

COMMAND

The Official Publication of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police



FUTURE FOCUS

IN THIS ISSUE:

Leadership Crisis

Challenges We Face Now and Our Path Forward

Supporting and Advancing Women to Improve the Police Profession



Leadership Crisis and Hope for the Future

Chief Darren Gault, Moline Police Department

In 2019, I took a phone call while I was on vacation on the East Coast. On the other end of the call was the City Administrator in Moline, Illinois offering me the job of Police Chief. Moline had sought to hire an outside chief for a multitude of reasons, one of which was turmoil inside the department. Add in a heavy dose of chaotic city politics and instability, it mixed challenge, opportunity, and uncertainty making it a risky proposition. I decided to take a leap of faith and accepted the job. Little did I know that the City Administrator would separate employment a month later, a national pandemic would hit in early 2020, along with civil unrest, mass staff departures and retirements. To add to the challenge, my city council flipped seats twice, we were getting few applications and criminal justice reform was the hot topic.... shall I go on? You all know how hard this has been for the past five years and we have collectively held it together. It has been some of the most challenging times in law enforcement history, not only in Moline, or Illinois, but around the world.

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) has conducted a staffing survey for each of the past five years. In 2023, the report was alarming. In that report, PERF reported that agencies were losing officers faster than they could hire new ones.¹ The 2024 report was a little more encouraging. PERF reported that agencies had hired more officers in 2023

than any of the previous four years. However, agencies had more officers resign in 2023 than in 2019 or 2020.²

While this information seems like cause for celebration, it should also raise additional concerns. This data certainly tells you a couple of things: agencies are young and inexperienced. But there is another crisis that hasn't really hit news headlines or training bulletins. And that crisis is leadership.

"Are we so focused on getting new officers in the door that we are ignoring the silent crisis?"

Leadership Crisis

On Oct. 12, 1994, then President Bill Clinton announced that the first round of hiring grants had been awarded in the goal of adding 100,000 police on America's streets.³ By March 1999, The Clinton Administration's Law Enforcement Strategy had paid for over 92,000 new police officers.⁴ By 2020-2024, those officers were performing their swan song, achieving 25-30 years of service and headed for the exit. With two plus decades of experience, many of those officers had attained leadership positions in agencies and decided the post-2020 era was their time to pull the plug. I know that happened in Moline and we

lost over 172 years of command experience in a two-year period.

But this staffing crisis is not limited to Illinois, or the US. Australia is short more than 4,000 officers.⁵ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are short more than 1,000 officers.⁶ New Zealand fell short of recruitment efforts and staffing numbers.⁷ We all know how difficult it is to rebuild our agencies, our staffing, our experience and our command ranks. It is painfully obvious that recruiting is difficult and everyone is focused on getting bodies on the streets, and X's on schedules. But are we so focused on getting new officers in the door that we are ignoring the silent crisis? The police leadership crisis.

Planning for the Future

If you are the chief executive officer in your agency you need to have a plan to develop current and future leaders in law enforcement. Historically, law enforcement hasn't been great at developing leaders. Leadership in law enforcement is unlike leadership in other organizations in that management styles are often antiquated and organizational structures largely bureaucratic in nature. The terms leadership and management are often used interchangeably yet have striking differences.

Leaders energize their followers to work toward a mutual goal. These leaders are focused on the future and are agents of

change. Managers, however, are focused on the routine details of organizational functions. While leaders are focused on the future, managers are focused on the present and resist change.⁸ Stephen Covey used the analogy of the ladder against a wall to differentiate between leadership and management. He said if a ladder is leaned up against a wall, managers are concerned with things like safety and stability of the ladder and if the employees could get up the ladder quickly. Conversely, leaders may be concerned whether the ladder was against the right wall to accomplish the mission.⁹ This is hard for executive law enforcement to comprehend because they spend the bulk of their training on crime fighting, or law enforcement specific practices. The role of a law enforcement leader requires a much different set of skills, one that many people are not prepared for when they get promoted.



You Are Not Alone

I know many of you from my additional responsibilities as the ILACP Vice President At-Large for Region #2. Over the past five years as a police chief, I have found ILACP to be an extraordinary association of people. Many of you are exceptional leaders and colleagues that I have called upon for guidance, advice, or friendship. Many of you are new leaders who are about to experience challenges that you did not anticipate. The advantage of belonging to ILACP is that you are not alone. The strength of the association is the powerful network of leadership, both active and retired, that can assist, mentor, train, and counsel all of us through these challenging times. In my opinion when we work together, share our experiences and learn from each other, we make each other better leaders. The skill set of a law enforcement executive is not about firearms proficiency or control and arrest tactics. It involves budgeting, human resources, risk management, politics, public speaking, conflict resolution, crisis management, oh and did I mention politics?

Chief Certification

The ILACP Certified Police Chief program evaluates the credentials of a police executive and gives credibility to the requirements, demands and expectations of police leadership. I'd like to draw your attention to a few things on the application that you should consider, not only for yourself, but as you start to develop future leaders. First, what positions are your future leaders holding and are they getting a wide variety of experiences to help them lead an organization? Second, what continuing education programs are your future lead-

ers, and yourself, completing? Although training budgets are tight, executive training programs such as the FBINA, Northwestern SPSC, ILETSB Executive Institute and the ILACP Conference are some examples of vital continuing education. What professional associations are you, and your leaders members of, and active in? Recently the ILACP made it easier for departments to have group memberships to expand the association deeper into your organization. It is critical to have a strong network to help grow your knowledge, skills and abilities. What community activities or associations are you, and your leaders members of, and actively participating in? It is important for leaders to be involved in the Rotary Club, NAACP, local sports clubs, or similar community associations. You might be surprised how these associations not only strengthen your credibility in the community, but your community's trust in your agency.

"After a careful consideration of your own resume, then pause to think about these things of the future leaders in your department. Start small, but start now."

In last month's Command magazine, Chief Ray Cordell (Ret.) told you three things: mentors matter, get involved, and education never stops. I would encourage you to look over the Certified Police Chief application and pause to think about your network, education,

associations and involvement. After a careful consideration of your own resume, then pause to think about these things of the future leaders in your department. Start small, but start now. Join an ILACP committee. Attend a networking event. Join a community board. Get involved and start developing future leaders.

Recently I announced my candidacy for the International Association of Chiefs of Police 4th Vice President, an election to be held in October 2025 in Denver, Colorado. Some of my colleagues pointed out how grueling this process is and asked why I would want to do that. For me the answer is simple: I want to be part of the solution for the problems we

face: a police leadership crisis. I want to make a difference and help develop the leaders of today and inspire the leaders of tomorrow. I hope you read this and consider what you are doing to play a role in saving the law enforcement profession from despair and elevate it back to the noble profession it must be.



IACP 2025
OCTOBER 18-21 | DENVER, CO
International Association of Chiefs of Police

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

Endorsement of Chief Darren Gault IACP 4th Vice President

"Chief Gault is an ethical leader and a person of integrity who puts the law enforcement profession and others above himself. His inclusive leadership style, critical thinking skills, and common sense make him the ideal candidate for IACP 4th Vice President."



Kenny Winslow
ILACP Executive
Director

