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# MORALE IN A POLICE DEPARTMENT

B. W. Gocke

(What is morale? Why is it necessary in policing? How can we build good morale in a police department? These are the significant inquiries discussed in the following article. The author has been a member of the Berkeley Police Department for the past eight years, has an M.A. degree in police administration (University of California), and is author of the recently published volume *Police Sergeants' Manual*. At present he is on leave of absence from his department and is now serving as Advisor, Personnel Training, Division of Public Safety, U. S. Group Control Council for Germany.—EDITOR.)

Among those things necessary for the proper functioning of a police department are: well selected and properly trained personnel, adequate equipment, and a soundly organized structure of administrative command and supervision. If these are present, the department has most of the essentials for success. For best results, however, the morale of the men also must be kept on a high level. All personnel should be eager and willing to do a good job; otherwise there is something wrong with the organization or its leadership.

## *What Is Morale?*

Morale is the term used to express a person's state of mind with reference to courage, zeal, confidence, and similar qualities; it is *esprit de corps*. Morale is to the mind what "condition" is to the body; it is the fitness of the mind for the task at hand. It is the tenacity to stick to the job without tiring; to hold on without a breaking of spirit; it is the staying power and the strength to resist mental infections which fear, discouragement, and fatigue bring with them; it is the manifestation of perpetual ability to come back with fitness and readiness to act. Good morale is the state of mind and the will-power to get the most from the equipment available, to perform a job with the greatest effect, to take setbacks with the least depression, and to hold out for the longest time.

## *Why Is Morale Necessary?*

Good morale is vital to police work. A police officer needs good morale in order to accomplish his objectives. His daily work demands that he deal with troublesome problems; he has many setbacks and discouragements. Good morale stimulates persistence, energy, and initiative. It also encourages patience and will-power. It enables a man to draw upon his latent reserves in time of need. Human beings have a tendency not to exert themselves to the limit; their natural "reservoirs of power" are tapped only by the proper sort of mental stimula-

tion. Effectiveness means power of accomplishment. With a hundred men, a depreciation of morale by twenty-five per cent is equivalent to a loss of a quarter of the command. In fact, it is worse, for while seventy-five men with perfect morale will accomplish the work of a hundred men whose morale is only three-quarters perfect, in the latter case there are twenty-five drones who make necessary a larger overhead of supervision, time, money, and who further act as unsound apples in a barrel — threatening the efficiency of the others.

The purpose of building morale is to make the men more efficient, to create a discipline that is voluntary and enthusiastic rather than enforced, and to stimulate their minds and wills toward desired ends. Morale work is calculated to bring out, encourage, and develop the best there is in the men. It aims to stimulate and assist the weak, direct the strong, correct the erring, educate the uninformed, and further encourage the successful. It brings enjoyment to work and pride in accomplishment. Morale work is designed to take the men's thoughts away from their troubles. It is not intended to reform offenders, though it frequently does so. Its primary purpose is to strike at any possible source of inefficiency and disorder, and thereby prevent conditions that result in a state of mind wherein the individual is willing to commit offenses against the rules and regulations of the department.

### *How to Build Good Morale*

Morale work is essentially scientific management, since it aims to correlate and systematize the best of all methods in the handling of men, to push developments further in accordance with the principles discovered, and by research to disclose and place in proper relation of importance any new facts bearing on the subject. Following are six rules for the building of good morale in a police department:

1. *Eliminate unfavorable conditions.* In order to build up the morale in a police department, one should first eliminate those conditions that are depressive to morale. Some of these conditions are: constant shifting of personnel from one job or beat to another, poor leadership among the supervisory officers, disloyalty among the men, political interference in departmental operations, partiality or preferences shown to certain men, sudden changes of administrative policy, petty bickering among the men, improper functioning of the civil service, rumor-mongering, suspicion of "stooling" by fellow officers, improper promotions, too many patrolmen or administrative officers in acting positions, lack of published rules resulting in misinterpretations of departmental policy, and the practice of "short-

circuiting" supervisory officers.<sup>1</sup> Some of these conditions are the result of the political situation as it exists in the city; others, however, are the fault of the chief of police or his supervisory officers, and it is their responsibility to correct them.

2. *Settle grievances promptly.* Before morale building can begin, all old grievances should be eliminated and all new ones should be taken care of as they develop. A grievance is anything about a man's job that irritates him or tends to make his working conditions unsatisfactory. If a plan or procedure is distasteful to the men, the sergeant or other supervisor should see that it is changed or else explained to their satisfaction why it must be done as it is. The supervisor should assume a helpful attitude and be willing to hear complaints; then when he has all of the facts and has considered the consequences of his decision, prompt corrective action should be taken. The deficiency or fault should be settled as quickly and fairly as possible. If the solution is not favorably received, the supervisor should study his tactics to see if he said or did anything that prejudiced the men against him. Each decision should provide a lesson from which something worthwhile is learned. It gives the supervisor an opportunity to judge character, attitude, loyalty, honesty, fairness, and prejudices, and how to handle his men in the future. Moreover, it shows the pitfalls to be avoided and the situations where positive action is to be taken.

3. *Gain the respect of subordinates.* For good morale it is vital that the supervisory officers be respected by their men. This is particularly true of the sergeants, for they are the supervisors on the firing line of departmental operations; they are the ones in closest contact with the patrolmen. They carry the department's policy to the men, and must in return carry the feelings and desires of the men to their superiors.

4. *Create an interest in the work.* The supervisor's part in building morale is to inculcate in the men an interest in their work, so that they may see it in relation to other human activities, so that they may understand that its value lies in its social significance as well as in its technical aspect, and to view it as a part of the great work humanity is undertaking toward creating a better and more abundant life. The men must believe in the cause for which they are working, in the plans or proced-

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<sup>1</sup> Short-circuiting is the practice of giving orders to subordinates not directly under one's command, or the asking of advice, making requests, or taking complaints to a superior at a level of authority not directly above. In other words, the orders or requests do not carry through the line or chain of command. It means that one or more levels in the command hierarchy are skipped or "short-circuited." Short-circuiting of this sort usually originates from poor organization structure due to lack of planning, indefiniteness, poor job analysis, or an ignorance of proper administrative relationships.

ures being used, and in the possibility of achieving some success.

5. *Give commendations when deserved.* A supervisor should make commendations and recommendations for those who merit recognition or advancement. One of his basic responsibilities is to be thoroughly familiar with the performance of his men and to the expectations for the particular job. Only with this information can the supervisor pick out exceptionally good work. A man desires recognition when he knows he is doing a good job. His interest is stimulated when he realizes his superior is watching him.

The first essential in giving a commendation is to know when it should be given. The nature of a man's assignment may not be spectacular, and like a blocking back in football who paves the way for the flashy runner, a man may do his work with such quiet competence and absence of color that his accomplishments are taken too much for granted. Also, if the supervisor is not appreciative of the results obtained from a certain type of work, good performance may be overlooked.

A commendation should not be given unless it is deserved. Commending work as exceptional when it is only fair may sometimes be the result of a lack of sufficient care and thoroughness on the supervisor's part. Such commendation is a direct invitation to slackness in the future, and stamps the supervisor as one who doesn't know good work when he sees it. The supervisor should also avoid giving insincere or undeserved praise. Undeserved praise embarrasses the recipient, for he knows he is unworthy of it. Such praise may also have harmful effects on the other men.

When a particularly fine piece of work has been done and the supervisor wants to put more emphasis on the commendation, he has two methods readily available to him. One method is to express his approval in front of the other members of the unit. This has a strong appeal and goes far toward satisfying the desire for recognition from one's associates. The other method is to let the man know that the commendation has gone up the line, or better still, to have some superior officer tell the man that he has heard about his good performance.

6. *Cultivate proper attitude toward subordinates.* A supervisor's attitude toward his subordinates is a powerful factor in morale. Conduct that is overbearing will inevitably provoke discontent, dissension, and inefficiency. The human touch, discriminating between firmness and rudeness, kindness and familiarity, justice and severity, fairness and partiality, is needed to control men. Just as the supervisor is a representative of the department, so is he a representative of the men to their superiors. If he is weak, the men will feel that they are not being properly represented to the chief. He should impart

the feeling that he is a responsible leader, so that his men will have confidence in him and in the department. By displaying qualities of humaneness, affection, tolerance, kindness, and justice he will win the men to him and have their willing obedience to his orders.

These simple rules of morale building are not "cure-alls," nor will they fill the needs of all police departments. They should, however, give police administrators and supervisors something to think about. Too little attention has been given to the men who perform the fundamental duties of police work — the patrolmen. In industry if conditions are not satisfactory, the workmen will strike. In municipal police departments strikes are outlawed, but disgruntled patrolmen make for loafing and general inefficiency, incomplete crime investigations with consequent low case closures, and finally, will result in a high rate of separations from the police service. The attainment of a high degree of morale is worth the best efforts of all who are necessarily concerned with the problem.

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