

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2013

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

To gain new insights on leadership, the *BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* engaged police chiefs in documenting their own paths and invited leaders to participate in various audio and video forums to tell their stories and discuss the future of policing and police leadership.

Please visit our website, <http://bjaleader.org>, to learn more about this project and to access a broad array of interactive, multimedia resources.

The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Bill Geller, project strategist Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

In Their Own Words: Police Leaders on Leadership Discussion Series - Leader Profiles

by
Nancy McKeon

#1: Looking Back – Why They Do It

- They are often outsiders who won the position over internal candidates who may well have been supported by officers inside the department.
- They can be seen as political hires – the mayor’s spy now in charge and looming over the ranks.
- Frequently they encounter an internal culture of weakened morale.
- The outsider can encounter an “old boys’ network” fueled by its own rituals and practices.
- The police union can be entrenched and powerful.
- The local media can be skeptical, poised to pounce.
- And, finally, the community itself may be angry. Literally, citizens may be picketing.

These “day one” recollections are among those of experienced leaders looking back on their careers. As part of the core work of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, a large and diverse group of police chiefs agreed to create their individual leadership profiles.

The police chiefs developed their profiles along a timeline of the major positions they have held over the course of their careers. For each position, they described the origin of the role, the specific challenges they faced, the major steps they took to address those challenges, and the sustainability of their achievements after they left the role. They also reflected on what most influenced their development as leaders and what challenges will likely face their successors in the coming decades.

The collection of profiles provides an engrossing set of narratives and a wealth of data to draw upon as we shape leaders for the future. *In Their Own Words: Police Leaders on Leadership* features three short papers drawn from the profiles. Each paper highlights a key aspect of leadership and is illustrated with the chiefs’ real-world examples. Each short piece is followed by a set of exploratory questions. Including this first piece - #1: Looking Back – Why They Do It – there are two others:

#2 Frontloading – They Expect You to Lead

#3 Having the Stuff – It Really Can be Lonely at the Top

Audiences for these short papers include current leaders and aspiring leaders at all levels. Each paper is followed by five questions to provoke reflection, discussion, more questions, and other activities. We hope the papers and questions find their way into training sessions, conference sessions, local staff meetings, and other venues. This discussion series serves as a companion work and links to other products from the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership web site.

So, at the end of the day, what keeps these leaders leading? Despite the considerable challenges of the job, the most enduring lesson from the profiles is that successful chiefs embrace their role with passion and the desire to make a difference. Here are a few of our leaders in their own words:

Reflecting back on my career and observations over 40 plus years I believe that the most effective police leaders have a deep and abiding passion for the profession and they have a genuine interest in making their department and the community a better place. (Sweeney)

Leadership positions are a gift and regardless of the cynicism we all have, a leader can make a huge impact on an organization and its people. A police leader can have a huge impact on people, particularly vulnerable people, and we should never underestimate what can be accomplished. (Kerlikowske)

As these brief excerpts suggest, inherent in the gift of leadership is the ability to instill pride in the work and profession of policing. Another chief reflects on learning this lesson early on in his leadership career:

Most employees want to be viewed as being good at what they do and they want to feel proud of their work. Engaging them in taking a leadership role in programs and practices not followed by others at the time gave them a sense of being a part of something that was unique and helped develop pride in what they were doing... This [early] experience also reinforced [for me] the importance of developing a sense of ownership in the organization and pride in what it does. (Stephens)

Chief Stephens' profile goes on to reveal that he was able to carry that lesson with him to the other organizations entrusted to his care over the years:

[I] challenged and engaged employees in working to make the department a better place to work and more effective in policing the community. This was a department filled with people who were not particularly proud of the place they worked. While some were confused equating fear of the police with respect – most were looking for an organization that was professional. Most responded very well to being engaged in the department's efforts to change.

And years later:

It is still possible to move an organization forward and contribute to community safety in an environment of significant internal turmoil. Although officers will support the union by not challenging what the leadership does – most will continue to do their jobs and still want to be thought of as professionals and respected for what they do.

The chiefs (see list below) reported that they enjoyed the retrospective and the opportunity to gain new perspective on their own paths. We thank them for their generous contribution to our project.

#1: Looking Back – Why They Do It
Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it is likely that a chief will walk into a complicated situation on his or her first day on a new job?
2. As they take on a new role, do experienced chiefs have a greater advantage than a brand new chief? In what way? Why or when might a brand new chief have a greater advantage?
3. What is the relationship between personal ambition and passion for making a difference? Is one self-centered and the other selfless? What have you observed in the leaders around you?
4. One chief writes in his profile “despite the cynicism we all have....” Do you agree that cynicism is a professional hazard in policing? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree that most people want to do good work and be recognized for it? What have you seen leaders do to create an environment where that can happen?

Profile Authors

- Lee Baca
Sheriff, Los Angeles, CA Sheriff's Department
- Anthony Batts
Chief, Oakland, CA PD
Chief, Long Beach, CA PD
- Jim Chu
Chief, Vancouver, BC PD**
- John Diaz
Chief, Seattle, WA PD**
- Ed Davis
Commissioner, Boston, MA PD
Superintendent, Lowell, MA PD
- Alana Ennis
Chief, Burlington, VT PD
Chief, Duke University, Durham NC
Director of Public Safety – UNC-Chapel Hill
- Terrance W. Gainer
Chief, United States Capitol Police
Executive Assistant Chief, Washington DC Metro PD
Director, Illinois State Police
- Jeff Halstead
Chief, Ft. Worth, TX PD
Phoenix, PD*
- Harold Hurtt
Houston, TX PD
Phoenix, AZ PD (Chief)*
Oxnard, CA PD*
Phoenix, AZ PD (Asst. Chief)*
- Gil Kerlikowske
Chief, Seattle, WA PD
Commissioner, Buffalo, NY PD
Chief, Ft. Pierce, FL*
Chief, Port St. Lucie, FL*
St. Petersburg, FL*
- Bill Landsdowne
Chief, San Diego, CA PD
Chief, San Jose, CA PD
Chief, Richmond, CA PD
- Tom Manger
Chief, Montgomery County, MD PD
Chief, Fairfax County, VA PD
- Rick Meyers
Chief, Newport News, VA*
Chief, Colorado Springs, CO PD
Chief, Appleton, WI PD
Chief, Lisle, IL PD
Chief, Plymouth, MI PD
- Rodney Monroe
Chief, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC PD
Chief, Richmond, VA PD
Chief, Macon, GA PD
Washington DC Metro PD*
- Tom Nestle
Philadelphia, PA PD
Upper Moreland, PA PD
- Phil Potter
Chief, Huntersville, NC PD
Chief, Piqua, OH PD
- Darrel Stephens
Chief, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC PD
Chief, St. Petersburg, FL PD
Chief, Newport News, VA PD
Chief, Largo, FL PD
- Tom Sweeney
Chief, Bridgeport, CT PD
Deputy Chief, Westchester County, NY PD
Deputy Chief, Yonkers, NY PD
Kansas City, MO PD
- Robert White
Chief, Louisville, KY Metro PD
Chief, Greensboro, NC PD
Washington DC PD*

*Not included in profile.

**Appointed from within

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