THE MODERN POLICE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

THE FIRST 90 DAYS

Building Credibility, Setting Expectations, and Leading the Transition

The first 90 days establish patterns that can last for years.

This training resource prepares new and aspiring law-enforcement supervisors to transition deliberately from officer to leader. It focuses on learning the assignment, setting fair expectations, establishing professional boundaries, coaching performance, managing operational risk, and creating continuity.



Leadership Development Resource

Purpose and Learning Objectives

Promotion changes more than rank. The new supervisor becomes responsible for people, standards, decisions, communication, risk, and the connection between frontline work and organizational expectations. The first 90 days are therefore not a period to prove that the new supervisor has all the answers; they are a period to learn deliberately, establish credibility, and create a stable foundation for leadership.

After completing this training, participants should be able to:

- Explain the leadership challenges created by the transition from peer to supervisor.
- Use a structured first-90-days approach built around SELF, TEAM, ORGANIZATION, and COMMUNITY.
- Establish clear expectations and professional boundaries without unnecessarily damaging relationships.
- Assess personnel, workload, operational risk, culture, and recurring performance issues.
- Use coaching, feedback, and accountability appropriately during the transition.
- Avoid common mistakes such as changing too much too quickly or avoiding difficult decisions.
- Create an actionable 30-60-90 day transition plan.

> **Core Principle:** The objective of the first 90 days is not to demonstrate power. It is to establish clarity, credibility, consistency, and direction.

1. The Transition: SELF -> TEAM -> ORGANIZATION -> COMMUNITY

A new supervisor must expand the way they think about responsibility. The transition begins with managing self, then broadens to the team, the organization, and the community the agency serves.

Level	Primary Focus	Key Questions
SELF	Identity, credibility, habits, judgment, boundaries, and leadership philosophy.	How must I change now that my responsibility has changed?
TEAM	People, expectations, communication, performance, coaching, trust, and accountability.	What does this team need from me to perform well?
ORGANIZATION	Mission, policy, command expectations, resources, systems, risk, and coordination.	How does my unit support the larger organization?
COMMUNITY	Service, legitimacy, stakeholders, partnerships, public expectations, and outcomes.	How do our decisions affect the people we serve?

The identity shift

One of the hardest transitions is recognizing that the supervisor is no longer simply another member of the group. Former peer relationships may continue, but the responsibilities are different. The supervisor must evaluate performance, enforce standards, make decisions, protect confidential information, communicate command expectations, and sometimes make choices that former peers dislike.

> **Transition question:** What behaviors that worked well as an officer may become liabilities when you are responsible for supervising others?

2. Days 1-30: Learn Before You Change

The first month should emphasize disciplined learning. New supervisors often feel pressure to demonstrate immediate impact. Unless an issue involves safety, legality, ethics, serious performance, or urgent operational risk, observation and understanding should usually precede major change.

Priorities for the first 30 days

- Meet individually with employees and learn their experience, strengths, concerns, and goals.
- Clarify what your commander expects from you and the unit.
- Review schedules, workload, recurring calls, reports, complaints, staffing, training, and operational patterns.
- Learn applicable policies, supervisory procedures, labor requirements, and documentation practices.
- Identify unresolved performance, conduct, equipment, training, or safety concerns.
- Observe team dynamics, informal influence, communication patterns, and cultural norms.
- Communicate your basic leadership expectations without promising major changes.
- Establish professional boundaries with former peers while remaining approachable and respectful.

What not to do

- Change systems simply to demonstrate authority.
- Assume the previous supervisor's methods were wrong because they differ from yours.
- Promise employees outcomes before understanding policy, resources, or command expectations.
- Ignore obvious problems in the name of 'taking time to learn.'
- Confuse friendliness with an obligation to preserve the old peer relationship.

> **First-month objective:** Understand the environment well enough to distinguish what must be preserved, what should be improved, and what cannot be allowed to continue.

3. Setting Expectations and Boundaries

Employees should not have to guess what their supervisor values or what standards will be enforced. Expectations should be clear, reasonable, connected to policy and mission, and reinforced consistently through daily behavior.

Core expectations to communicate

- Professional conduct and respectful communication.
- Officer safety, sound tactics, and appropriate risk management.
- Report quality, timeliness, documentation, and case follow-through.
- Attendance, readiness, equipment, and shift responsibilities.
- Communication up the chain and timely notification of significant events.
- Accountability for mistakes and willingness to learn from them.
- Support for teammates without protecting poor conduct or performance.
- Respectful disagreement and the expectation to carry out lawful decisions once made.

Former peers

A new supervisor does not need to become distant or artificial. The relationship changes because responsibility changes. Avoid favoritism, insider relationships, gossip, inappropriate disclosure, and selective enforcement of standards. The fastest way to damage credibility is to create one set of expectations for friends and another for everyone else.

> **Consistency turns words into trust.** Employees will compare what you say with what you repeatedly do, tolerate, reward, and correct.

4. Days 31-60: Align the Team and Address Gaps

By the second month, the supervisor should have enough information to begin moving from observation toward deliberate action. The emphasis shifts toward alignment: clarifying standards, addressing recurring problems, developing people, and improving coordination.

Priorities for days 31-60

- Address known performance gaps with clear expectations and appropriate documentation.
- Begin regular coaching conversations rather than waiting for formal evaluations.
- Recognize strong performance and identify employees ready for additional responsibility.
- Correct avoidable workflow problems and remove unnecessary barriers when within your authority.
- Coordinate with other supervisors, detectives, specialty units, dispatch, records, and command staff as needed.
- Review training needs and identify opportunities for development.
- Evaluate whether workload and responsibilities are distributed fairly and effectively.
- Follow through on commitments made during the first month.

Coach before the crisis

Supervision is strongest when feedback is routine. If the only time an employee receives meaningful feedback is after something goes wrong, the supervisor has surrendered much of the developmental value of the role. Short, specific conversations about decisions, reports, communication, tactics, initiative, and professional growth can prevent larger problems.

> **Coaching question:** What does this employee need from me right now - clarity, feedback, practice, resources, encouragement, correction, or accountability?

5. Performance, Accountability, and Difficult Conversations

New supervisors sometimes delay difficult conversations because they fear damaging relationships or appearing overly aggressive. Delay often makes the problem harder. The objective is not confrontation; it is clarity.

A practical conversation sequence

1. Describe the issue

State the observable behavior, performance gap, or concern without exaggeration.

2. Clarify the standard

Identify the expectation, policy, procedure, or performance requirement.

3. Listen

Allow the employee to provide relevant information or context.

4. Identify the gap

Separate facts from assumptions and determine what must change.

5. Establish the next step

Clarify expectations, support, timeline, and consequences when appropriate.

6. Document appropriately

Follow agency requirements and preserve an accurate record.

7. Follow up

Determine whether performance improved and provide additional feedback or accountability.

> **Fair does not mean identical.** Employees may require different coaching or support, but comparable conduct and performance should be evaluated against consistent standards.

6. Days 61-90: Build Continuity and Direction

The third month is an opportunity to convert early learning into sustainable supervisory practices. By this point, the supervisor should be developing a clearer picture of team strengths, recurring risks, development needs, and operational priorities.

Priorities for days 61-90

- Evaluate progress against the expectations established during the first two months.
- Identify two or three realistic priorities rather than creating an excessive change agenda.
- Develop employees through assignments, mentoring, training, and increased responsibility.
- Create repeatable communication and follow-up practices for the shift or unit.
- Review unresolved risks, performance concerns, and resource needs with command staff.
- Strengthen relationships with internal partners and relevant community stakeholders.
- Document lessons learned and adjust your leadership approach where necessary.
- Establish a longer-term development plan for yourself and the team.

From transition to sustained leadership

The end of 90 days is not the end of learning. It marks the point at which the new supervisor should be moving from transition management toward a sustainable leadership rhythm: clear expectations, regular communication, timely coaching, defensible decisions, follow-through, and continued organizational awareness.

7. Decision-Making During the First 90 Days

New supervisors are watched closely when decisions become difficult. A repeatable decision process reduces impulsive responses and makes reasoning easier to explain.

Question	Consider
How much time do I have?	Immediate action, short deliberation, or time for consultation and participation?
What is the objective?	Safety, service, compliance, performance, development, accountability, or problem resolution?
What information is missing?	Facts, policy, history, employee perspective, resources, or subject-matter expertise?
What options exist?	Identify reasonable alternatives instead of defaulting to the first available response.
What are the risks?	Operational, legal, ethical, personnel, community, credibility, and organizational consequences.
Who should participate?	Determine whether input will improve the decision without creating unnecessary delay or ambiguity.
How will I close the decision?	Clarify what was decided, who is responsible, the timeline, and required follow-up.

Decision residue: Even a sound decision can leave frustration, uncertainty, or disagreement behind. Good supervisors close the loop through explanation, follow-up, and continued communication.

8. Tabletop Scenario: Leading Former Peers

Scenario: You have been a sergeant for three weeks. One of your former peers, an experienced officer you have socialized with outside work, has repeatedly submitted incomplete reports. You previously joked together about supervisors who were overly focused on paperwork. The officer now tells you privately, “You know how this place works. Don't become one of those supervisors just because you got stripes.”

Discussion Questions

- What makes this conversation more difficult because of the prior peer relationship?
- What standard must be clarified?
- How should you acknowledge the changed relationship without becoming defensive?
- What support or coaching may be appropriate?
- When would documentation or formal accountability become necessary?
- How might avoiding the issue affect the rest of the team?
- What would a fair follow-up look like?

Facilitator Considerations

The supervisor should avoid both favoritism and overcorrection. The report standard should be addressed as a performance issue, not as a test of friendship or authority. The prior relationship makes clarity especially important. The supervisor can acknowledge the transition, explain the expectation, determine whether a training or workload issue exists, and establish a specific follow-up plan.

> **Leadership challenge:** Can you preserve respect for the person while accepting responsibility for the standard?

9. First 90 Days Supervisor Self-Assessment

Mark the response that best describes your current practice: **Needs Attention / Developing / Consistent / Strength**.

Statement	NA	D	C	S
I understand what my commander expects from me and my unit.	■	■	■	■
I have communicated clear standards to employees.	■	■	■	■
I apply expectations consistently, including with former peers and high performers.	■	■	■	■
I conduct coaching conversations before problems become formal performance issues.	■	■	■	■
I address difficult issues rather than delaying them to preserve relationships.	■	■	■	■
I understand the team's workload, strengths, recurring problems, and development needs.	■	■	■	■
I communicate significant issues upward appropriately.	■	■	■	■
I make decisions using available time, information, objectives, alternatives, and risk.	■	■	■	■
I follow through on commitments, corrections, and decisions.	■	■	■	■
I have identified specific leadership behaviors I need to improve.	■	■	■	■

The leadership behavior I most need to strengthen:

10. My 30-60-90 Day Transition Plan

Use this worksheet to convert the concepts in this training into a practical transition plan. Keep the plan focused enough to use and review.

DAYS 1-30 - LEARN

What do I need to understand about myself, my people, the assignment, expectations, policies, workload, culture, and risks?

DAYS 31-60 - ALIGN

What expectations, performance gaps, communication issues, coaching needs, or workflow problems require deliberate action?

DAYS 61-90 - BUILD

What practices, priorities, development efforts, relationships, and follow-up systems should become part of sustained leadership?

11. Leadership Commitments

The first 90 days create a foundation. Identify the behaviors you intend to carry beyond the transition period.

One expectation I will communicate more clearly:

One relationship or boundary I need to manage intentionally:

One employee I need to coach or develop:

One operational risk or recurring problem I need to address:

One leadership habit I will practice consistently:

One way I will measure whether I am becoming more effective:

Final Principle: Your first 90 days will not define every day that follows, but they will teach people what they can expect from you. Be deliberate about the patterns you establish.