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THE GOAL: A POLICE PROFESSION

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More and more often we hear the words "the Police Profession." Police writers, speakers, administrators with increasing frequency use this term. How much more must be done before we attain professional status? How far in the future is the goal?

Before getting an answer to these two questions we must know two things. Then perhaps we can hazard a guess as to how long it will be before the general public acknowledges that police work is a profession.

1. What traits identify a profession?

2. How near are we to meeting those requirements?

There can be but very little disagreement on question 1. If we analyze the professions we know we find that a first requirement is training. Knowledge of the job is basic. In the medical or legal field, for example, there is an organized body of knowledge. Before a man or woman is recognized as a member of either of those professions he must have been schooled in the knowledge and skills of that profession so that he is capable of practicing medicine or law. He must be trained. The degree of his training is determined by examination. He must demonstrate that he has the knowledge necessary to serve his patients or clients in a professional capacity. Take the others, and examine them. Engineering, architecture, and accounting, to name just a few more, have this same trait in common. Before a man is acknowledged as a member of anyone of them, he must have received the degree of training thought necessary to serve properly the people. Certainly all readily admit that training is a primary requisite for law enforcement officers if we expect to attain our goal, professionalization.

A license or certificate based on standards of competence. This is a requirement in law, medicine, and the other professions. This is where we run

into a major difficulty in the police profession. In all of our states, as a requirement for entrance into and the practice of most of the professions it is necessary that the applicant pass an examination and the scrutiny of a state board. In these professions the schools, the colleges, and universities have in most cases provided the training thought to be necessary to practice the profession. When the required training has been completed the applicant for a license is examined by the state board. When he is given his license he may go anywhere in the state and seek employment, he may form a partnership with others of his profession, or he may open an office and begin the practice of his profession by himself. He frames his license, hangs it on the wall, and hangs out his shingle. He is in business.

Police organizations throughout our country are examining this procedure with the idea of setting up professional standards. Forward looking police administrators, expecting a surplus of college trained men in the next decade are giving serious consideration to the idea of a state license for police officers. The California Peace Officer's Association is a pioneer in this idea. Bernard C. Brannan, Chief of Police of Kansas City, is an enthusiastic and able advocate of a plan in his state to enact legislation along this line. The Texas Police Association has a committee working on such a plan. Police journals are carrying articles pointing out the necessity for some type of uniform standard.

With the movement gaining momentum rapidly you might ask where is the road block. Where is the major difficulty mentioned above? If you will start such a movement in your state and go to your legislature with it you will quickly find that there is a road block, a major difficulty. Despite the fact that the ultimate purpose is to give better police service to your citizens you will probably

find that the plan is strongly opposed by the governing body of your city. These same city officials in other ways consistently try to raise the standards of the police. They want a modern well trained department. Most of them recognize the need for an expanded budget to buy the equipment and hire the manpower to combat the ever increasing crime rate. They advocate improved personnel selection. But they will not listen to any proposal for a state license for police. They do not want any outside source to determine the qualifications of their employees. The associations representing heads of our city governments wield a lot of power at the state capitol. They do not want their hands tied when it comes to hiring policemen. In some cities this course is dictated by politics. In others it is an honest desire on the part of elective officials to keep the state legislature from interfering in strictly local matters. The doctor or lawyer, as an individual, gets a state license and may move from city to city as he desires. He works for a fee. He may be called across the state to attend a patient or represent a client. On the other hand the policeman holds a public office. He operates within one jurisdiction. His pay comes out of the tax dollar.

If the city has been successful in clearing city politics out of the police department, the officials do not want to get involved in state politics. If city politics govern the department, the city officials do not want the state politicians to muscle in on their territory. Either way they oppose a state board. The people want the control of the police left in local hands.

So it seems we do have a road block or major difficulty. To overcome this difficulty we have one of two courses to pursue. We can continue a stepped up plan of public education and eventually get the support of the public for higher standards of selection. This is slow work. Secondly we can, through our state police associations, ask our legislatures to enact legislation to provide a state board of examiners who in cooperation with those same associations can set up the machinery to conduct examinations and make background investigations. The board can set out the conditions under which an officer can secure a license. This license may be of different grades, for example, grade I for cities over 100,000; grade II for cities from 50,000 to 100,000; and grade III for cities and towns under 50,000.

This is of course looking into the future. Today we have no such laws. Our answer today is for the

city to set up high standards, certain educational requirements, rigid examinations, thorough background investigations. When an applicant meets the requirements we can hire him, train him, and keep him under observation during a probationary period. If he cannot meet the requirements in the field, he can be dropped from the rolls. All of this is good. But all of our cities will not adopt such a plans. They find that it costs more money to hire men as you raise your standards. We find ourselves back at the local level. Some city officials will set their standards high and not deviate from them. Others will not. In some places the only requirement may be that the applicant supported the administration. Where politicians can dictate police appointments we certainly cannot have the personnel which will be recognized as professional.

To overcome the opposition of city officials we can adopt another method. If we can get our legislature to set up a board of examiners and a standard which an applicant must meet to secure a license, and then provide that it is optional on the part of each separate department whether or not they come under this act we would at least have a start in the right direction. In other words we can make the operation voluntary on the part of each city. Then our police organizations can keep the public informed as to how the plan is working and as time passes most of our cities will come into the program. Many are ready now. Some of them already have a more comprehensive program of this type than the legislature is likely to enact into law.

We must all remember that the men who head our city governments are not elected for life. Changes occur frequently. New officials are elected. New city managers are appointed. Some of these officials are strong in law enforcement, others are weak. What one group might approve today can be abandoned by those who succeed them in office.

So it is doubtful if any type of voluntary cooperation will succeed. We need a law. To make certain of success we must see our plan outlined in state statutes.

How far are we from professionalization? Perhaps we are a long way, many difficult contests, many fruitless years. For if we are to be a profession, there must be some uniformity in hiring and firing policemen. We must have high standards, and they must be supported and adhered to. A profession cannot qualify as a profession if it permits half of its members to practice who have

no proper training or qualifications. Your department may meet all of the requirements but draw a circle around your city to embrace all the other departments within 200 miles. Look at the professional qualifications of those men. One Chief of Police will fire a man on a morals charge, for abuse of a prisoner, for bribery, or simply because he is no good. Fifty or one hundred miles away another department will hire him and possibly make him a sergeant.

We need training, and we need a license if we are to be a recognized profession. What else do we need?

The third requirement is one which is within our grasp. We need a Code of Ethics accepted by all the members of our profession. We need some means of seeing that this code is not violated. Both of these necessary requirements can be met by us, the practicing members of the police profession without legislation and without cost.

All of us are by now familiar with the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics as originally proposed by the California Peace Officer's Association and adopted by the IACP, the National Conference of Police Associations, and hundreds of other organizations and departments. It can be adopted within each department. It can be enforced by the Chief of Police. What are we waiting for? Let us all adopt this code and demand its enforcement. It is off to a good start.

In this writer's home state the Texas Police Association has adopted the code and urged all members to work for its adoption in their respective departments. The Texas Sheriff's Association, the East Texas Peace Officers Association, and the FBI National Academy Associates of Texas have all done likewise. Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, the three largest cities in the state have adopted the code. Dozens of smaller departments have adopted the code. You can find a framed copy of it in many police headquarters

in our state, and many departments have had it printed in their official manuals.

So it looks like the so called police profession may have one of the three primary essentials for professionalization. With a little more effort we will have a Law Enforcement Code of Ethics subscribed to by the vast majority of our officers.

Training, a long subject in itself is moving along. We who have been on the job for 25 or 30 years feel that with a little more time we will have training in most jurisdictions of a type which will meet professional standards. The answer to the question then of how long it will be before we attain professional status rests on one thing. When will the vast majority of our police be required to meet high standards of competence. This may be done on the local level, but if we wait for each local department to meet this requirements, we may wait for a hundred years. We may get legislation on the state level which is our best chance for real standards, uniformity, and quick action. Is there another possibility.

Yes, there is one more and one we must not consider. Proposals are now being advanced to set up a federal system for licensing police. This is one more step down the short road leading to the loss of our liberty. The police license must and will come. If our cities will not provide a workable system and continue to assume the "dog in the manger" attitude when we talk of a state license, you can be sure that the efforts now being made to federalize your police will be accelerated.

J. Edgar Hoover has told us year in and year out and then repeated his warning not to set up federal police in the United States. He has told us to keep our local police under local jurisdiction. We should heed his warning. We can have local police with a state license, but who is so naive as to believe that our police departments can be kept out of politics and under local control when the black day comes and we have federal licensing of local police.