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Is Your Police Records Unit Undervalued

Is your police records unit undervalued? Are the employees who work there appreciated? Is the records management function one that is taken seriously? If not, then it's time to take an inventory of this important area of your department.

Unfortunately for those who work in records (and for the department as a whole), police officers are clueless about what happens to their report once it gets submitted. They have no idea about the work that is required to make sure the reporting officer, the parties involved in the report, the public and the department itself are getting the right information into the right hands at the right time. Little do they know what it takes to ensure the department doesn't violate public records law and to ensure it produces accurate UCR reports. How do I know? Because I used to be one of those officers until I got assigned to oversee the Records Unit; and what an eye opening experience it was.

I have since learned after several years in that assignment and one promotion later that in fact, police records clerks are often underappreciated and unrecognized for the hard work they do. Conversely, I have also learned after now conducting many training seminars and records management assessments that police departments routinely fail to develop these employees and end up paying a price.

Sound information management in law enforcement is critical. How many cases have been lost, employees disciplined and lawsuits filed as a result of mismanagement of information? Many. Some of the headlines include:

http://policerecordsmanagement.com/2011/11/when-police-records-management-goes-bad/

http://www.myfoxdfw.com/story/18440915/dpd-investigating-more-mishandled-cases

Information is the lifeblood of any organization but when the organization is dealing with the protection of life and liberty its proper management becomes really important. The information management lifecycle includes 6 stages: creation, collection, processing, maintenance, dissemination and disposition. If there is a breakdown in any of these, the information can be spoiled, lost or improperly changed, the results of which can be catastrophic for a police department.

How do you achieve turnaround in a problematic records unit or in an agency where records management isn't taken seriously? Begin with assessing 1) the agency's business processes and 2) the performance of personnel. Determine efficient ways to shorten your report turnaround time, lower the report error rate and flatten information workflows throughout the agency.

Then analyze how the records unit and its employees are performing. If your team is one that is well trained, professional and customer service focused then you're probably in good shape. If on the other hand your records personnel have not been sent to regular training, empowered to perform, or have been neglected in any way, then chances are the agency is missing records and has boxes of files piled up somewhere where they shouldn't be.

Take the time to recognize the efforts of your records unit and work towards changing the organizational culture into one which takes seriously the proper production and management of police records. Your clerks (specialists if your prefer) will appreciate it and your agency will be all the better for it.