

LEADERSHIP



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The National Police Association's free Law Enforcement education series is designed for home school, classroom, or independent learning. As part of our nonprofit educational mission, it prepares you for careers in public safety. This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#)

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Protect Our Police Chiefs

As LA Times writer Jill Leovy noted in an article nearly 20 years ago “The era of long-time chiefs has given way to an era of short-timers (who) rarely last longer than three years anymore.” The average tenure of police chiefs, although shorter for large agencies than smaller agencies, is 2-3 years. Compare this to 5-6 years in the 1980s.

The challenge of carving out and maintaining a healthy police culture can hardly be met by police leaders with short tenures. Unfortunately, the highly charged politics of policing has made leading a law enforcement agency tenuous for police executives. Chuck Wexler, Director of the respected Police Executive Research Forum, said “Chiefs must perform a high-wire act of retaining the respect of their officers, aligning with their elected officials, and giving the community genuine in put into policy and operation”.

As former Detroit Chief of Police Jerry Oliver says “Change agents have a shelf life. When you make changes, you make enemies, and sooner or later your enemies become 51%”. How can police leaders at the top executive level affect the leadership an attentive public expects when their own officers suspect he’ll be gone soon? It may be time to provide greater security and job protection for these positions to ensure greater stability in an era of change.

Missouri is one state that has put some stability for police chiefs into law. Prior to the law police chiefs were

entirely without job protection and could be fired at any time for any reason or no reason. This practice, still the case with many chiefs across the country, results in pressure to accommodate political cronyism. The chief must decide how much compromise they can tolerate in order to remain in leadership and keep a job and viable career.

The Missouri statute requires that there exists just cause for a firing and requires some degree of due process. The language of the law states that a chief may be fired if he or she: “is unable to perform his or her duties with reasonable competence or reasonable safety as a result of a mental condition, including alcohol or substance abuse; has committed any act, while engaged in the performance of his or her duties, that constitutes a reckless disregard for the safety of the public or another law enforcement officer; has caused a material fact to be misrepresented for any improper or unlawful purpose; acts in a manner for the sole purpose of furthering his or her self-interest or in a manner inconsistent with the interests of the public or the chief’s governing body; has been found to have violated any law, statute, or ordinance which constitutes a felony; or has been deemed insubordinate or found to be in violation of a written established policy, unless such claimed insubordination or violation of a written established policy was a violation of any federal or state law or local ordinance.”

The governing or appointing authority must not only cite cause for dismissal, they must provide certain due process protections including written notice of intent, and a specific charge and statement of supporting facts.

The chief must be afforded notice of time and place of the meeting at which the dismissal will be considered and have the opportunity to present a defense to the charges with counsel. There must be a two thirds vote of the governing body to complete the firing and a written notice of the grounds after dismissal.

While these protections won't prevent a clever enemy of a chief from manufacturing "just cause", it does present a statement to the public that arbitrary or purely political and personal conflicts are not grounds for depriving a police executive of their livelihood and leadership. In an era where policing is a political football, stability of police leadership is especially important and should be protected.

Police Chiefs – Leaders, Diplomats, and Politicians

While at lunch with a former police chief of mine and the county sheriff, the sheriff remarked that he needed to start campaigning for the next election. The chief chuckled. “You’re lucky that you only have to worry about your job every four years. I have to work to keep my job every Tuesday night when the city council meets!”

Very few law enforcement executives have job protection. This reality keeps many potential candidates away from the top cop slot. As officers achieve advancement in rank, their job security remains intact until that final step behind the chief’s desk. Political whim and public opinion can unseat a police chief overnight.

Does this mean that police chiefs are necessarily politicians who must bob and weave, agree with those in power above them, and cater to the shifting winds of politics? To some degree, yes. Police chiefs are creatures of politics. They are appointed by elected officials. Some chiefs have maneuvered and manipulated their way to the top. They have deftly catered to those who can be of use to them and cleverly hindered those who might compete with them. They know how to play chess with scandal, personal weakness, egos, rumors, and rewards. It is this kind of chief that does no favors to their officers unless it benefits them personally.

This kind of chief knows who the influencers are and caters to them shamelessly. Businesses and individuals with economic influence in the community are treated differently than the average citizen. In these departments, when a patrol officer hears that the person against whom they are about to take some enforcement action says they know the chief, or threatens to have their badge, there is good reason for the officer to worry. These chiefs don't have to be corrupt, just slanted toward self-interest rather than equal treatment.

The ethical officer who earns the title of chief through their meritorious lifetime of service must still be a diplomat. The difference between the diplomatic chief and the politically motivated chief is the acceptance of the reality of losing their job. The chief who refuses to sweep things under the rug, who insists on treating all citizens equally, and who is willing to defend officers who have made controversial but reasonable decisions, must be willing to accept being fired.

The ethical chief will think first of their mission to their community. They will think second of their responsibility to their officers. Only after these two essentials are assured can an ethical chief think of themselves and their careers.

An ethical chief is not invested in preserving his or her ego. They will listen to their citizenry, listen to ideas and opinions of the officers under their command, take responsibility for decisions and the blame when they are wrong. They will give credit where credit is due and

not claim others' work as their own. They will pull every string to get funding for their agency's needs and be good and frugal stewards of the resources they have.

One of the potentially long-lasting and negative results of the current reform movement may be the gradual elimination of some of the most ethical police executives. Decisions on policy, reform, and funding are so often being made based on political expediency in complete defiance of facts, that chiefs who argue against irrational changes for the sake of change can be thrown to the wind. While some compromise is inevitable, demands on chiefs to make changes that are harmful to their officers and harmful to the mission of protecting the public must be resisted. The choice is to acquiesce to the superficial politics of the moment, or to do as little harm as possible and still keep their position in order to be a positive influence. At some point, the desire to remain and build the agency up can result in an intolerable ethical choice of doing harm.

In turn, this pushback on ethical leaders trying to stem the tide of rising crime and disorder in the face of deconstructing their police department can give rise to those political opportunists who are all too happy to satisfy political expediency to get and keep the rank of chief.

Chiefs know they can be replaced in short order. We must maintain a cadre of ethical leaders who can maneuver in the fickle realm of politics and retain their mission and character. While we thank police officers for their service, those police executives who have the backbone to stand up against the call for the dismantling

of our law enforcement institutions should be given our thanks as well.

Zero Defects: The Quest for Perfection

Can a police officer get through a shift without making a mistake? If so, can they sustain that perfection for a career? How about a physician, a factory worker, a teacher, or an engineer?

We accept mistakes as part of life. That's why we have so many safeguards in place to prevent errors. Every factory has safety and quality control rules to follow, inspection points along the process, and the threat of customer dissatisfaction and even lawsuits as an incentive for perfection.

My father worked in a WWII barracks on an Army post in the accounting department. As with any bureaucracy, there was always some new program coming down the pike. One day he came home sporting a lapel pin with the letters ZD on it. When I asked what it stood for, he explained that it meant Zero Defects. The purpose was to encourage workers toward perfection by taking responsibility for their work rather than expecting that a supervisor or inspector would just catch any error they made.

Even proponents of ZD and other quality management philosophies recognized that the goal of no mistakes is not possible. It appears that the public does not apply this reality to law enforcement. Our military recognizes the possibility of "collateral damage" when targeting enemy positions. Not so in the crime-fighting business.

With the erosion of qualified immunity police officers are more frequently avoiding imperfection by reducing officer-initiated activity. No contact, no complaint becomes the rule. Could this be playing a role in the frightening increase in violent crime? There is no doubt in this writer's mind!

As a reminder, qualified immunity (QI), is a court-developed doctrine that recognizes that police officers face situations for which there is no clearly established precedent to guide the officer's decisions. QI addresses the reality that officers face unique, often split-second decisions, for which no clearly established law or policy applies. It does not permit or forgive a decision that is wrong on its face based on what the officer knows or should have known.

Imagine a surgeon opening up a patient and thinking "I've never seen this situation before!" Does that mean that the surgeon immediately gives up on the patient? The trained surgeon uses his or her best judgment to take action to save a life. In the same way, an officer can only put to use what he or she knows to craft a solution to the event unfolding before them. Police officers may not have the luxury of calling a time out or walking away. They must be given the latitude to do the best they can, then wait for the possibility of years of litigation for a court, far removed from the crisis, to decide that the officer did the best they could do.

Recently, nurse RaDonda Vaught was convicted of manslaughter because of an error in administering medication to a 75-year-old patient. Without commenting on the appropriateness of the verdict, it is note-

worthy to consider her attorney's argument that it was an honest mistake that was partly due to systematic errors in supervision and management that should shoulder some of the blame. We almost never see doctors prosecuted in the estimated 100,000 (some say closer to 400,000) deaths due to medical errors. That's not to say that doctors should be immune, but their activities are not generally known to the public, while police officers' activities are very public. There is no profession as highly surveilled as American law enforcement. Even before body-worn cameras, ubiquitous cell phones captured police activity. These videos are inevitably posted on social media, often with erroneous, damning narratives casting libelous false information. Reams of policy are reviewed for violations in the officers' actions. Lawyers make claims that are often paid with no regard for the merits of the case. Grand juries and sometimes hostile prosecutors review the officers' actions.

No one, even fervent police advocates like this writer, seeks to diminish the necessary accountability of our armed government agents who are empowered to take life and liberty. But they must also be trusted to make necessary, complex, and gut-wrenching decisions with the continued protection of qualified immunity.

The Good Police Leader

If there was one way to be a good leader there would be one book on the shelf at the bookstore, instead of an entire section on leadership. You can lead like a Naval commander of a battleship, a major league coach, or even Jesus. You can be a transformational leader, a fierce leader, a wise leader, a trusted leader, touch hearts with fire and go from good to great. But will any of those make a good police chief?

There is no absolute template for a police executive. The diversity of American policing won't allow it. Some top cops will never be met by the officer on the line. Some chiefs still answer calls and work beside their officers. Some rose through the ranks and some are outsiders. Some were hired to solve deep problems with an agency, others fell into the job when others fell away.

There are some traits and behaviors that every citizen can appreciate and every officer can hope for.

The first on my list is realizing that the officer who faces the citizen is the first customer of the chief. Others may argue that the citizen is the first customer, but that person will be treated by the line officer whose behavior should be modeled by their leader. Officers that are berated rather than corrected, whose concerns are unheard, and whose value is unappreciated are likely to reflect that in their interactions with the public. How can a chief who treats their officers with impatience and distrust will inevitably see that reflected in the public's perception of the agency?

An effective chief will provide appropriate and relevant training to their officers. A close evaluation of performance deficiencies as determined by citizen feedback and prosecutors' observations is necessary to determine training needs. Unfortunately, politics and special interests rob police agencies of discretion in what justifies taking officers away from their police duties and into the classroom. A good chief will be creative and give the officers what they really need.

A good chief will back the blue. It seems obvious but with the political pressures to prosecute and vilify law enforcement officers, some so-called leaders willingly sacrifice their own to calm the cries of critics. Photos from some anti-police protests will show some police leaders kneeling, marching, and bearing placards to show unity with the protesters. Maybe that is a good public relations stunt in the short term, but it hardly creates confidence among the officers lining the streets amid taunts and threats of others in the crowd.

Frequent, positive communication with the public is another desirable behavior of police leaders. Instead of making press appearances only during a crisis or making a "no comment" response when called upon by the media, the chief should be in a constant process of educating and informing the citizenry. A good chief keeps the conversation going.

Speaking of conversations, a good chief will listen to their employees. Officers, administrative staff, dispatchers, and custodians all have access to information and inspiration that may escape the boss.

There are certainly times when an order must be issued and obeyed, but whenever there is an opportunity to gain insight from others, a chief should humbly seek it out.

A good chief is a good diplomat. We would like to say they should stay out of politics, but police leaders are not like federal judges who can remain independent because of their lifetime appointment. Being a police executive in most agencies is always a high-wire act without a net. I once heard a city police chief remark to his colleague, a sheriff, that the sheriff was lucky. He only had to run for office once every four years, but the chief had to run every Tuesday night at city council meeting! International diplomacy may be about compromise, but police executive diplomacy is about holding fast to immutable principles and keeping lines of communication open.

Finally, (for this lecture – the list could be much longer) a chief must dare to discipline consistently and fairly. A chief who really cares for their officers and wants to be loved by them in return may be tempted to let some things slide. But forgiveness is not a policy when it comes to maintaining high professional standards. Officers may need to be retrained, realigned, reassigned, or released.

The average tenure of a police chief these days is half of what it was 25 years ago. It is not an easy job and shouldn't be. If there is to be continued professional development of law enforcement, good chiefs are an essential ingredient in progress.

Is Paramilitary Structure Bad?

One of the terms thrown out by police critics is “paramilitary”, implying that law enforcement is an occupying force and, therefore, a bad way to operate. By definition, the term means “organized similarly to a military force” according to the dictionary. That is not inherently evil.

As we examine whether or not most law enforcement agencies are paramilitary organizations, we can look at similarities and differences.

Ranks and organization.

Most uniformed agencies parallel Army-type ranks and insignia from the rank of corporal and above. The stripes, the clusters, the bars, the stars, the hash marks, and the award ribbons are familiar sights on police uniforms. From a functional standpoint, these markings are helpful to civilians. Even if a citizen has no military background, the ranks are widely known so that a police supervisor is easily identified.

The use of hash marks or stars on the sleeve to show years of service is also a confidence builder for the public and a morale builder for the officer. Pride in service and achievements of awards are recognized throughout all industries. Office walls and shelves universally display awards, trophies, letters, and symbols of achievement. Look for them at your doctor’s office, your insurance agent’s office, the McDonald’s

manager, or your next oil change service counter. Law enforcement is no different.

Can we claim that this paramilitary ranking system comes with any disadvantages? Even the critics would be hard-pressed to cite an objection to this aspect.

Uniforms.

Other than a star dangling from a shirt, the idea of a standard police uniform wasn't very popular prior to the civil war. The specter of uniformed Redcoats running the streets of the colonies eventually faded. After every able male had donned a uniform in the War Between the States, along with vigilantism in the wake of the conflict, the idea of a police uniform was no longer distasteful and was deemed quite appropriate.

In 1970, the City of Lakewood, Colorado was carved out as an independent suburb of the Denver metropolitan area. With innovation in mind, the first person to head the city's law enforcement was Ronald Lynch. The 70s were a time of tumult, continuing from the 1960s civil rights and anti-war disruptions, assassinations, and a great mistrust in government, including law enforcement. In order to avoid the cloud of a paramilitary label, Lynch eschewed common terms and accouterments of traditional law enforcement. The agency was called a Department of Public Safety, its head was a Director, not a Chief. Its personnel were agents, not officers. Supervisors were not sergeants but agents in charge, reflecting FBI structure rather than military ranking. The uniforms consisted of a blazer and gray pants, not the typical uniform of a gun belt and badge.

It didn't work. Not only did the blazer concept lack functionality for the line agents, the public expected the police to be easily recognized with the enhancing authority of a uniform. Today's Lakewood Police are still known as agents, and still known for excellence and innovation, but sport traditional uniforms.

There are those who claim that uniformed officers arriving at a scene are inherently disruptive. There are many who find so-called "riot gear" too aggressive and provocative. This has led to the unconscionable deployment of officers in highly dangerous situations without essential protective gear. To expose an officer to serious injury for the sake of some sense of good public relations is as foolish as sending a firefighter into a blaze in their pajamas.

Firearms.

Yes, cops carry guns. They carry them constantly and visibly. As much as the idealists want to make US police like UK police, where fewer than 10% of the force carry firearms in specialized units. Those comparisons lack many values for accurate assessment. The American culture of acceptance of weapons for hunting, sporting, and self-defense along with the embedded arms rights in the Constitution has created nearly universal acceptance of police officers carrying weapons.

This doesn't equate to police being militaristic. The tactics of military operations are vastly different than the demands on police officers. Military movements are team movements that include a variety of force options, based on clear objectives, actionable intelligence, and

commenced from a position of strength. Apart from a few major law enforcement operations, there is little comparison.

As discussed below, police officers do not carry the array of weaponry available to the standard infantry soldier. They may have a stun or smoke device, but no fragmentation grenades. They are unlikely to have a “machine gun” although they may have an AR15 or other semi-automatic rifle that fires only one round per trigger pull.

Police officers generally work alone or with a limited number of team members. They operate in areas that are not labeled “enemy territory”, but from which an enemy may suddenly appear. A most striking difference is the acceptability of collateral damage. American civilian police are expected to operate with no unintentional casualties and are frequently prosecuted for their use of deadly force even when justified.

Military gear.

Misconceptions also abound when critics accuse law enforcement of “militarization” and possession of “military-grade” weaponry and “weapons of war”. Rescue vehicles, frequently the affordable military surplus armored vehicles are not used for mowing down aggressors. The transport officers into areas where firearms are actively being used or threatened. The rumble toward school shootings and other areas that may be under assault. They offer protection for people who need to be evacuated from a dangerous area. The vehicles can operate in swift water and high winds, getting rescuers in and victims out of areas that a

standard patrol vehicle could not navigate. There are zero mounted machine guns on any armored civilian police vehicles.

Camo-themed tactical uniforms are essential for a number of agencies whose environments pose a risk of exposure. Helmets with ballistics protection and other protective gear are designed to keep an officer in service and protected from disabling or deadly injuries in a threat environment.

Let's concede that police agencies operate, in many ways, as paramilitary organizations. Let's also agree that is not inherently a bad thing.

Agency Partnerships Yield Results

Murders were rare in the city where I first began working. The agency whose uniform I wore had just one full-time detective. When a murder or other major criminal event occurred that required intense investigative effort, the solution was our regional Major Case Squad. Each agency in a multi-county region offered up one or two officers, creating a pop-up detective cadre that could process dozens of leads within a critical time period.

Interagency rivalry is real, but mostly comprised of good-natured ribbing and stereotyping. Conservation officers are ‘possum cops. State Troopers are tail light chasers. Deputies are cowboys. Campus cops aren’t “real” cops, and on it went. But when it came down to having coffee at the Country Kitchen after bar closing time or dealing with a threat to the community, everyone ignored the shape of their badge and shoulder patches and sang from the same sheet of music.

One of the historic interagency conflicts has been jurisdictional disputes between local and federal law enforcement. The stereotype of the “Feds” is of them horning in on a case and not only taking over with an air of superiority but taking all the credit as well. While this makes for good television scriptwriting, the reality is that multi-jurisdictional operations involving federal and local officers are common and fruitful.

My personal experience is illustrative. When running a small agency investigating a suspected child sex

offender in the early days of the internet, I requested assistance from the FBI for digital evidence collection. A squad of technicians arrived and collected computer and paper evidence from the suspect's home. The same pros that had worked on major cases such as the explosion of TWA flight 800 in 1996 enthusiastically and methodically processed evidence at a suspect's trailer in a small town at my request.

When I was head of a campus police agency there was a series of thefts from the mailroom in the student center. A call to the U.S. Postal Inspectors launched an investigation that involved installing surveillance equipment and questioning a number of people. A search warrant was obtained and a suspect was arrested.

In another suspected case of academic fraud involving potential foreign abuse of student visas, I was able to refer the matter to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for investigation as a potential matter of national security.

I've had great cooperation from state agencies as well. Crime scenes that were too big for my agency personnel resulted in a call to the state – in my case the Colorado Bureau of Investigation – and their van and technicians swiftly rolled into town. In another case involving suspected financial fraud, the CBI offered their forensic accounting investigators to nail down the case that involved banking transactions across several states. In yet another case CBI assisted in a sexual assault investigation with several suspects who had consented

to a polygraph examination and the state's experts devoted their expertise, helping to clear the suspects.

Task forces involving multiple agencies and often funded largely by participants from federal law enforcement can address crimes that cross jurisdictional lines. Experience and research show that offenders are not always specialized in their crime of choice or by any geographic boundaries. Drug dealers often cross international borders and use both interstate highways and smaller state backroad routes. Scofflaws may be burglars who drive impaired with suspended driver's licenses and hunt wildlife illegally. Sharing information among various elements of law enforcement is critical in finding and prosecuting the small number of offenders who commit a large percentage of crimes.

Law enforcement trainers and emergency managers know the importance of training across multiple agencies for mass casualty events. The school shooting in Uvalde, Texas had a horrific result due in part to the failure to coordinate the nearly 400 officers who responded from dozens of law enforcement agencies.

I never cared what color uniform showed up to help me or my officers, and I didn't care who was calling for backup if my officers could help. We'll keep our trash talk about other agencies, but that won't keep any dedicated officer from hauling butt to help another.

Updates on Police Recruiting

A recent study makes the police recruiting crisis sound even bleaker. A sample headline reads “Recent college grads are ‘emotionally’ unprepared for 9 to 5 jobs, study shows”. The research cited was conducted by a team who conducted an online survey of over 1000 adults between the ages of 22 and 28 who had earned a four-year college degree. Among the culprits are social media, gaming, political and cultural divisiveness, pandemic disruptions, and other factors associated with a rise in suicidality, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Other studies indicated that participation in the workforce by men ages 24-54 is matched only with the Great Depression Era, with the biggest drop in the 25-34 age group of men. The obvious and distressing difference is that in 1940 workers were begging for jobs, whereas today jobs are begging for workers. While theoretically, women would make up half of the population of police officers to represent their presence in the population, young men still make up the majority of police recruits in most cadet classes. Their absence from the pool of candidates contributes greatly to the recruiting crisis.

The Army is also suffering from a dearth of qualified volunteers for enlistment. The last fiscal year saw recruiters missing their goal by 25% reducing the branch’s strength by 10,000 soldiers, with projections that will see that shortage double. Youth obesity rates

have increased, test scores have declined, and interest in military service has decreased significantly.

When today's police officers are asked if they would choose police work again or recommend it to others, their answers of "No!" are more frequent and emphatic today than ever before. The number of men and women who are physically and mentally fit, have no significant substance use issues, and have no significant criminality in their background is small enough. Finding those with a spirit for adventure, service, and sacrifice in the face of today's hypercriticism of police and a general disdain for authority and traditional institutions is a challenge that seems insurmountable.

A host of strategies are being used across the country to address police recruiting. For example, a recent class of 39 Philadelphia police recruits includes several middle-aged graduates, ages 47, 55, and 44. These newly minted police officers, most of who are older than their academy instructors, bring a level of enthusiasm and maturity that can serve an agency well for many years.

In New Orleans, a strategy to replace some police officer roles with civilians to increase the number of officers on the streets netted only three hires out of fifty available positions. Meanwhile, the numbers in uniformed police ranks keep slipping as New Orleans' murder rate is increasing.

In Seattle, a city in a state that has been notorious for kicking away support for law enforcement, 180 officers left the police department in 2020, and 66 more officers have left so far this year. "I have about 1,080 deployable

officers. This is the lowest I've seen in our department," said Police Chief Adrian Diaz. Meanwhile, in a poll that should make politicians shake, the great majority of Seattle voters want more cops and more money for public safety. State legislator Joe Schmick admits "We're handcuffing (police) and our communities just aren't as safe as they once were." Whether recruiters can overcome the recent years' anti-police sentiments remains to be seen.

LAPD Chief Michel Moore traveled to Glendale, Arizona to visit baseball's spring training facility. His purpose was not to catch some rising stars before they become famous but to catch the attention of some of those hopefuls who might turn to law enforcement with the famous law enforcement agency. With a personnel shortage of 300 officers, the Chief had hopes that some of the audience might join others from ex-athletes from the NFL and NBA. "Going into that sport, they have attributes like teamwork, athleticism, and emotional intelligence that if they hadn't thought of coming in and transitioning those into law enforcement, they should," Moore said.

With bigger cities competing for officers, smaller agencies are losing officers to the allure of higher pay and better benefits. In Michigan City, Indiana, for example, Chief Steve Forker says his agency has become a training ground where officers can gain experience to be hired at an immediate pay increase. "Currently at three years on LaPorte (Indiana 12 miles away) Police Department, they're at \$68,000. Three years at the Michigan City Police Department, currently \$54,631. That's a \$14,000 difference."

Incentives such as better assurance of disability benefits, housing allowances, child care, and hiring bonuses can help. But what the law enforcement profession needs the most is a restoration of public confidence and support to stir the hearts and minds of those who can step up to serve in a noble cause.

Precision Policing: The Next Law Enforcement Era

“The gun violence spikes seen in 2020 and again in 2021 in many cities show the crime reductions experienced over the last three decades are fragile (Major Cities Chiefs Association, 2021). Cities must have comprehensive strategies to create and maintain safe communities.” This is the thesis of a white paper published by www.publicsafetyresearch.org of the University of Cincinnati.

As crime rates, political power, and public attitudes rise and fall over time, the eternal question among academics and public officials is whether society can impact criminal activity while maintaining liberty. Numbers on graphs seem to correlate increased violent crime with reduced public trust, reduced criminal justice funding, and reduced numbers of police officers. Would a new philosophical or tactical approach push those violent crime numbers down? The premise of Precision Policing 2.0 is that a new era of policing can.

From the use of radios and automobiles that removed officers from neighborhood beats, to calls for training and education out of the tumult of the 1960s and 70s, to emphasis on professionalism and effective police response, to community-oriented policing, to intelligence-led policing, law enforcement may now move to Precision Policing.

Precision Policing is undergirded by 4 tenants:

1. Evidence-Based Crime & Disorder Prevention
2. Community Engagement & Protection
3. Transparency & Accountability
4. Officer Performance, Safety, and Wellness

None of these seem spectacularly new, but technology makes evidence-based crime fighting more precise. Crime mapping has been around since the invention of the pin map. Where there is an incident, stick a pin at its location on the corkboard with the map over it. Find a cluster, increase your patrol. Red pins might be homicides, blue burglaries, yellow sex assaults, white armed robberies. But other than increasing patrols or using manpower-intensive surveillance, what more could an agency do?

A sophisticated pin map is computer modeling such as Compstat. Criminal acts, or disorderly actions, were correlated with potential strategies and resourcing to respond to problems that were charted. Problem-oriented policing sought out root causes that may or may not have a law enforcement solution, but in the spirit of community policing, police agencies could cooperate with governmental and private entities to resolve crime and disorder problems.

All of these strategies and interventions were engaged during a period of lowering crime rates, but they all preceded today's rocketing violent crime rates. The deficit may lie in methods of community engagement and department transparency. With most current crime event tracking, neighborhoods and their population are targeted for more police intervention. In the attention given to proactive policing in an area, local residents

may be caught up in law enforcement contacts that are counterproductive for the growth of trust. New York City's stop and frisk deployment, for example, was effective in reducing crime and increasing arrests but resulted in concerns about unequal treatment of citizens subjected to stops, questioning, and searches. Law enforcement thinks that crime suppression is welcomed, but the public is also concerned about liberty and equal treatment. Over-identifying a suspect population can be avoided if police focus on the actions of offenders that are known or discoverable.

What police officers intuitively know is that a relatively small number of people are responsible for a disproportionate amount of criminal activity. Crime analysts reduce that intuition to numbers: 1% of the population is responsible for 25% of crime while 3% are responsible for 50% of crime. One percent of neighborhoods are responsible for 100% of shootings. Small geographic areas and relatively small numbers of victims are subject to repeated crimes. A principle of Precision Policing is to respond to these micro populations rather than subject larger populations to police sweeps hoping to catch these chronic, prolific offenders.

As surprising as it may be to some, 70% or more of shots fired are not reported to police. Technologies like ShotSpotter not only can illicit a real-time notification for immediate police response, but can "pin-map" locations of frequent firearms discharges whether a suspect or police response results or not. It also provides locations for investigators to collect spent

brass or other firearms evidence that can be entered into a database to help solve past or future cases.

In addition to technology, such as ShotSpotter, engaging the community in intelligence gathering can focus law enforcement efforts. Often, offenders are known to residents of an area but will only be revealed where there are non-confrontational law enforcement contacts gleaned from personal interactions. The transparency component involves more than complaints, use of force, and policy issues, but revealing, as appropriate, the efforts and intentions of the agency to solve crime and engender trust.

These efforts require resources that allow dedicated officers to be untethered from their radios. The so-called “tyranny of 911” interferes with many prevention and collaboration efforts as urgent calls for service make it appear that officers taken off immediate response duty are not being productive. Training for trust and engagement as an add-on to tactical response and officer safety has the opportunity cost of taking an officer from the patrol car to a chair in the training room.

The efforts of police leaders to restore order to disordered communities can lead to long-term strategies to maintain orderly communities. Investing in Precision Policing is a path to lower crime, healthier communities, and healthier officers.

Mission Creep in Policing

The term “mission creep” came into the American vocabulary in the early 1990s in the context of U.S. military intervention. The classic example, and perhaps among the first use of the term, is America’s involvement in Somalia where President Bush sent in 30,000 troops on a mission under the United Nations peacekeeping operations. After those troops were attacked by a powerful Somalian warlord, President Clinton expanded attacks. Post-911 engagements grew from punishing terrorists to nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan. Regardless of the merits of any of those actions, they were not anticipated at the inception of the first troop employment.

In policing, mission creep began a long time ago, but two things happened in the last century that are likely causes. The first was a greater presence of police officers in cities around the country in the 1920s. The second was the availability of the telephone beginning around the same time. About a third of the households in the U.S. had telephones in 1920, nearly two-thirds by 1950, and nearly 100% today, with 911 access to law enforcement beginning in 1968.

The acceptability and availability of government help were just a phone call away and the police always answered the phone and were willing to help. Of course, from time to time officers would say there was nothing they could do, but they showed up and did the best they could to resolve whatever problem confronted them. Domestic violence shelters and laws didn’t appear until

the 1970s. Child abuse hotlines are barely a decade old. Homeless shelters and mental health facilities weren't ubiquitous and regulated until relatively recent years. The police had no massive social services network to pass problems to.

Police officers delivered groceries, babies, bad news, and lectures to juveniles. They taught safety and crime prevention to clubs and classes. They drove drunks home, herded errant livestock off of the streets, shook their finger at speedy drivers, and played referee to fights. They were open 24 hours a day, radio dispatched, and mobile. They did it all, and all of it was expected of them. Until 2020.

The disinformation movement, claiming mass murder of innocents by police officers, advocating for radical reform and defunding of law enforcement, wove the narrative that cops do not have the skills to handle all that they have taken on to do.

Paradoxically, just as social agencies were maturing in capacity, policing entered into the frenzied world of "community-oriented policing" with the encouragement of federal dollars and think tank theorists. Many of the community policing efforts were a throwback to the days of beat cops and problem solvers. Police agencies were encouraged to immerse themselves in any community effort that would improve relationships and have a trickle-down effect on reducing crime. A lot of good things came from the community policing era, which President Biden touts as essential to police reform. And yet its failure seems to be proven by the

anti-police sentiment that should have been eradicated in the previous two decades.

As governments, local and federal, attempt to address social problems they often do so by passing laws with criminal penalties. The police are pulled into social control roles ever more deeply, expanding their mission beyond fighting traditional violent and property crimes.

The pendulum's swing now seems to be the extraction of law enforcement from the multitude of expectations once thrust upon it. Some good results are showing up with co-responder programs or complete diversion of things like civil disputes and mental health calls from the police. This philosophy has not eliminated the police role in responding to dangerous situations in which unarmed civilians should be reluctant to engage.

To keep cops out of the drug war and the so-called "school to prison" pipeline, efforts to decriminalize drug possession and remove police from schools are happening while drug overdose deaths and school shootings command the headlines.

While politicians and interest groups conduct grand social experiments at the cost of dollars and lives, police dispatchers are still answering 911 calls and officers are still out there solving problems in the minefield of human dysfunction.

Schizophrenic Political Leadership

Schizophrenia is a disorder that affects a person's ability to think, feel, and behave clearly. It is a diagnosis assigned to an individual with the requisite symptoms and behavior. In a broader sense, the description can fit some leadership styles and group behavior. Can you imagine working under a leader who cannot make up their mind and travel in one logical direction? If you can, then you know what police officers are facing.

One example is the continued desperate state of affairs of the Portland Police Bureau. After 14 months of continuous civil disturbances, the 50 officer Rapid Response Team designed for addressing violence in unlawful assemblies, walked away from that assignment. In a schizophrenic protest of her own, Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty sharply rebuked the officers for resigning. The irony of her constant demand that the unit be disbanded in the first place, then fussing about it being de facto disbanded by the officers that comprise it, seems to be lost to her.

The officers, who will keep their normal assignments since appointment to the response team was voluntary, walked away after one of its members was criminally charged with an assault on a reporter, based on her complaint and review of video of the disturbance. Hardesty is quoted as saying "I remain deeply concerned these RRT resignations are yet another example of a rogue paramilitary organization that is unaccountable to the elected officials and residents of Portland." When a member of the unit is being

prosecuted for an act occurring under the most chaotic of conditions and other officers are being closely investigated for potential prosecution, Hardesty's claim of lack of accountability rings hollow if not downright nefarious.

The reporter, who may or may not have a legitimate claim, is like many media members who expect to dance in the thunderstorm and not get wet. Media privilege does not mean that they can break the law just because they are covering law breakers, nor are they immune from obeying lawful orders to disperse.

Portland's Police Bureau has been forbidden from using video surveillance on protestors even in areas attacked during what the media typically refers to as "mostly peaceful" protests. They have also been restricted from using standard riot control munitions while being attacked by commercial grade pyrotechnics, bottles, and rocks. I am reminded of the Biblical account of the slaves of Egypt when the Pharaoh told the slave masters "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota" (Exodus 5).

We see the same kind of hypocrisy in the nation's capitol after the January 6th attack. President Biden recently, again, used Capital Police Officer Sicknick's death as a weapon against his political foes. Sicknick's tragic death was possibly a result of the attack that day, but from a stroke to which he succumbed the day after the incursion. The narrative of his death varies depending its usefulness in a political agenda.

Media headlines proclaim that Colorado Congresswoman Lauren Boebert refuses to support the awarding of medals to the Capitol Police Officers who served during the attack. Boebert stated, however, in contrast to the implication that she is snubbing the officers that ““Once again Nancy Pelosi and House Democrats prove that there is no level they won't stoop to. Using the death of an officer in April to try and score cheap political points is shameful.”

It is hypocritical for the House of Representatives to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (yet to reach the Senate) which eliminates qualified immunity protections, eliminates police from schools, and increases the ways that officers and agencies can be held under the thumb of Federal authorities, then ooze emotion about the officers that worked to protect them.

Police officers continue to be caught in the crossfire of conflicting sentiments and proposals from Washington, DC to their own capitol cities and local governments. No one is blaming those officers who walk away.

About The Author



This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.