

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

### **#2 Frontloading – They Expect You to Lead**

*Introductory Note: As part of the core work of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, selected police chiefs agreed to create their individual leadership profiles. 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 brief papers with companion exploratory questions to be used in a wide variety of venues. Each paper highlights a key aspect of leadership and is illustrated with the chiefs' real-world examples from the roles they have held over the course of their careers.*

Incoming leaders typically find that they must move quickly on multiple paths. One chief explains it this way: “As a new Chief, I frontloaded a lot of work. I spoke to any community group who wanted to hear me, and I attended many more internal events where I could talk with staff formally and informally. I felt like a ‘Politician’ building up credits in the cookie jar, and I worked towards people getting to know me better” (Chu). The reference to the political aspect of a chief’s role permeates the profiles.

The chiefs report that their most significant challenges are often the internal ones. Many describe this overall internal challenge as nothing less than bringing their new agency into the 21st century: “[The] Department [was] living 20-30 years in the past, on a reputation of excellence” (Batts); “My priority was to create a 21st Century organizational culture of leadership and education for all sworn and professional staff with core values that are constitutionally based” (Baca).

Where a chief faces a sweeping change challenge, a first move can be to establish a structure and process for defining a new mission and values: “In order to meet these challenges, I followed a similar plan that I used in my former agency in establishing a Transition Committee (later renamed Continuous Improvement Committee) in order to establish a common Vision, Mission, and Values Statements for the agency that all officers could accept. The committee represented all ranks and positions in the agency....They identified the needs of the agency through the SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats] methods” (Potter).

The profiles reveal that, overwhelmingly, the first thing new chiefs turn to is staff, from the top ranks to the front lines: “I realized shortly into my tenure that I had to change the culture, and I began to do this by hiring and promoting from the outside. We also started the process of accreditation from CALEA” (Ennis).

Many chiefs share the belief that change cannot happen successfully unless supervision is right. The profiles describe different barriers and approaches to replacing, promoting, and hiring. Here is one approach that combines re-structuring, new roles, and change training with external experts: “Change the organization through training and proper supervision. Revamp the supervisory structure and select new supervisors who were trained and engaged in change management. Offsite department-wide change seminars employing strategic change facilitators from the private sector” (Manger). Here is another approach based on greater accountability: “Create various levels of accountability within [the] organization [to offset] a very strong ‘good old boy’ system. Managers had been assigned and promoted based on personal relationships with [the] former mayor and chief. [There was] little to no diversity within [the] organization, [a] rising crime rate, and little interaction with residents” (Monroe).

Many of the chiefs combine changes in supervision with efforts to open up the organization through participative problem solving: “I presented each Sergeant with an operation-

al problem and tasked them with developing solutions that were implemented department-wide. I also changed the decision-making process so that squad sergeants were provided with the authority to make squad-level decisions without input from the [lieutenants]” (Nestel). With candor typical of the profiles, there is this cautionary note: “[I] started over 20 internal workgroups to work on Department initiatives. That turned out to be too many and some never produced a work product. I did not have the time to ‘shepherd’ all of these projects. I should have better prioritized them” (Manger).

While launching internal initiatives, successful new leaders realize they must work with equal energy to build external visibility and relationships throughout the community. As Chief Chu noted above, it is politically savvy to frontload your community events and accept all invitations. Another chief put it this way: “It took me many months to learn the history of politics in this city, and I was very cautious about declining an invitation for any public meeting” (Halsted).

As policing continues to move toward an integrated vision of public safety, Chief Hurtt’s experience underscores the value of a broad network: “The thing that helped me the most was talking to elected officials, business leaders, community leaders, local chiefs and sheriffs, federal authorities, religious leaders, community groups, education leadership, groups of officers, union officials, [sergeants, lieutenants, captains], asst. chiefs, and executive assistant chiefs, and [having] the department personnel identify who they recommended for my leadership team.”

Successful leaders in all sectors move on multiple paths. And all successful leaders realize, as the profiles reflect, that they must rise to the simple but heart-stopping truth that “employees expect you to lead” (Hurtt).

#2: Frontloading – They Expect You to Lead  
Discussion Questions

1. We hear about a “honeymoon period” that a new leader has. What does that typically mean?
2. Why do you think the leadership profiles speak of the need for a new chief to move quickly on multiple paths?
3. One chief reports that he put 20 task forces in place and did not have the time to oversee them all, with the result that some did not produce. Could an argument be made that a leader should make internal improvements before turning his or her attention to the external community?
4. Several chiefs point out that early on in a new role they went out of their way to accept all invitations to speak to external organizations or groups. Isn't that risky when, as one chief notes, it takes months to learn the political landscape? Why or why not?
5. Why is it “heart stopping” for leaders to face the reality that employees expect them to lead?

## 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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