



# A Law Enforcement Leader's Guide to Retention

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Building teams that stay, serve, and succeed.

## A Law Enforcement Leader's Guide to Retention

Retention is not a single decision. It is built shift by shift, moment by moment, through leadership, culture, and daily experience.

More specifically, as stated by Sgt. Doug Kazensky (ret.), "officer retention is built daily."

## What We Think vs What's Actually Happening

When asked why agencies around the country are struggling with retention issues, there's a few common culprits that are frequently cited:

1. The gap between pay and the day-to-day expectations placed on officers
2. Staffing shortages adding extra pressure and workload
3. Public perception of policing and the scrutiny of officers in today's environment

However, in reality, these issues are only part of the equation, and in actuality, be far less impactful than assumed.

**You can have agencies that pay really well, but still struggle with retention, while others pay less and retain people because the culture is strong.**

**Sgt. Doug Kazensky (ret.)**

## What are we actually hearing from officers?

1. A lack of pay and benefits is not the main motivator when officers leave
2. Workplace culture is incredibly important to building an environment officers will want to stay in
3. Having opportunities for growth and a career path is vital to fostering the next generation of leaders

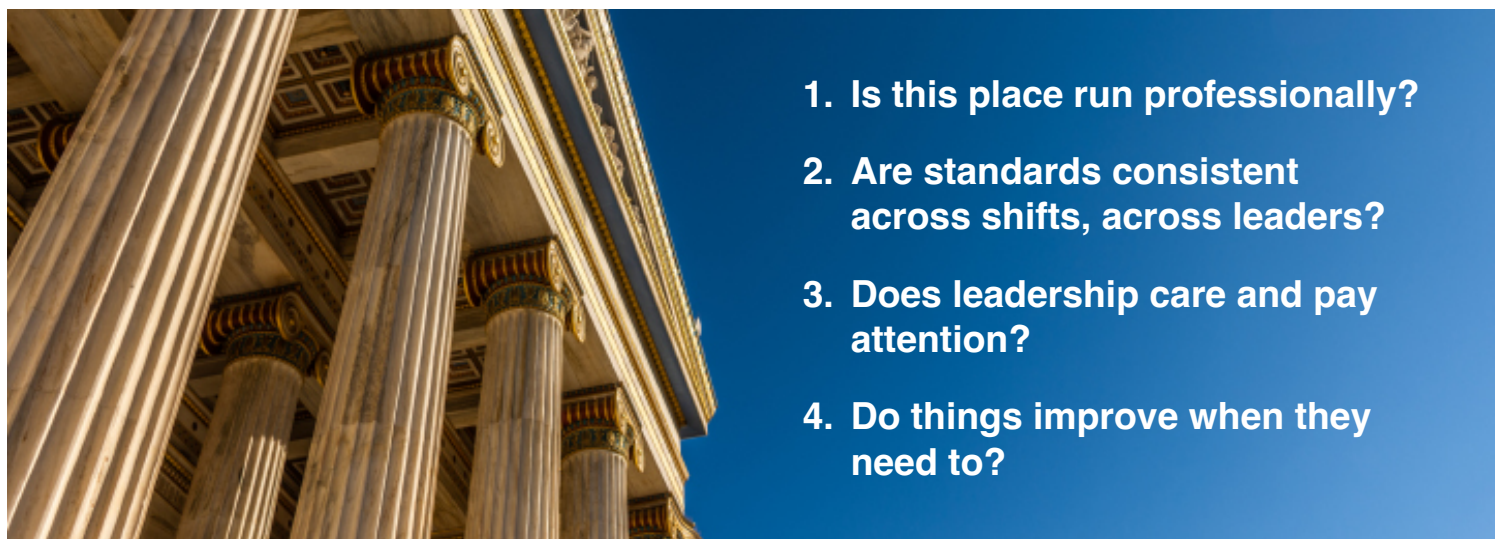
Pay and benefits are not the motivator for people to leave agencies. There's a bigger picture — it's the culture, how we treat people on a daily basis, opportunities for growth, training — all of those intangible things. It is not the hourly wage."

**Deputy Chief Anthony Addante (ret.)**

And, perhaps most importantly, officers stay where they feel valued and when their contributions feel like they matter.

## The Four Pillars of Officer Retention

When an officer is deciding whether to stay with their agency or leave, either for greener pastures or to leave the profession entirely, there are few questions they'll ask themselves. And these questions are all directly influenced by the leadership of the agency.



*How do you think your officers would answer those questions?*

## What will make or break retention?

These pillars show up in the small, everyday moments officers experience on shift. When they break down, retention follows. When they are strong, culture holds.

# CONSISTENCY

## Where it breaks down

- Standards change by supervisor
- Policies are enforced differently by shift
- Discipline and expectations feel uneven

## What good looks like

- Clear expectations across the agency
- Supervisors are aligned
- Positive recognition and discipline are metered out fairly, every time

## What's the impact?

- Inconsistency in officer behavior and conduct
- Officers are frustrated and disengaged
- Trust erodes and officers no longer believe in their leadership

# OPERATIONAL REALITY

## Where it breaks down

- Staffing shortages strain the agency and officers
- Increased expectations from the community or oversight from leaders
- Complex policies and procedures create inefficiencies and redundancies

## What good looks like

- Leaders work to mitigate the negative impact of staffing shortages or other challenges
- Inefficiencies are reduced and complex processes are simplified where possible
- Officers are encouraged to prioritize wellness to support their long-term success

## What's the impact?

- Officers are exhausted and overwhelmed
- Officers hesitate or don't feel like they have clear direction in critical situations
- Officers don't trust their leadership to back them up

# LEADERSHIP VISIBILITY

## Where it breaks down

- Leadership is not visible to officers
- Officer feedback is never acted upon
- Conversations with leaders only happen as a part of discipline

## What's the impact?

- Officers may adapt a "why bother" mindset
- Officer disengagement from leadership priorities
- Loyalty to the agency and leadership erodes

## What good looks like

- Leaders engage with officers and take part in day-to-day activities
- Officer provide feedback is acknowledged, even if it cannot be acted upon right away
- Leadership is honest and transparent with officers, especially regarding major policy or procedural changes

# GROWTH AND VALUE

## Where it breaks down

- Officers have limited opportunities for advancement or lack a clear career path
- When officers express an interest in growth opportunities, leadership does not support it
- Officers stagnate in roles for longer than they should

## What's the impact?

- High performers leave for other opportunities
- Motivation to go above and beyond disappears

## What good looks like

- Ample opportunities for officers to expand responsibilities when appropriate
- Career paths are clearly outlined and officers know how to prepare for promotions or new roles
- Succession planning is prioritized and leaders take an active role in shaping the next generation

# How would your agency rate?

Rate your agency 1-5 on each pillar and see how you're doing.

## Consistency

- 1 Standards are applied evenly across shifts
- 2 Supervisors handle discipline similarly
- 3 Expectations are clearly understood

## Operational Reality

- 1 Leadership understands time demands on shift
- 2 Redundant tasks are actively reduced
- 3 Reporting processes are efficient

## Leadership Visibility

- 1 Officers feel heard
- 2 Feedback leads to action
- 3 Leadership presence is consistent

## Growth & Value

- 1 Officers have opportunities to grow
- 2 Strong performers are recognized
- 3 Responsibilities evolve over time

## Here's how to boost your score

“Nobody wants to be kept in the dark. You don't have to share everything, but you do need to communicate clearly and consistently about what's happening and why.”

**Deputy Chief Anthony Addante (ret.)**

# 1

### Get real input from the field.

Your best insight is already in your agency.

- FTOs
- Senior officers
- Detectives
- Dispatch

### Ask them simple questions:

- What slows you down?
- What feels unnecessary?
- What takes the longest?

# 2

### Standardize expectations.

Consistency builds trust.

- Clarify policies
- Align supervisors
- Remove gray areas

# 3

### Close the loop and communicate.

Follow-through is key.

- Share what is changing
- Explain what is not and why
- Show that their input matters

## Retention Starts with You

Retention does not come down to one policy, one incentive, or one decision. It is shaped by what officers experience every single day. When leaders are consistent, present, and willing to act, trust grows over time. And when they are not, the opposite happens just as quickly. Small frustrations stack up, and apathy will spread.

The good news is that this is within your control. Strong retention does not require massive budget increases or quick fixes. It requires leaders who pay attention, follow through, and create an environment where people feel valued. Because in the end, officers are deciding whether they believe in the place they work, and when that belief is there, when they feel heard, supported, and part of something bigger, they stay.

### Want to learn more? Get additional insights into officer retention from the experts!

Watch "[How Officer Retention Is Built Daily](#)" On Demand!

Join Sgt. Doug Kazensky (ret.) and Deputy Chief Anthony Addante (ret.) as they explore how effective leadership can create lasting careers for your officers by fostering job flexibility, allowing room for growth, and empowering passion-driven initiatives.

