

Making Our Supervisors a Priority

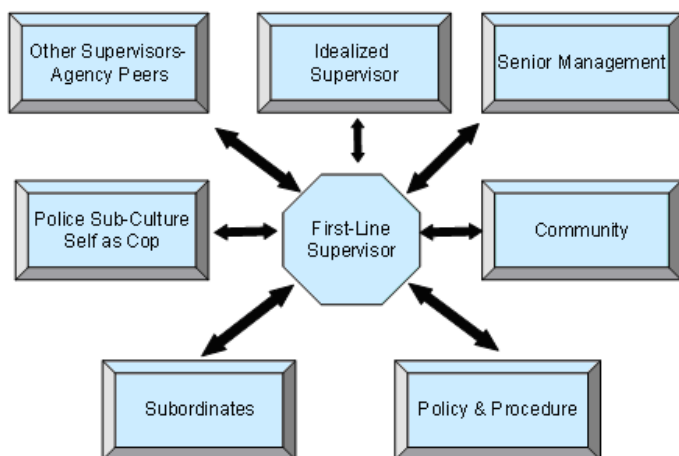
By Jack Serier, Inspector, Water Patrol, Dive Team and K-9, Public Safety Services Division, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, Minnesota

As senior managers in our top down world of law enforcement chain of command, we often give orders to our supervisory staffs and know that it will get done, but forget what goes into the execution of the orders we give. The world of the law enforcement supervisor is one that many of us experienced as we ascended through the ranks, but may not have reflected much on the dynamics at the time or just forgotten in the years since.

My purpose here is to remind us that as law enforcement leaders, our actions are exaggerated – no matter how small. This includes the demands we place on our subordinate supervisors.

In my time in graduate school, I took the opportunity to do part of my doctoral research on this very phenomenon of what happens after we “give the order.” I found what became the Multiple Constituency Model (MCM). In the end, what this model represents is all the groups who are or demanding the time and attention of supervisors during their daily routine. These groups include:

Multiple Constituency Model ©



These different groups are all asking for the time and attention of a supervisor in law enforcement. The element I am focusing on in this article is Senior Management.

As command staff, when we ask for something, it is often trumping the numerous other demands supervisors are addressing. The reason it trumps is because you are the boss!

And while you may not mean to disrupt the chain of events of a supervisor's day, it certainly does.

Having said this, it is important to weigh the priority of what we are asking supervisors to do versus the other tasks that supervisors are accomplishing in the name of our agencies. While it may seem rather simplistic, an integral conversation to have with our subordinate supervisors regards the place of our demands versus their other priorities – which are all being done in our names, but are generated from other parts of the Multiple Constituency Model.

Whether this comes out as a rating system of priority on an urgency scale or a regular conversation about what is important, we should all be having this conversation with our supervisory staff. We have all heard the saying, “If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.” This is a managerial trap that I encourage all of us to avoid. Just because we demand it, does not mean it is the only demand that is important to supervisors. They have to address community concerns, equipment problems, scheduling, and personnel issues; just to name a few.

One of the perennial concerns I identified in my research was that administration was just “too busy” to talk with supervisors who worked for them. This led to ambiguity on mission, guessing as to what the boss wants, and feeling administration does not care.

Bosses do care, but get caught up in the whirlwind of competing priorities as well. One of those priorities has to be our supervisors and attending to their needs to build up their confidence and leadership skills. Remember, what we do as an administrators becomes exaggerated, so spending regular time with our supervisors helps to define professional relationships with them in a very meaningful way. It also helps them to understand what is urgent and what is not when we ask for something to get done. This goes a long way to reducing the stress of the competing priorities of supervisors; and in the long run, helps our agencies serve our communities through better functioning law enforcement supervision. ★

Contributor: Jack Serier is an Inspector with the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office in Saint Paul, MN. He holds an Ed.D. from the University of Saint Thomas and is an adjunct professor at Saint Mary's University and a private consultant. He is a 21 year law enforcement veteran. Jack lives in Stillwater, Minnesota with his wife Kathryn and two children. He can be contacted at jack.serier@co.ramsey.mn.us.