Guidance for Your First Year as a New Chief

Experienced executives from smaller agencies have contributed the following tips for new executives to consider during their first year. This list of tips is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a helpful starting point; keep in mind that every community and agency is unique. These tips are geared toward a new executive from outside of the agency but can apply to internal hires as well.

First Day

Congratulations! Being appointed or elected as the executive of a law enforcement agency is a significant accomplishment. The first day on the job can be a challenging mix of emotions and activities that can quickly feel overwhelming. New executives are eager to establish themselves as strong and fair leaders, but it’s important to remember that the first impression you make with your agency, governing body, and community can be long-lasting.

Get settled in your office, but don’t spend too much time there the first day. Walk around and meet with as many of your employees as possible. Attend roll calls and let them talk with you and ask you questions.

- Ask questions about people and their duties that can help you remember something about them and their contribution to the organization. Take note of what works well and what needs improvement as you go.
- Try to avoid talking about how things used to work in your previous agency. Remember, this is a fresh start for you and your new agency.
- If you can help it, don’t jump on any issues the first day, especially personnel issues. You need to take time to assess the environment.
- Arrange for someone (like the mayor, town council, or county administrator, as appropriate) to organize a gathering of city officials and other department heads for an official introduction.
- Look through the agency’s policy and procedure manual to learn more about the organization. Start thinking about whether you will need to develop a committee to update the manual in the next few months.
- **If you are a new executive who has come from within your agency**, on your first day you should also be mindful that your staff already have an impression of you, so it’s all the more important that you start to establish your style and expectations as the executive. Have discussions with your employees that offer an opportunity for two-way conversation regarding what this transition will mean for you and for them. Your role is very different now and it can be difficult to transition from a peer position to an executive position.
First Week

The first week for a new executive can be exhausting; it’s easy to feel like you have more to accomplish than there are hours in a day. It’s important to pace yourself and work on prioritizing which issues will get your attention; time management and delegation are skills you will need to start practicing.

- Meet with your boss and get a list of items he/she would like to see addressed; build your understanding of what they see as priorities.
- Begin to formulate your own observations about priorities for the agency and develop an internal survey to deliver to your staff (see below for additional resources). The simple exercise of delivering this tool will demonstrate your desire to tap into what they know as well as your value of their opinion.
- Reach out to colleagues and stakeholders and get to know who the powerbrokers are. Begin building those relationships and ensure that they know you are a team player.
- Hold a facilitated meeting giving the staff an opportunity to express what they know about the new chief, what they don’t know, and what they want to know.
- You have an opportunity to begin to set the standard for performance and behavior. Use your interpersonal skills, be professional, and set the tone for how you expect the organization to communicate and behave.
- Start thinking about whether or not you want or need to restructure your command staff. Develop a plan and review it with the political leadership to build their support.
- Outside groups will want your time and commitment to get involved. Resist joining any groups for at least a month; you should, however, start attending their meetings. Eventually, this will be an important connection to make with the community, but you want to start by focusing on internal relationships.
- Identify a fellow executive who can serve as your mentor and confidant. Over time this individual (or network of individuals) will be invaluable in the guidance and support they can offer. Consider other ways to connect with executives and resources, including through membership in regional, state, and national/international chiefs and sheriffs associations.

Are you new to your current rank and looking for transition assistance? Working with a mentor can help you find resources, address questions and concerns, and assist you with making a smooth transition for you and your agency.

http://www.iacpmentoring.org/

- If you are a new executive who has come from within your agency, in your first week you should also be mindful of the following:
- Remember, the most challenging area of management is the employees. Your staff know you; good, bad, or indifferent. Be sure to meet with all shifts, reassuring them that things will either remain the same or improve.
First Month

After the first month as an executive of a law enforcement agency, you will be developing more confidence and familiarity with your agency, governing body, and community, and they are becoming more familiar with you. As you continue to develop and establish your leadership style, remember to strive for a balance of identifying and addressing the concerns of all of your stakeholders.

- At this point, you should have a solid list of goals you want to address, through your meetings with your boss and your staff, as well as your personal observations.

- Start/continue attending civic association meetings to get a better sense of how the community perceives the agency. Ask questions about service and trust of the police department. Consider partnering with a local college or university to conduct a community safety survey (see below for additional resources). Also start considering whether you want to join any of these groups or volunteer to sit on their board.

- Demonstrate your approachability to your employees and the community. Spend time out on patrol, including with the midnight shift. Set up "meet the chief" meetings and consider an agency open house to let community members come in and visit.

- Start regularly attending town/city/county council meetings. Be prepared to answer questions about agency resources as well as community safety. If you don’t know the answer to one of their questions, tell them you’ll find out and follow up with them promptly.

- Deliver on as many of the “easy” changes that you see within the agency as you can. However, if you’re making changes, even “easy” ones, make sure you formally communicate those changes to everyone in the agency. This will demonstrate your commitment to addressing your staff’s concerns.

- Address issues that come across your desk with the individual who has responsibility for the issue so that you can observe the way they use judgment, problem solve, and make decisions. Begin mentoring your employees.

- Continue one-on-one meetings with employees, begin regular staff meetings, begin setting up systems and expectations, and continue prioritization of issues and policy review, especially of high liability areas.
If you are a new executive who has come from within your agency, in your first month you should also be mindful of the following:

- You may be ahead of the game when it comes to the list of issues you want to address; you’ve probably been making the list of things you would want to change or do differently for the past several years. Write them down and create a conservative time line for completion.

- Implement a plan to internally and externally assess the department. You will probably find issues aside from the ones you are concerned about that need to be addressed. Once you have an assessment plan in place, communicate your strategy to everyone in the agency and the community.

- Make sure to take appropriate time to meet with political bodies, community groups, and schools; they may know you already, but you’re in a new role now and they will need to meet the new executive. Build a community base demonstrating your approachability that fosters confidence in you and your style of being the executive.

Other helpful resources for the first month

**Internal and Community Survey Resources**
http://www.theiacp.org/International-and-Community-Surveys

**Best Practices Guide: Developing a Police Department Policy-Procedure Manual**

**IACP Policy Center**
http://www.theiacp.org/Model-Policy

Consider membership to [IACP Net](http://www.theiacp.org) to access sample policies, including high liability policies
The first six months with your agency have probably been spent gathering information and assessing the organization, as well as building political capital. You may now be at the point to enact some significant changes in your agency.

- By now you should have an idea of where the political landmines are and know enough to avoid them, work around them, or if critical, at least how much political capital will need to be used to compensate for what you are about to do (see below).

- Development of strategies, goals, vision, mission, and values should be in progress; engage a cross-section of the organization and community stakeholders.

- Look at implementing a strategic planning process if one has not been done (see below). This will help you involve the community and the department in setting policing priorities for the coming years.

- Establish a committee or assign an individual to review (or continue reviewing) the entire policy manual, focusing on those high risk/high liability areas.

- Continue your assessment of the professional capacity of the department, including what training may be necessary. Consider holding a management retreat with staff to articulate your vision and expectations for each of them.

- Compile all agency statistical data - this is critical. Knowing what crime is happening in your community, where, and when is vital to effective deployment strategies.

Other helpful resources for the first six months:

Best Practices Guide: Maneuvering in the Political Environment

Best Practices Guide: Strategic Planning
http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/BP-StrategicPlanning.pdf

Building Community Trust: An Internal Affairs Promising Practices Guide
http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/good_to_great.pdf

IACP Technology Clearinghouse
http://www.iacptechology.org/
Year One

After one year as the executive in an agency, you have probably experienced a variety of challenges and successes in implementing your vision. This entire year is one of opportunity. This is a good time to re-evaluate your goals and progress toward those goals. Also, take time to recommit to the enthusiasm you had on your first day.

- Listen, listen, listen. Although you may establish the general direction of the department there is a lot of information available to help you get there by listening to other perspectives. Your responsibility to listen to the concerns of staff, the governing body, and the community will last throughout your career.

- Assessment of command staff members should be complete; following policy, get the right people in the right seats on the bus (see below).

- Formalize strategic planning (including timeline for implementation), review accomplishments of the year and goals for next year, continue to make personnel changes if necessary, policy revision, and strengthen community relationships. Don’t forget to revisit the strategic plan on a regular basis; it won’t do you or the agency any good if all it does is take up space on the bookshelf.

- Develop and reinforce the desired organizational culture and manage the change created by it. Hold people accountable for doing the right thing for the right reasons. Develop a cohesive team and work together to create a positive organizational climate. Conduct a lot of after action review sessions around tasks, issues, and calls for service.

- Celebrate the organization’s successes, and challenge the organization to be its best. Recognize, publicly if you can, the successes of individual staff members, which reinforce the behavior and standards you expect.

- Think about relying on five key principles:
  1. Model the way - lead by example
  2. Inspire a shared vision - show your passion
  3. Challenge the process - search for opportunities to improve
  4. Enable others to act - collaboration
  5. Encourage the heart - recognize and celebrate the values and victories of others

“Good to Great” Policing: Application of Business Management Principles in the Public Sector

http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/
Areas to Avoid

During the leadership transition there are many pitfalls to watch out for. Experienced executives from smaller agencies have contributed the following tips for new executives to consider avoiding throughout their leadership transition. This list of tips is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a helpful starting point; keep in mind that every community and agency is unique.

- Don't create immediate change, unless there are serious organizational or ethical issues. The organization, as well as the community, needs to get comfortable with you and you need time to understand the organization and community.
- Don’t make sweeping changes or make decisions based on input from only a few.
- Don't act like a know it all, come off as arrogant, or condescending. Make sure that you demonstrate a positive and effective management and leadership style to your staff.
- Don’t assume you know everything; success requires teamwork and commitment from others. If you lead every conversation and make every decision you will have a group of followers and no leaders to help you move the organization forward.
- Don’t jump into solving other people’s problems for them.
- Don’t over promise or make promises just to be accepted.
- Don’t try to make the organization your former organization, if your came from outside.
- Don’t criticize the previous administration or personnel.
- Don’t play favorites - everyone starts at the same point and earns their reputation. Especially if you’re from within the organization, don’t hold on to old grudges.
- Don’t expect that every idea you implement will be readily accepted. You probably will be met with some resistance.
- Don’t start out with an adversarial relationship with the press. Rebuilding this relationship may take years and the media can be a helpful ally.
- Don't take things personally.
- Don’t forget to enjoy, appreciate, and share credit for the successes of your agency.