

Passion-Based Succession Planning in Policing

Dave Redekopp & Barrie Day
Life-Role Development Group Limited

Succession planning in most police organizations is competence-based, experienced based or random. Think about the Field Training Officers or Field Coaches in your organization, and ask yourself these questions:

- Are they “selected” or “randomly assigned”?
 - If selected, are they selected because:
 - of seniority?
 - they are competent police officers?
 - they display the potential for leadership competence?
 - they hold the values, beliefs and interests appropriate to an FTO?
 - If randomly assigned:
 - how comfortable are you with the way FTOs represent the values and direction of your police service?

Now, ask yourself these questions about your next level of supervisors (typically corporals or sergeants). Your organization may be different, but the typical answers are “randomly assigned” or “selected because they are competent police officers” and/or “selected because they display leadership potential.” Rarely, however, are individuals selected for leadership roles *because of a passion to lead*.

Obviously, choosing leaders randomly is not wise. Choosing only on the basis of seniority is only marginally more effective. The real question is how to weigh the value of technical (policing) competence, leadership competence/potential and leadership passion. Ideally, one would want all of these elements in place, but the ideal is often elusive. Given this, one needs to consider which of these elements to emphasize.

Promoting Technical Competence

Technical competence--advantages. Emphasizing technical competence has some clear advantages in succession. First, the rank-and-file want and need to see that the development of technical competence is worthwhile, valued and recognized. Second, leaders will have credibility issues with their subordinates if they are not seen to be technically competent. This is particularly true at early levels of leadership, where front-line constables demand their immediate supervisors to be better performers than they are. Finally, leaders who are technically competent gain credibility with the public and other stakeholders. This credibility serves them well in developing partnerships and alliances.

Technical competence—disadvantages. There are no disadvantages to promoting those with technical competence. Disadvantages arise only if technical competence is the *only* basis for promotion. Technical competence guarantees *nothing* about leadership skill, leadership potential or the desire to lead. Leadership then becomes a random occurrence – clearly this is not desirable.

Promoting Leadership Competence/Potential

Leadership competence/potential—advantages. Promotion based on leadership competence (or the clear potential to develop it) ensures that people placed in leadership positions will have (or will quickly acquire) the necessary skills to lead, such as those required to motivate, strategize, plan, organize and team-build. This is obviously highly desirable.

Leadership competence/potential—disadvantages. There are two main problems with promoting exclusively on the basis of leadership competence or potential. First, a lack of technical competence makes it very difficult for the leader to establish credibility with his or her reports, the public or stakeholders. This is not an insurmountable barrier, especially with regards to the public and other stakeholders, but it is a significant one with one's own team. There is a strong expectation within police organizations that supervisors have "been there" and that if they have not, they cannot possibly be effective. Although this is untrue, it is very difficult for a single leader to counteract this cultural belief system.

Promoting Leadership Passion

Leadership passion—advantages. Promoting on the basis of values, interests and beliefs (what we call "passion") has a number of advantages. First and foremost, *motivation* to lead is built into the process. People are promoted because they *want* to lead, they *want* to represent the values of the organization and, if they are selected on their passion for a particular unit, they are philosophically aligned with the work of the unit. This leads to the second advantage: The motivated individual is the *learning* individual. Motivated to perform the role, the individual will take on learning tasks (both informal and formal) with zeal. Third, the motivated individual is the one who inspires, raising standards of the team with higher expectations. Finally, the passionate individual is the one who is *engaged*, who possesses a high level of job satisfaction and therefore experiences the commensurate benefits such as reduced sick time, absenteeism, tardiness and stress.

Leadership passion—disadvantages. Promoting exclusively on passion has disadvantages: Skills need to be acquired, and the credibility issue described above regarding technical competence remains significant. However, the passionate leader will acquire skills quickly and in doing so may overcome the credibility stumbling blocks in his or her way.

A Recommended Blend

It is quite apparent that a blend of at least two, if not all three, of the above areas is desirable. We recommend this sequence of emphasis in the leadership promotion process:

1. Leadership passion,
2. Leadership competence/potential, and then
3. Technical competence

In our view, the rationale for this sequence is quite simple: *Passion* ensures motivation and satisfaction, which in turn drives the development of *competence*. To put it another way, passion is more likely to drive the pursuit of competence than competence is going to create passion. Both can work, but the former is more reliable than the latter. For example, which of the instances is more likely in each of the following pairs?:

I drive a car well and therefore love driving cars.
I love driving and therefore I learn to drive well.

I identify fingerprints well and therefore develop a love for the detail and precision required in identifying fingerprints.
I love detail and precision and therefore learn to identify fingerprints well.

I communicate effectively and therefore love leading people.
I value people and their growth and therefore I learn to communicate effectively.

Notice that both statements in each pair *can* be true. We feel the second statement is *far more often* true than the first.

We place technical competence at the bottom of the list for the obvious reason that *it is not essential for leadership*. The CEO of Ford Motor Company need not know how to tune the engine of the Ford Freestyle to be an effective leader, nor does an Inspector in charge of an identification section need to be the best blood-spatter expert. However, technical competence makes credibility so much easier to attain that it is well worth including within promotion factors.

Since most police organizations have reasonably reliable mechanisms for recognizing technical competence and many are working on mechanisms for identifying leadership competence/potential, we will focus below on how to accommodate passion into an organization's promotion strategy.

A Passion-Based Identification and Selection Process

There are several steps to develop the “passion” part of one’s promotion system:

1. Identify the Passion of the Role
2. Identify the Passion of the People
 - a. Develop Interview Questions
 - b. Obtain Recommendations
 - c. Conduct Career Conversations
3. Select Applicants

Each step is explained in detail in subsequent sections.

Identifying the Passion of the Role

Most leadership roles have some common elements of passion: an interest in working with people; values of achievement and facing challenges; a belief in the cause in which one is leading; and characteristics such as discipline and “withitness.” However, each leadership role has a unique set of passion characteristics as well, typically influenced by the:

Technical component of the role (*e.g.*, a leader in an identification section needs to value quality; a leader in a canine unit needs to value dogs)

Philosophy/approach of the organization or unit (*e.g.*, leaders within a police organization that is moving to a highly proactive policing model require different beliefs than those within a reactive organization)

Level of leadership (*e.g.*, leaders at very high levels of an organization typically need to have greater interests in strategy and collaboration than do those in entry-level leadership roles)

It is important, therefore, to identify the unique set of passions for each leadership level (*e.g.*, FTO, corporal, sergeant) and position (*e.g.*, watch/squad leader vs. traffic unit leader).

1) *Clarify the role in question.* Ensure that all involved in the process are clear about which role is being examined for succession. For example, is it the generic “FTO” role? Or, do you want different types of FTOs depending on where they are in the organization?

2) *Identify three experts in the role.* A solid profile of a role’s passion requires the input of three expert performers, individuals who clearly display both the skill and the passion for the role in question. *NOTE: These experts may work within another organization!* There are two main ways to identify these experts:

- a) *Talk to as many people in the area as you can, asking them to name the experts.* If you talk to followers (subordinates) within these roles, peers (other leaders) and managers of

individuals in these roles, asking each to identify the best person they have seen in the role, eventually a few names will be repeated over and over again. These are your experts.

- b) *Identify people you would like to “clone”!* If you are looking at changing the direction and/or culture of the organization, you may wish to create leaders with a passion that has not been there before. In this case, finding experts is not helpful in and of itself. You need to find experts who reflect the “new” philosophy or approach. Here, select individuals who display the new approach and who are identified as experts (as per 2a).

3) *Request permission to interview the experts.* The main interview can take from half an hour to two hours. The two validation interviews with the second and third expert typically require half-hour interviews. Experts are almost always willing to give you this time to be interviewed, *precisely because they are passionate about their roles!* You will find this to be true even if the experts reside in other police organizations.

4) *Interview the first expert.* Meet with the “first” expert (the one who appears to be the best of the best), explain that you are looking for the underlying drives or motivations for the role, and ask questions such as the following:

- a) *“What do you find rewarding or fulfilling about your job? Why is this work important to you?”*
 i) NOTE: Here you are looking for values, those elements that are of fundamental importance to the person (e.g., “safety,” “justice,” “quality,” “innovation,” “education”).
- b) *“Are there any specific beliefs that you hold that make this job more satisfying to you than it might be to others?”*
 i) NOTE: Here you are listening for beliefs, or views about the world that influence how the person undertakes the role (e.g., “We’re here to serve the public good,” “All people want to do good work,” “People enjoy working toward high standards.”)
- c) *“On a day-to-day basis, what makes this job enjoyable or interesting?”*
 i) NOTE: You are listening for interests here, those elements of the role that are fun or enjoyable (e.g., “working with people,” “solving problems,” “figuring out technology”)
- d) *“What personal characteristics do you have that make this role work well for you?”*
 i) NOTE: Characteristics of the person are the aim here (e.g., “organized,” “disciplined,” “humble,” “direct”)

With careful listening, a little probing and some paraphrasing, it will not take too long to identify values, beliefs, interests and characteristics associated with the role. An example

may help clarify the interview process. Consider an identification expert, who may respond to the above types of questions as follows:

There are a few things that are really important to me. I don't know if you'd call it "quality" or "accuracy," but I'm always striving for perfection. We can't make mistakes in ident – I double-check, then re-check then check again. But it's not just getting things right for the sake of getting things right – I really want to know what the truth is; what actually happened at the scene. You might call this "justice" or "fairness," but I really want to nail the bad guys and clear the innocent ones, and I don't want to be the one who mixes the two. I'm not sure what beliefs I hold, other than "mistakes cannot be tolerated." Well, I guess I believe that the justice system works overall, even though it sure seems to screw up sometimes on a case-by-case basis. As for interests, I get a real kick out of problem-solving; putting evidence together, looking for patterns, figuring out what happened. My personality lends itself to this kind of work, too: I'm very detail-oriented, patient and thorough...

At the end of the interview, you should have a list of passion characteristics that you can confirm with the expert and validate with the next two experts. The list might look something like this:

Passion Profile: FTO

Values	Beliefs	Interests	Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public safety - integrity/ethics - growth/learning - policing as a profession - performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people can learn almost anything if they're motivated - I can make a substantial difference in a new member's career 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working with people - policing tactics - teaching/coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - patient - disciplined - calm - flexible

5) *Validate with the second and third experts.* The profile of values, beliefs, interests and characteristics needs to be validated to ensure you are not capturing simply the quirks of one particular expert. By talking through the profile with two additional experts, you will find out what the common set of characteristics is. The validation process is straightforward: Explain your intention with the second expert, show him or her the profile, and walk through each item to either gain agreement or have a discussion about how the element should be changed. Then, take the original profile with the second expert's comments to the third expert and walk through the same process. Finally, go back to the original expert to confirm the recommended changes.

Identify the Passion of the People

Having identified the passion of the role, the next phase is to determine the passion of individuals applying for the role. The two main ways of doing this are an interview and a recommendation.

Interview Questions

From an interview perspective, the challenge is to create interview questions that:

Capture a passion element without “giving away” what you are looking for

- People have a tendency to please the interviewer even when they know it may not be in their best interests. If they can guess what you are looking for, there is a tendency that they will try to show you what you want, even if it means bending the truth a little.

Are based on past behaviour, not speculation

- As mentioned above, people have a tendency to please the interviewer. Focussing on actual, past behaviour (*e.g.*, “Tell me a time when...”) circumvents some of this tendency, whereas allowing for speculation (*e.g.*, “What would you do if...?”) encourages this tendency.

Can be answered equally fairly by all applicants (or has a back-up question available)

- It is easier to inadvertently discriminate against certain groups than one might think. When formulating questions, one needs to think through all potential applicants and whether or not they have the same chance of responding well to the questions. For example, the question “Tell me where your #2 Phillips screwdriver is in your shop” is answerable by many in the policing community, and would provide an indication of the personal characteristic of “orderliness” or “organized.” However, many individuals do not have shops or are particularly knowledgeable about hand tools, and their answer to this question would not reflect their passion. A back-up question might be “Where is your 2002 income tax return information?” More individuals are likely to be able to answer this.

Allow you to infer the passion element

- This almost goes without saying, but it is imperative that the answer to each question you ask can accurately allow you to infer the person’s passion! For example, “Tell me about the last sporting event that you were really pleased to participate in, and why you were so pleased” might get at some issues around competition, team-playing and other useful passion elements if they talk about camaraderie, collaboration and winning. On the other hand, if a person answers “It was a hockey game last month and I scored a hat trick!”, does this mean that they are lone wolves who like the spotlight? It may, but it may be that the person is so excited about this because it is

such a rare event in their lives. Good questions do not replace skilled interviewing, which involves really listening and finding out deeper contexts for answers.

Once the interview questions are created, put them together in a form that allows you to write comments about each applicant's answers and rate the applicant on a scale of your choosing (1-5 is usually easiest, where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "completely" in terms of how much of the attribute is held by the applicant). You may want to weigh the items (*e.g.*, the value of "integrity" may be worth 5 times as much as the interest "being outdoors") if some are clearly more significant than others.

Recommendations

If you are unable to interview all succession candidates, you need to at least work with the recommendations of previous leaders of the candidates. For example, some police organizations will accept Field Training Officers solely on the recommendation of their immediate supervisor and the supervisor's supervisor. This can work, but it is imperative that the individuals providing the reference or recommendation understand the desirable passion elements. Perhaps the simplest way to ensure this is to prepare a document that lists and explains each value, belief, interest and characteristic, emphasizing any heavily weighted elements. See the following:

Call for Field Training Officer Recommendations

Training Section is mounting an FTO course in April. Please recommend FTO candidates as per policy:

A letter of reference from their direct supervisor and supervisor's supervisor indicating their suitability to play the role of Field Training Officer

Demonstrate a commitment to public safety, integrity/ethics, growth/ learning, performance, and policing as a profession

Display beliefs that people can learn almost anything if they are motivated, and that they can make a substantial difference in a new member's career

Show genuine interest in working with people, police tactics and teaching/coaching

Possess the following personal characteristics: calm, patient, disciplined and flexible

Be proficient at:

- *Reports*
- *Problem Solving*
- *Client interaction*

Possess sound knowledge and understanding of all aspects of patrol work

Have 5 years of operational police experience (consideration may be given to members with a minimum of 3 years or more of operational experience if an insufficient number of qualified members apply). As per policy, members with less than 3 years service WILL NOT be considered for this position.

Career Conversations

Many members have had little opportunity to think about their work in terms of values, beliefs or interests. Their career choices are often based on a combination of gut instinct and the traditions of the organization's culture (e.g., "People who do this typically do this next" or "Of course you'll apply for promotion!"). Even young members, who tend to be more conscious of their own needs and aspirations, often have difficulty distilling their motivations into distinct lists of values, beliefs and interests.

"Career conversations," or conversations that help people identify their passion elements and move forward with them, are useful in the regard. These conversations can be quite

straightforward. Kris Magnusson, University of Lethbridge, developed a “5P” model that focuses on five elements in sequence:

- Pride (an experience with which the member experienced considerable pride)
- Passion (a list of the values, beliefs and interests underlying the “pride experience”)
- Purpose (a discussion of the future activities or projects the member could engage in to capture more passion)
- Performance (identification of the resources and skills the member will need to adequately execute the new “purpose”)
- Poise (identification of feedback mechanisms that will let the member know that they are succeeding in the new “purpose”)

Pride. The manager facilitates this process by encouraging a member to describe an experience, project and/or service that happened in the past few months in which they took particular pride in accomplishing. A simple question such as “What have you done in the last while that you’re really proud of?”

Passion. Most members will have specific reasons for taking pride in an experience. These reasons form the basis for passion - the liking or devotion to some work activity. As you listen to their story about something they are proud of, you will hear underlying values, beliefs and interests. Your job is to identify these, reflect them back to the member, and help the member complete a list of values, beliefs and interests that captures a large part of their passion. Questions like “What was important about that event for you?”, “What was fun about that event for you?” and “Are there any beliefs you hold that really line up with that experience?” can be helpful.

Purpose. The third “P” involves discovering an outlet or purpose of the member’s passion. The desired path of action will need to satisfy the employee’s current needs and be seen to be leading towards a preferred future. It must also take into account the needs of the organization. The quest for such an action plan is for the *best fit*, not necessarily an *ideal fit*. The manager’s role is one of facilitating this exploration process with questions such as “What could you do more of, or what new activity could you take on, to allow you to grab more of these values, beliefs and interests in your work?”

Performance. Once a “purpose” has been identified, the next step is to ensure the member has what he or she needs to perform well. Questions like “What do you need in order to be ready to do this new activity?” or “What might get in your way of doing this new activity?” are helpful. *NOTE: Further coaching sessions may be needed, depending on the extent of the member’s needs.*

Poise. Poise is simply performance with confidence, competence and grace. Once employees are able to personalize acquired knowledge and skills they will increase their levels of self-confidence and, in turn, expand their “pride” experiences thus beginning a new cycle. To perform with confidence, members need feedback. So, this part of the conversation examines how the member will obtain feedback as they undertake their “purpose.” “What kind of feedback will you need to let you know whether or not you’re doing well?” is a useful question. *NOTE: The feedback need not come from the*

manager. It can come from clients, colleagues or project outcomes.

These types of conversations enhance the succession process because they help clarify, for potential applicants, *what their real passions are*. So many people work through promotion processes without examining the real “fit” between themselves and the supervisory or managerial role. They become stressed and unhappy, their staff become stressed and unhappy, and the organization as a whole suffers.

Additional Succession Considerations

“Passion-based succession” will not solve all your succession/promotion problems, but it will help substantially in filtering people who simply are not suited for particular leadership roles. A host of issues remain, however, some of which “passion-based succession” will help with and some not. They are posed here for your consideration:

What differences are there in rural, “rurban” and urban environments from a leadership perspective? Your succession process needs to be able to identify differences in passion and competence in rural and urban settings (if your organization covers both). Do “big city” police supervisors and managers have different characteristics than “small town” supervisors? How will you identify these and account for them in your succession process?

What special cases do you have that complicate the succession process? It is one thing to promote people within a patrol or general duty policing function. How will your organization address the following special cases?

- Human Resources & Training
- Community-Based Initiatives
- Emergency Response Teams/Tactical
- Crowd Control/Special Events

Clearly, passion-based succession can be helpful here. What other considerations are required?

How can members be helped to move through places where they will not “shine” for a while? Some leadership positions tend to be ignored (e.g., cells, communications), and this can be career-limiting for the leaders within them. How will your organization pay more attention *and* let people know that more attention is being paid?

Who is paying attention to who is going where? Is promotion simply an HR function? Or, do you want every leader at every level of your organization focussing on succession at all times?

What responsibility does the member have in succession? What are you doing to encourage members to look after their own career paths? How can you do so without encouraging a “me first” attitude that pits people against each other and destroys morale?

How can rotational assignments best be handled? Are you considering the best person for the role? Does this person demonstrate the values required in the role? What contributions will this person provide when s/he returns to patrol?

How will your succession strategy deal with “age and stage” issues? People and their circumstances change throughout their careers. Getting married, having children, coping with elderly parents: All of these influence a person’s motivation at work. How will your succession process account for these changes?

What will you do to ensure women in your organization have equitable access to promotion? Part of “age and stage” process for women is having children, and it has an enormous impact on their lives and careers. How will your organization ensure women are not left out of the loop when they go on maternity leave or in those first few years when their children require a great deal of attention? What will you do to keep the fire alive within them so that, when they are ready, leadership possibilities are available to them?

How do you ensure people have a broad range of experiences even when these do not align with their “passions”? You want people who are motivated to perform the roles they play. You also want people to have a wide breadth of experience (e.g., cells, communications, front desk). How will your organization reconcile these things?

How can you identify leaders below you who are NOT passionate? Every succession system makes errors. What will you do if a leader who reports to you is no longer passionate about his or her role (or never was)? How would you discover this?

Summary

Few police services are prepared for what has become the war for *talent*. Currently the supply of the age and experience cohort that has traditionally provided entry into the senior ranks has declined severely. Not only is there a shortfall in the overall size of the talent pool, but there is also an important shortage in the background experiences required for senior leaders. In response to these challenges, old succession systems used in policing need to be re-invented. The concerns facing most police services include identifying the talent and developing its capacities to the fullest. New forms of succession management will need to have critical differences. The re-invention will include finding and nurturing individuals that possess the passion for leadership. As suggested in this article, this process must begin very early in a person’s career within the service. To wait until promotion processes sort out the potential leaders will be too late in today’s changing environment. Without including elements of *passion-based succession planning processes*, succession systems will never realize their full potential.