in their present department, it's quite clear that only a few could have had recent experience in other occupations or even other police agencies. Previous research has criticized the relatively narrow experience (e.g., primarily within one police agency for

many years) of law enforcement administrators. This condition appears to remain largely unchanged, and such a narrow range of experience would not seem conducive to developing a sophisticated understanding of the complex environment in which policing must function.

The educational levels achieved by the participants far exceed the levels discovered during previous research. There can be no question that law enforcement leaders have made substantial progress in this area. Again, this is an area in which the field has been harshly criticized in earlier studies. As recently as 1975, an International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) study found that only about 10 percent of chiefs nationwide had earned a baccalaureate degree.<sup>6</sup>

The percentages of college graduates among the chiefs differed markedly by region. Executives from the western region were twice as likely to have a degree as their colleagues from the northeast. Executives in the south and north central fell between the two extremes, but their percentages were much closer to their western colleagues than to their northeastern counterparts.

There was a strong consensus among the respondents that executive development training programs were excellent vehicles for improving the performance of administrators. In fact, the executives overwhelmingly selected training over other methods (e.g., more experience or education) to prepare their successors properly for the top position. Also, some respondents wrote that law enforcement has a distance yet to travel in executive training before it catches up with other types of training in the field.

### CHART 1—PROFILE OF POLICE EXECUTIVE

#### A. THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. Age _____	49 Years
2. Time in Present Position _____	5.5 Years
3. Law Enforcement Experience _____	24 Years
4. Experience in Present Department _____	17.7 Years
5. Work Week _____	56.6 Hours
6. Experience in Law Enforcement Before Becoming Executive _____	92%
7. Promoted to Chief's Position From Another Executive Position Within Law Enforcement _____	80%
8. Previous Experience as a Chief Executive in Another Law Enforcement Agency _____	10.5%
9. Experience in at Least One Other Law Enforcement Agency _____	54.9%

#### B. EDUCATION LEVEL

1. Minimum of a Baccalaureate Degree _____	50.7% (1982)
	56.8% (1983)
2. Graduate Degree _____	18.4% (1982)
	25.6% (1983)
3. Associate Degree _____	17.1% (1982)
	15.9% (1983)
4. Less Than an Associate Degree _____	32.2% (1982)
	27.3% (1983)
5. Most Common Field of Study (Minimum of an Associate Degree) _____	
a. Law Enforcement—Criminal Justice _____	49.5%
b. Public—Business Administration _____	29%

#### C. EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING NEEDS

(Highest rated subject areas 1982 and 1983)

1. Executive's role in management
2. Legal problems and issues
3. Personnel management
4. Strategic planning
5. Computers and information management

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**“... transformational leadership addresses and stresses the morality and integrity of leaders...”**

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The final selected finding related to how the administrators viewed their jobs. They were requested to rate their three most important duties from a list of nine functions that are frequently described within the management literature as executive in nature (e.g., identify and set objectives or establish priorities). It was obvious from their ratings that many of the chiefs realize that there is more to their job than administering a complex police organization. A number of executives rated maintaining relationships with community leaders, political figures, and the media as integral to their effectiveness. These officials know that law enforcement is a public function that will never be truly apolitical, and that if they are going to be effective in their role, they must interact with a number of significant actors outside of their organizations. This vision, which comprehends the political environment in which law enforcement occurs, was not as broadly shared as might be expected.

#### **Preparing for Transformational Leadership**

The thumbnail sketch in the first section of this article includes the essential elements of transformational leadership. Still, readers are strongly encouraged to read the Bennis and Nanus book in its entirety to receive a thorough explanation of their ideas. To avoid misunderstanding here, two critical points will be discussed more completely. First, the ability to articulate a vision of where an organization is going is not synonymous with being glib or quick witted. It is much more. Most especially, it entails sound and careful thinking. Further, steadfastness to the vision described implies more than bull-

headedness. In particular, it means that people trust a leader's integrity and character. Thus, transformational leadership addresses and stresses the morality and integrity of leaders unlike some of the fashionable but simplistic approaches so popular in recent years.

How does one go about developing the ability to envision? Or, how does one learn to make a mesh of things? Clearly, there are no guaranteed approaches or methods; however, it seems quite sensible to argue that by putting people in a wide variety of jobs and situations, and requiring them to think seriously about their lives, their profession, and their Nation, perhaps the broadening process can be facilitated. Some people will never see the big picture regardless of their preparation. Still, the four aspects of preparation discussed here can assist many individuals in furthering their understanding of law enforcement in America.

If there is any truth to the old saying that what you see depends on where you sit, then aspiring executives should attempt to sit in as many different chairs as possible. In this way, they can begin to see situations from a variety of viewpoints or perspectives.

At present, it seems unrealistic to expect many police leaders to serve in more than one department so they can gain these varied perspectives. In general, pension systems do not allow for this sort of mobility without imposing some level of risk to the financial security of the executive and his family. Nevertheless, future police leaders should give careful consideration to their career plans to allow for as many different types of jobs and experiences as possible. Several participants in the PERF study indicated that administrative positions were particularly benefi-

cial experiences for understanding the chief's position, and that in some departments, these positions were not as career enhancing as operational-type positions. Aspiring chiefs should attempt to complete both types of assignments.

The reasons for advocating that law enforcement officials have regular involvement with community and professional figures are essentially the same as those just described regarding career planning. This contact will insure that officials expose themselves to a wide variety of opinions and views. Many innovative ideas from one occupation can be adapted by other fields, and leaders must constantly scan their communities and professional discipline for new ideas. Probably an even more compelling reason for this involvement is that police organizations exist to serve the citizenry. Is there a better method to receive feedback on organizational performance than directly from influential community figures?

With respect to the necessity for a formal education, including at least a baccalaureate degree, and the need for quality developmental and executive training programs, this sort of preparation insures that administrators have been exposed to current concepts and opinions on numerous matters relevant to law enforcement. These intellectually stimulating experiences can assist executives in developing an open and inquiring mind. They should help leaders obtain a more refined understanding of the proper role of law enforcement in American society. This understanding is crucial to forming a vision of the future of the organization. Even though this knowledge is somewhat intangible

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**“... police organizations ... need transformational leaders to successfully confront the challenges of the future.”**

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and may be difficult to discern, it informs most of the daily actions and decisions of the administrators. Author Harlan Cleveland believes that there is a bright future for complexity.<sup>7</sup> If this is so, can anyone doubt the importance of sound intellectual preparation for police leaders?

Perhaps, one of the best ways to highlight the necessary experiences for police leadership is to discuss the ongoing preparation of a law enforcement professional. The author suspects that there are numerous police officials who could serve as exemplars of transformational leadership. Here, John E. Granfield, Chief of the Fairfax County Police Department in Virginia, will be profiled. John is a good example of the model advocated herein, and he is well-known by the author. Neither the author nor John would argue that he is a transformational leader. Nevertheless, the author will assert that this man makes conscious efforts to develop his abilities and to expose himself to a wide variety of opinions and ideas.

The Fairfax County Police Department is the largest local law enforcement agency in the State, employing approximately 1,300 people. The department received professional accreditation in 1985. John has over 18 years' experience as a police officer with Fairfax, and he has more than 10 years' service at supervisory and executive management level positions. John is a college graduate, and he also is a graduate of the FBI National Executive Institute, the FBI National Academy, and Northwestern University's Course for Police Supervisors. He lectures regularly at a number of local universities and police academies. Chief Granfield is actively involved with pro-

fessional law enforcement associations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and the Police Management Association, as well as with important community groups within Fairfax County. John continues to strive to develop himself and represent his department and profession to the utmost of his ability.

### Conclusion

It is widely recognized that the most critical ingredient in the success of an organization is the quality of its leadership.<sup>8</sup> Although police leaders cannot singlehandedly upgrade law enforcement, there is no other single group as important to this process. Further, police organizations, like their counterparts elsewhere, need transformational leaders to successfully confront the challenges of the future. The author believes that certain types of preparation and experience can assist an individual in developing this critical skill.

Finally, increasing fiscal pressures on all governments cannot be allowed to impede the continued upgrading of American law enforcement. Law enforcement is too important a governmental function, and good policing too important a right of all citizens and legal residents, to be sacrificed on the altar of cutback management. The real progress in policing of the last 20 years can not be allowed to dissipate. Individuals of the highest moral character and with solid intellectual ability are required to lead law enforcement agencies. Now is the time to take stock and move forward.

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### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>James McGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).
- <sup>2</sup>Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 216-219.
- <sup>4</sup>Raymond Fosdick, *American Police Systems*, reprinted (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), p. 215.
- <sup>5</sup>Donald C. Witham, *The American Law Enforcement Chief Executive: A Management Profile* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 1985).
- <sup>6</sup>National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Police Chief Executive* (PCE Report) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), Appendix D.
- <sup>7</sup>Harlan Cleveland, *The Future Executive: A Guide for Tomorrow's Managers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup>Supra note 2, pp. 226-227.