

The Puzzle of Leadership

The people's capacity to achieve is determined by their leader's ability to empower.

—John C. Maxwell

During my career, in various places and times, I have heard officers say that their department's morale is low or that their agency is having significant problems with morale. These comments always trigger in me the rhetorical question, Is morale the responsibility of the entire department, or is morale an individual issue?

Morale may be defined as “the emotional or mental condition of a person or group with respect to confidence, cheerfulness, discipline, and willingness to perform assigned tasks.”¹ While the organization's top executives do have a significant role in establishing and sustaining positive morale, I believe every member of the agency has the responsibility of morale. Many times we want to blame others for our discontent. Certainly, it is easier to blame others than to deal with our own issues.

Yet, when we fail to deal with our own issues, they are exacerbated over time and can lead to serious, chaotic, or disastrous events. Let us not forget that morale has the root word *moral*. Morality relates to the means in which individuals deal with the good and bad of their own character or ethical behavior.

Leaders are responsible for morale, and every member of your agency has the potential

to be a leader. Within the community, your officers are a representation or extension of the sheriff or chief. How is their morale? Do your officers portray a positive or negative image of your department as they interact with the community and each other?

Leaders realize that successfully building a puzzle requires completing it one piece at a time. We often look at a unit or division as a whole when, in reality, we should evaluate

it piece by piece, person by person. As leaders, we always should look for the opportunity to be a mentor or coach. We should spend time with officers who truly are teachable and willing to make a difference. We should not hesitate to deal convincingly with problem officers. However, leaders also should take the time to look for opportunities to teach or create a positive influence in less

than stellar performers. If leaders coach and mentor effectively, they can make a positive difference with their officers, agencies, and communities.

¹ *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “morale.”

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