

# ESTABLISHING & MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS



**KEITH D. BUSHEY**

*Police Chief Selection & Survival...*

***DEVELOPING and MAINTAINING***

# **RELATIONSHIPS**

**With**

***MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS***

**Keith D. Bushey**

**THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOKLET MAY BE REPRODUCED, IN PART  
OR IN WHOLE, WITHOUT PERMISSION. ATTRIBUTION IS  
APPRECIATED**

## INTRODUCTION

If ever there was an imperfect situation, it is the issue of how best to develop, maintain, and ultimately survive in the imperfect world of municipal politics. With respect to this issue, the typical components of art and science are augmented by the very real issues of luck, timing and behavioral chemistry. The overwhelming percentage of law enforcement executives will agree that dealing with crime and criminals is the easy part of being a chief; the more difficult challenge -- in a great many instances -- is the often Herculean task of developing and maintaining an appropriate and productive relationship with city managers, mayors, and other elected and appointed officials.

Those who assert that democracy is horrible and problematic, but still the best form of government known to mankind, really know what they are talking about, and the relationship between well-educated and experienced criminal justice executives and often less experienced appointed or elected officials is a perfect example of the problems that can result. The big issue is not good or bad, but rather the absolutely predictable dynamics that can emerge because of conflicting personalities, mutual lack of understanding, different backgrounds, and varying levels of experience and education.

Every situation can be different because every individual is different, and there is no such thing as one strategy that is applicable to every situation. In creating this document I have reflected on not just my thoughts and experiences, but those of a number of other law enforcement executives who possess wisdom and scar tissue stemming from their experiences as well. Several city managers have also graciously provided very valuable perspective.

Since the most common municipal organizational structure is the city manager–city council configuration, that is the model I have used in this booklet. However there are other municipal organizational configurations, including the strong mayoral form of government with a city administrator instead of a city manager probably being the most prominent, where the issues and strategies discussed in this booklet are equally applicable. While a few titles are different, the challenges remain essentially the same.

I hope that this document will be helpful to the critical issues of police chief success and survival. However, realize that there are likely situations beyond those that I have discussed that merit additional reflection and discussion. This is not a set of instructions on what to do or what not to do, but rather those factors and considerations that may very well play a role in your interaction with appointed and elected municipal officials.

Good luck (and luck is among the components of your success)!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to the following law enforcement and municipal executives for their input in the creation of this publication: Thomas Alber, David Allen, Ronald Bayne, David Boggs, Judy Bradshaw, Jake Bushey, Troy Butzlaff, Dean Crisp, Joseph De Ladurantey, Jennifer Harris, David Hinig, Larry Horak, John Horsman, Gary Hoving, Chris Jeffers, Les Kachurek, Anne Kirkpatrick, Roy Minter, Talmadge Moore, Judy Pal, Daniel Primozic, Tim Plotts, Charles Robb, Joseph Santoro, Paul Shastany, Raymond Sherrard, Kim Wadding, Dan Watson, Joseph Wellington and Terri Wilfong.

## INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS & REALITIES

There are a few baseline issues that truly need to be understood by those who seek to become police chiefs.

**It is what it is and people are who they are, just accept it.** The overwhelming percentage of elected officials in our municipalities typically do not possess the education or municipal wisdom of most law enforcement executives. This reality often gives rise to misunderstandings, disagreements, and a lack of appreciation for the magnitude of the challenges facing today's police executive. The wise police chief is one who works hard finding the patience to deal with these realities, and avoids permitting frustrations to be reflected in his or her demeanor. Just like when playing cards, you have no choice but to play the hand that you have been dealt. While the overwhelming percentage of elected officials are basically decent people wanting to do a decent job, there are times when yesterday's village idiot becomes tomorrow's councilperson. Dealing with crime is sometimes the easiest part of being a police chief!

**Politics cannot be divorced from you or from your department.** There is a big difference between being influenced by politics and engaging in politics. Public safety is typically the most critical issue facing our communities and a key topic in every aspect of the political process. To the extent humanly possible, the wise police chief is one who is able to avoid becoming involved in municipal politics. *Police chiefs need to be politically astute, but apolitical while working in a political environment.*

**You do not have the right to engage in confrontational behavior.** Your behavior cannot be separated from the well being of your department, and the few moments of satisfaction you may gain from returning a verbal salvo from an impulsive politician may result in some real damage to your department. The manner in which you deal with a situation is likely to be remembered long after the situation that gave rise to your actions. Should you act foolishly, the real losers will be the citizens and the men and women who work with you.

**Not all chief positions bode well for the future.** As an example, a city with a history of a revolving door for police chiefs may or may not be all that great for your resume, and there are times when moving into campus law enforcement can hinder a return to a conventional police chief's position.

With respect to campus positions in particular, don't permit the occasional perception of difficulty in returning to the municipal environment become a self-fulfilling prophecy. With the intense focus on emergency preparedness, emergency situations, active shooters, aggressive outreach to students, faculty and parents, campus law enforcement leadership can be a great stepping stone to other challenging positions, especially in emphasizing the balance between pro-active policing and customer service.

**The perfect political environments are few and far between.** The overwhelming reality is that most police chiefs face some degree of challenge in dealing with elected and/or appointed public officials; it is just a matter of degree. Those who might choose to wait for the political winds to shift in hopes of an improved political environment are likely to have a long wait ahead of them. The time and mental energy is better spent developing the skills and wisdom to play the hand that you have been dealt.

**The average tenure for police chiefs is typically three to four years.** Certainly there are exceptions to this average, with some chiefs lasting for many years. Limited tenure (forced, persuaded, etc.) might be fair or unfair, merited or not merited, and influenced by personalities as well as performance. In many instances the most significant factor in a termination is a lack of compatible chemistry between the chief and the person to whom he or she reports. For this reason, unless based on obvious cause, termination as a police chief does not typically have a stigma attached.

**Be honest with yourself - Do you have the skills to succeed as chief?** To some extent, every police chief position is a learning experience where people increase their knowledge and sharpen their skills. However it is critical to be honest with yourself in assessing whether or not you are ready for that next step. Unfortunately, our profession has no shortage of examples where people, with the very best of intentions, have gotten in over their heads and have not done well. Are you truly ready for that next

step? If not, you may be doing yourself and the people in your agency some long-term harm professionally.

When moving on to another department, anyone younger than retirement age needs to give particularly serious thought and calculate the likelihood of being able to attain that magic age while still employed. The thought of losing your position a couple years shy of retirement eligibility, without another position in the offing, is not a good thought.

While taking information seriously, realize that what you hear about a city and its officials is most likely heavily influenced by the experiences and/or perspective of the person who provided the information, and may or may not reflect the same opinion of others. Numerous police chiefs have unhappy endings, and typically share their negative experiences and perceptions with their colleagues. If all the negative things that are said about all of the departments where a new chief is being sought were accurate, no one would ever apply for any department!

The fact that the previous chief had serious difficulties does not mean that the next chief will suffer the same fate; it may well just be an issue as to whether or not someone is a “good fit.” Also recognize the reality that most of us (yes, most of us!), at least initially, blame someone else or something else for our failures, and share these negative perceptions with others. Just reflect on all of the situations where some of our fellow chiefs have advised colleagues against applying for certain positions. Without suggesting that some situations are not truly toxic and may well be legitimately avoided, sometimes the issue is one of individual suitability.

## **DO YOUR HOMEWORK AND LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**

In deciding whether or not to apply for a police chief’s position, do your homework.

**Understand the municipality.** Learn everything you can about the city, the nature of the population, the various industries and neighborhoods, the tax base, the financial stability, degree of undeveloped land, demographics, and all of the other issues that relate to the city’s nature, health, vitality, and

future. Is the City fiscally sustainable and if questionable, are there discussions considering potential contracting out law enforcement services? Beyond helpful data, this information will be valuable in assessing the likelihood and degree of potentially necessary organizational growth. Reviewing the previous three to five years of the police department's budget can also be informative.

**Understand the municipal culture.** Is there significant activism or other activities that will have an impact on the police department? Examples of such potential activities might include: marijuana enforcement, needle exchange, degree of vice enforcement and the entire spectrum of social and legal concerns surrounding the homelessness issue.

**Understand the issues.** Every city has issues, but what are the various issues facing the city where you may apply? Burning neighborhood issues: perceptions of racism, pending ballot measures, potential new revenue initiatives, etc? Remember, there are times when situations that may not seem all that significant to you are huge issues with some segments of the population.

**Understand the city's reputation.** How is the city perceived by other cities? Does it have an elitist or standoffish reputation, is the department seen as a team player and good municipal neighbor, or something in between?

**Understand the political climate.** Seek to determine the perspective of the council (which includes the mayor) and city manager regarding critical matters involving the police department. Those perspectives may differ. An example may be a council that is seeking quick change in some areas, but the city manager may believe a more gradual approach is preferable. Are there voting blocs on the council, and who appears to have special strength and wisdom?

**Understand the politicians.** Identify and learn what you can (within reason) about each elected official, including his or her background, positions on certain issues, passions, and perceived personal qualities. This type of insight can be helpful to the process of developing an appropriate relationship. *Understanding the politics of the various elected*



*officials can be helpful, but “playing” politics can be fatal. Avoid the temptation to say or do things in your interactions that might suggest similar or dissimilar political beliefs or positions.*

**Understand the city manager.** You really need to know what you can about this person! In most instances, this is the person who will lead the selection and hiring processes. It is likely that he or she has some experience, or at least some level of knowledge, on the issue of police chief selection. The city manager most likely has in mind a number of qualities that are being both sought and avoided, and can also be both positively and negatively influenced by things you may say or have done. Understanding any bias(s) or preferences is critical. Learn of the tenure and work history; is he or she likely to remain in the position for an appreciable period of time? A word of caution: learn what you can, but be mindful that information is only as good as the source, and some (or all) of what you hear may not be accurate.

Recognize that the city manager will pick the candidate felt to be the best fit for the position and who is likely to be a positive and contributing member of the city’s management team. The city manager usually works very closely with the chief and will want someone who connects with his or her personality and skills. The process is likely to be influenced by factors beyond skills and experience, such as the personal dimensions discussed throughout this booklet.

**Are you likely to be able to work with the city manager and council?**

This question can be hard to answer and often develops with experience. However, there can be times when the conflicts in personalities and behaviors are so apparent that a good fit is unlikely. If tensions are unreasonably evident during the selection process, when people are typically on their best behavior, the likelihood of long term success as the chief may not be that strong.

**Does the city council appear to act in a professional manner?** Do they meet and adjourn as scheduled, demonstrate appropriate respect towards the citizens, one another, and city staff. Is business conducted in an orderly manner with appropriate decorum? These types of issues can be

helpful in understanding the nature of the city's elected representatives, and the overall character of the municipality.

**Are the city's values in sync with your values?** Be mindful of the reality that police departments, in many respects, are a reflection of the municipal environment and values. As the chief, will your values and ethics be in sync with the values and ethics of the elected and appointed officials, or are you likely to be expected to engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with the way you do business? The gray area between what is right and what is clearly illegal can be a moving target for some municipalities, and therefore may or may not be the place for you.

**Be sensitive to tension between the city manager and the council.**

Being hired by a supportive city manager and a lukewarm council, especially if the city manager does not last much longer, can have an unhappy ending. On the other hand, the chief can also gain the council's confidence and enjoy success. These are among the scenarios to be considered before getting serious about the position.

**Is ethnicity likely to become an obstructionist issue?** Are there strong racial issues that may ultimately weigh more heavily than performance, and be contrary to your best interests and survival? A 3-2 council split, with strong political opposition based on folks who believe that the chief's ethnicity should reflect that of the majority of the city's population, when you may not be of that demographic, can be a bumpy ride!

**Are there any "sacred cows?"** Are there any employees in the police department who are essentially untouchable when it comes to adverse personnel actions? Unfortunately, it is not all that uncommon in some departments for a long-term problematic employee to be somewhat "off-limits" for remediation because of a friend(s) or relative(s) who is an elected official or otherwise prominent person in the community. A person has to think long and hard about going into a department under these circumstances.

**For challenging departments, is there truly the political will for needed changes?** Is the city manager and the city council genuinely poised to stand behind and support the new chief when tough decisions

and actions are required, play a role in structuring somewhat of a middle ground, or will they “cut and run” in the face of pressure from unhappy civic and/or employee interests, and leave the chief in a difficult situation.

**What kind of chief is needed?** Is it a relatively stable department in a relatively stable community that has the potential to be a good experience for all concerned? Is it a troubled department where the chief is likely to be a relatively short tenured (2-3 years) change agent? There is nothing wrong with someone who goes into a department essentially as a limited tenure change agent, but understanding that likelihood is important to be aware of.

**What are your potential long-term intentions?** Is this likely to be your last position before retirement? Is this potentially a stepping-stone in size or challenges in preparation for a larger and/or more demanding department? It is not wise to share personal long-range employment goals beyond the city where you are seeking employment.

## **QUESTIONS & ISSUES YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ADDRESS**

A candidate should be prepared to address the following issues:

**Self-Improvement.** What are the things that you have done, are now doing, and intend to do in the future to further improve your skills?

**Developing internal support.** As a new chief, what measures would you take to hopefully develop the support of the department’s personnel?

**Developing community support.** The measures you will take to develop and maintain community support and credibility.

**Greatest past challenge?** Describe the greatest professional challenge you have faced in the past, and how you handled it?

**How are you perceived?** Your assessment of how you are perceived by past subordinates, peers, and superiors. What will others at your previous agency are likely to say about you?

**Are you a municipal team player?** As a member of the city's management team, what measures would you take that would cause other executives to see you as a collaborative team player? In your previous position(s), were you perceived as a team player?

**Reason for interest in the position?** Describe why you are particularly interested in the position that you are applying for.

**Why the best fit & most qualified?** Be able to describe why you feel that you are the best fit and most qualified for the position.

**First few actions upon assuming command?** What are the first few things that you would do as the chief of police?

**First year's goals?** *Be able to describe what you would hope to achieve in the first 30, 60 and 90 days, and also during the first year.*

**Knowledge of the community.** This would include various distinct neighborhoods, demographics, emerging communities, and special challenges that might exist (crime, gangs, potential languages barriers, etc).

**Knowledge of industrial and the business community.** Learn about the economic engine that fuels the city, with special emphasis on issues where the conduct and effectiveness of the police has the potential to be a particularly good or bad thing. Review Chamber of Commerce materials.

**What measures have you taken with your current agency to ensure continuous situational awareness of crime and troublesome trends?** Be able to describe what you did to keep your finger on the pulse of crime and how you reacted to that information. How do you remain forward thinking?

**Describe actions that you have taken to address juvenile delinquency.** Describe experiences and philosophies about activities to keep kids out of trouble, and otherwise occupied with positive experiences.

**Describe experiences and philosophies with police cadets and/or police explorers programs.**

**Describe innovative measures that you have taken to address various types of crimes and other issues.**

**Describe examples of innovation in juvenile community programs.**

**Describe examples of innovation in adult community programs.**

**What will be your approach in addressing recruitment and retention?**

**Describe your experience in managing a budget.**

**What will be your approach to determining appropriate deployment and staffing levels?**

**Describe your experience and philosophy in dealing with police unions and/or employee associations.**

**Describe your philosophy and experiences in the area of community policing.**

**Describe your philosophy and history in the development of maintenance of appropriate relationships with other governmental entities and private organizations.**

**Describe your current agency and assignment.**

**Describe your leadership style.**

**If selected as chief, what do you anticipate will be your most significant challenges?**

**What do you see as your greatest strengths?**

**What do you see as your greatest weaknesses? Don't be so hard on yourself as to create a potential deal breaker, such as indicating that, "you**

don't feel comfortable dealing with politicians." With respect to described weaknesses, explain what you are doing to strengthen the issue.

**Describe, step-by-step, how you would address a supervisor or a manager who is not performing in an acceptable manner.**

**Describe those traits that you believe cause you to be a strong and effective leader.** These traits will differ and be determined by different constituencies. Based on organizational and/or community climates, the strengths may be as a peacekeeper, change agent, innovator, growth manager, maintainer, etc.

**What do you see as potential "mortal sins" for a police chief to commit?**

## **INITIAL INTERACTION WITH THE CITY MANAGER**

First impressions are critical. Whether fair or not, first impressions sometimes create perceptions that can determine whether or not you continue in the selection process. A few thoughts are worthy of consideration:

**Grooming and attire.** Obviously grooming is appropriate, with a fresh haircut and breath mints. Best to wear conservative business attire that would be suitable for any professional environment. Avoid unnecessary jewelry. If married a wedding ring is appropriate, as is a college ring. A professional lapel pin, such as a military or service organization, is fine (there could be exceptions if a unique bias is perceived).

**Brief and powerful resume.** Avoid the temptation to provide a "kitchen sink" resume that provides information overload. Think in terms of an initial resume that is essentially a hard hitting and powerful executive summary, of the essential points that you want to communicate. Keep it to no more than a couple of pages and focus on chief-level issues and accomplishments. Any more may well not be read, but barely scanned. It should refer to the immediate availability of your more detailed resume.

**Pleasant and professional, but not patronizing.** While there is much you will likely want to communicate, don't overwhelm the person you are talking to. Until and unless asked to elaborate on yourself or an issue, the interaction should be a mutual exchange conversation with neither person dominating.

**Avoid initiating conversation on politically related issues.** Knowing that the appointing authority may be having an ongoing troublesome issue with another elected or appointed official is something to be aware of but not necessarily discuss. If something of that nature does come up, avoid taking a position; that person's political enemy today may be the best friend tomorrow. Using the term "challenges" may be preferable to "problems."

**Be knowledgeable and articulate.** Know as much as you can about the municipality, the Department, and the things you would reasonably be expected to be familiar with. Be careful not to accept something you may have been told by another person as gospel, and then discuss it as fact with the person you are talking to. Be mindful of the reality that there is typically no shortage of various perspectives held by various people.

If certain terms or landmarks have unique names, ensure your pronunciation is accurate. Also, avoid slang terms that might be considered as offensive or inappropriate ("Diego" as opposed to San Diego, "friggin" idiots as opposed to criminals, etc.).

**Be knowledgeable of key local, state, and federal criminal justice issues.** Know as much as you reasonably can with respect to those things occurring within the criminal justice arena, and other things that affect the profession. There are typically issues of critical importance at just about all governmental levels, with your knowledge and understanding being essential.

## **DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING WITH THE CITY MANAGER**

It is absolutely essential for you to have an understanding on as many issues as possible, in order for both you and the appointing authority to develop a mutual understanding before accepting a position. There may be issues where you may have reservations accepting what the appointing authority expects, especially those related to the degrees of involvement and decision making on critical personnel issues. As examples, are there expectations that you will promote a certain person(s), be influenced by others in the hiring process, or experience troublesome interference in disciplinary matters, etc? It is critical to reach understanding on these types of issues before the issues arise.

**You work for the city manager – not the city council.** With respect to the council, be friendly and engaging, but never forget whom you work for and keep the city manager aware of all of your contacts with the council. This is a reality that some councilpersons may have trouble understanding and/or accepting, and where you can be of assistance to the city manager by statements and actions that reinforce this reality.

Is there an assistant or deputy city manager, and is this person likely to act as an intermediary between you and the city manager? If so, be clear on which issues are to be dealt with by the city manager and what issues are to be handled with through another person. Also establish your ability to go directly to the city manager if you think that it is necessary to do so.

Notwithstanding the above, you are expected to serve two masters (at least two!). It is very unrealistic to think that the Chief will not be receptive to certain requests by the Mayor/Council; that is part of your survival. However informing the City Manager of your actions allows everyone to know what the other is doing. It is not unusual for a mutual comfort level to develop where you and the city manager know what needs to be communicated, and when such notification is not necessary.

**What is expected of you?** Beyond the obvious myriad of tasks involved with being the chief of police, are there special expectations with respect that you need to be aware of: organizational growth (or reduction), capital



improvements, strengthening perceived individual and/or organizational weaknesses, additional inroads with particularly challenging communities, etc.

**Your ethical line in the sand.** Be clear about ethical lines that you will not cross, and how to deal with inappropriate requests from elected and/or influential people. Be willing to walk away if necessary. This is where being able to retire, or already receiving another retirement, can be valuable!

**Help the city manager be successful.** Learn what success looks like to the city manager. Being on the same page will cement your relationship and create a harmonious and trusting bond. Pay attention to the city manager's priorities and make them yours. Making your city manager look good is one of the best things you can do to improve or strengthen your relationship. Keep in the mind that the city manager's success is also good for your career. Look for ways that your skills can compliment one another, so that you can help each other succeed.

**Carrying concealed weapons (CCW) permits.** Don't expect CCW overtures when you become chief, as they are likely to start before you are even sworn in! This is a critical area that is full of potholes, and a subject that has played a role in any number of unhappy endings for police chiefs. Spend some quality and serious time understanding all of the related issues, the position you believe is most appropriate, and the position of the city manager. You and he/she, with the support of the council, need to be very clear on your course of action with regard to CCW issuance.

**Hiring decisions.** Are you the person who decides who is and who is not going to be hired? Who else is involved, another person and/or municipal entity? What is the process? Is there a potential for inappropriate interference? Become familiar with the city's municipal code, city charter (if applicable) and civil service rules. \*

**Promotions.** Same issues as hiring decisions. \*

**Terminations.** Same issues as hiring and promotions. \*

Note\*: Realistically and appropriately, there are likely to be other individuals and entities that play a role in critical personnel issues, such as hiring's, promotions, and terminations, and such is appropriate. For consistency and adherence to certification guideline, a human resources entity is likely to oversee the selection process. To minimize the frequent perception of favoritism and strengthen credibility, concurrence by some municipal leadership of promotional decisions can be helpful. With respect to adverse personnel actions and terminations, there should always be oversight and involvement by legal counsel. Remember, you don't have all the answers or the Wisdom of Solomon, and from time to time will make decisions that are not always that great. Even though you may have the tie-breaking vote, a knowledgeable support system is essential and invaluable.

**Budgets and financial flexibility.** Understand the process and engage in a speculative discussion about what the future may hold. Are there some potential problems on the horizon, capital projects, personnel growth or reductions, etc? Also, will you have the latitude to move some funds around and/or divert savings to other areas not initially intended? It is important to develop trust and a good relationship with the finance director. He or she can be very helpful to you in managing your budget, probably knows more than you do about the process, and can be supportive in a number of ways.

**Degrees and nature of interaction(s) with other officials and department heads.** This is an issue that can be very problematic and is ripe for conflicts and misunderstandings. Generally, a city manager will want to be the key or maybe the only person you interact with on certain issues. The involvement of an unsophisticated strong-willed politician, who only has some of the facts, in a critical issue, can become a political and/or personnel and/or liability nightmare. A clear understanding of your role and behavior in interactions with elected and other appointed officials is critical.

**Deployment decisions.** Generally, are you the person who is going to make scheduling and deployment decisions, or is someone else going to tell you where and when people are going to be assigned? This is often a dynamic process that involves input from other people and interests but someone always needs the tie-breaking vote; is that person going to be the

chief of police? In conversations, don't hesitate to raise hypothetical questions: Will a call from the Chamber of Commerce to the mayor result in a call to you from the city manager with deployment instructions?

**Potential Shared Decisions.** Are there some instances where the appointing authority desires to be part of the decision-making process? Examples might include, but are not limited to: types and degrees of partnerships with other public or private organizations, checkpoint locations, school shutdowns over types of threats, task force loans, etc. These types of discussions, including the degrees of shared decision making, can prevent serious misunderstandings.

**Advisements & Notifications.** Let there be no misunderstanding of what he or she wants to be advised of, and when. When in doubt, err on the side of over notification. People rarely get in trouble for making unnecessary notifications, but the failure to make a notification can have serious consequences. Also be clear on how various types of notifications are to be made; from immediate phone calls in the middle of the night to an e-mail when convenient, and everything in between.

**Understand the Perceived Negatives of the Previous Chief.** This can be very helpful in potentially avoiding some of the actions or behaviors that were seen as negative. It is also helpful to understand his or her professional reputation, are you following a well-respected chief, someone who was seen in an overall negative light, or somewhere in between?

**Conventions, Conferences, Training, and Business Travel.** Which type of functions will the city allow you to attend, and how often? Typical desirable attendance would include the annual conferences of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, FBI – Law Enforcement Executive Development Association, state police chiefs conferences, and related events. If accompanied by your spouse, are a suitable dual suite and rental vehicle acceptable for expense purposes, etc.

**Are There Certification Issues for You?** Do you have the appropriate peace officer certification for the position, or will you have to acquire it (out of state chief)? If it needs to be acquired, how much time will you be provided in order to do so?

## **DEVELOPING THE APPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY MANAGER**

Simply stated, your relationship with the city manager should be one based on trust and mutual respect. While you don't have to be close personal friends with the city manager, it can be easier to establish a comfortable working relationship when you add a more personal dimension. If your city manager is receptive, occasionally raise the issue of common family affairs, hobbies, movies that have been seen, etc. Share information about yourself as well. Even though it is not unusual for a friendship to emerge, some degree of social and psychological separation is most likely appropriate. The police chief is often among the strongest intellectual members of city staff and as such is occasionally sought out by the city manager on a myriad of issues, often with the emergence of professional warmth. There is no book of rules on this issue, but common sense and individual experience will help determine the most appropriate courses of action.

### **Qualities of Critical Importance To City Managers**

While every city manager likely has his or her own idiosyncrasies or issues of unique importance, the following are qualities that most city managers feel are of critical importance for a police chief to possess:

- Professional competence, and the skills necessary to run the police department. The more competent you are, the less he or she needs to become involved.
- Trustworthiness. Trust eliminates the drama that produces tension and erodes relationships.
- The ability to proactively solve problems before the city manager asks you to.
- Loyalty. Simply put, there is no greater feeling a leader can have than knowing that you have his or her back.
- Responsive to input.
- The ability to prioritize and recognize those things that are most important, operationally and politically.
- Keep him or her advised and in the loop.

- Thorough and professional in personnel actions, and ensuring that the city's human resources and legal counsel are consulted and worked with on issues such as hiring, promotions, terminations, grievances, etc. Also recognize an occasional need to play a role in educating human resource and legal counsel on portions of personnel law particular to peace officers with which they may be weak and/or unfamiliar.
- Solid understanding of appropriate and inappropriate personnel practices, risk management and civil liabilities considerations, and the best paths to avoid the likelihood of successful litigation against the city. Thorough, thoughtful and not reckless in personnel actions.
- Holding subordinates accountable.
- Key player in the municipal family beyond the police department. Someone who recognizes and appreciates the role of all city agencies/departments and, when and if appropriate yields to these other entities.
- Knowing when to remain silent and what not to discuss.
- A diplomatic straight shooter
- Ability and inclination to adapt to his or her management style.
- Inclination to change course when appropriate.
- Supports decisions and guidance, in both deed and spirit.
- Does not badmouth or otherwise criticise the municipal leadership.
- Courage to acknowledge ownership of controversial issues.
- Shows maturity and not moodiness when things don't go his or her way.
- Has the savvy to differentiate between those business and community leaders who actually do represent others as opposed to those who have little following and/or represent selfish and/or special interests.

### **Keeping The City Manager Advised**

Like most executives, city managers don't want to be blindsided. In the absence of a mutual understanding with the city manager on what he or she needs to be kept aware of, keep him or her promptly and completely informed of everything, including all contacts with council members. Not only does a city manager need to know as much as possible in order to function effectively, but they are often one or two council member votes

away from losing their jobs. Even seemingly innocent actions, such as one council member seeing an adversarial council member in conversation with the chief, can trigger heartburn. Without appearing to be a sycophant or irritating, find a dignified way to keep the city manager promptly informed.

Don't do anything with or for a council member without the City Manager being informed or kept in the loop.

### **Don't Get Between the City Manager and the Council**

When there is conflict, don't take sides. You serve many masters (these are two pretty big ones!), and it is best to show loyalty to all by taking and staying on the high ground. You will come to be recognized as one who listens, but does not participate in backstabbing.

### **Commitment to Candor.**

A mutual commitment to be honest and candid with one another in good times and in bad, with the realization that the only thing worse than the bad news you know about is the bad news that you don't know about. Seek the type of relationship where you can be "sounding boards" for one another.

### **"Ride Along" with the City Manager**

A "ride along" is a great way to get better acquainted and to demonstrate your knowledge and expertise. It also allows you to show the city manager some of the challenges facing the department and to discuss potential emerging issues that need to be addressed.

### **Don't Be Hypertensive to Words and Actions**

City managers are just like all the rest of us, with good days, bad days, and everything in between. Like everyone else, sometimes the nature of their days affects their disposition, demeanor and inclination for discussions. Don't have your emotional antenna so high that you potentially perceive personal animus where it may well not exist. There are times when we all need a "wide berth" and that means city managers as well.

## **Some Final Tips for Working with the City Manager**

Realize that you and the city manager are probably the two most dominate personalities in the organization. You both want to get your way, and may sometimes have a hard time listening to the other person. Learning to compromise and consult each other on big decisions will ease some of the tension.

It is also important to understand that as chief you are most likely to be the most visible department head, often more so than the city manager. Be careful to not “steal the city manager’s thunder!” Some city managers are threatened if the chief has greater visibility and community exposure, an issue for which you need to be sensitive. Discuss this issue with you city manager and give just as much weight (maybe more!) to his or her body language as to what they actually say.

## **RELATIONSHIPS, ACTIONS AND BEHAVIORS IN GENERAL**

### **Building Your Political & Organizational Strength**

The absolute keys to achieving political and organizational strength are your ability and inclination to development and maintain relationships, internally and externally. Those constituencies include your command staff, employee associations, business and residential groups, faith-based community, and other governmental entities. Be known as a coalition builder; being a peacekeeper is not a sign of weakness.

### **Develop Relationships Before Problems Arise**

Trying to create a good relationship while in the midst of a problematic situation usually does not end well. The wise leader is one who works hard to develop and maintain solid relationships with the various individuals and entities, public and private, with which interaction may occur in the future. Resolving a serious issue under harsh conditions with a friend is much easier than trying to invent a friendship when things are going sideways.

## **Controversial Community Decisions & Actions**

Always try to solicit the input of affected groups, and recognize the value of the relationships that have hopefully been developed. You may well have to juggle several interests simultaneously; political officials, managers, department heads, special interest groups, employee organizations, media and who knows who else. It is not unusual to have one or more of these groups angry with you, but they will hopefully get over their concern as time goes by and with your continued professional behavior. The key to survival is not making them all angry with you at the same time!

### **Key Colleagues in the City Family**

Among your first actions as the new chief is to meet with and start the process of establishing and maintaining a solid relationship with the human resources manager, city attorney, and finance director. These persons are essential to much of what you will need to accomplish as chief. The maintenance of a good relationship will become especially important when disagreements arise, so they can be addressed in a spirit of goodwill among familiar colleagues.

### **Relationships With Council Members and Political Activities**

This isn't easy, but you must stay out of politics to the degree humanly possible. Even something such as an innocent luncheon with councilperson "A", where nothing of substance or of a political nature is discussed, can be perceived by councilperson "B" as a conspiratorial meeting. It is very common for some members of political and public bodies to have serious disagreements, and also a desire by some to have you as an ally in pursuit of their goals and/or agendas. It is very common for others to be able to indicate that the police chief and/or the police department agrees or disagrees with various positions; be very careful to be wise in your statements, positions, and endorsements. Also be sensitive to how quickly political landscapes can change, and how today's special relationship with an elected official can be tomorrow's liability. Avoid any statements or behaviors that might be interpreted as taking a political position. Be professional in responding to appropriate requests for



information or perspectives and keep the appointing authority advised of interactions.

Avoid endorsements of elected officials, be it council members, county supervisors, prosecutors or state legislators. If you take the position that you never endorse, you avoid the difficult position of being asked to support someone that you don't want to see get re-elected. If you do endorse someone, others will expect the same.

### **Stay Ahead of Controversy**

Attend council meetings and be particularly attuned to matters during the public comments session of the meeting regarding embellished, derogatory or controversial information. Have staff conduct research on these claims and report back to the complainant with progress. Get the facts before jumping to conclusions.

### **Know How to Manage Confidential Information**

There may be some things that you legally, morally or ethically cannot or will not bring to the attention of the city manager or others within the organization. Cases in point have occurred in several municipalities where FBI undercover operations have been prematurely scuttled because of chiefs, who after having been confidentially briefed informed other department members and/or city officials of active investigations. Should you be put in the difficult situation of not being able to brief other city officials, insist on a gag or other type of confidentially order.

### **Sweat the Small Stuff**

It can be easy, especially for innovative and creative chiefs, to find more on their plate than can be comfortably handled. Don't become so tied up with the bigger issues that you fail to give adequate attention to the daily mundane issues, such as grooming, uniform appearance and related types of issues.

## **Be the First to Know**

Walk around and be seen by staff. Informally inspect the physical environment of department facilities. Don't be blind-sighted by inappropriate, sub-standard or hazardous conditions within the facilities. Insist that supervisors do the same and bear primary responsibility for taking action.

Set media alerts for yourself and the department to be notified of any instances when you or the department is mentioned on the web.

## **Outbursts are Never Forgotten**

Under all circumstances, keep your temper and emotions under control. It is a somewhat common tendency for people to become loud and animated when very unhappy, but that is not a tendency that applies to public executives. Outbursts are a poor reflection of someone's temperament and self-control and, although potentially forgiven, will never be forgotten.

## **Socializing With Appointed and Elected Officials?**

Only you can know what is best, but any personal association with council members is fraught with hazard. On one hand, it is certainly nice to have a casual and enjoyable dinner with a councilperson and his or her family. On the other hand, especially when there are divisive issues being dealt with by the council, such an innocent dinner can be perceived in a not-so-innocent light by a political rival, and unsettling by the city manager. Be ever mindful of the unique personal and political nature of some of the more challenging personalities you may find in elected bodies, and the troublesome consequences that can emerge from their perceptions and misunderstandings. Try as you may, there are likely to be those who will find troubling any personal relationship between the chief and an elected official. The very best approach is to keep the relationship at a professional and non-personal level.

## **The Chief's Role in Police Labor Negotiations**

The Chief of Police is part of the City Manager's management team. You are not a member of the Police Officers' Association or Union. Like every chief, you certainly want your officers to be well compensated and to receive the best benefits possible. However, you have an obligation to represent the direction given by the Council and/or the City Manager. Express your support for who believe to be a fair contract behind closed doors, but support management's position elsewhere. Develop a solid understanding for the labor side of the municipal equation.

The police chief should not sit at the bargaining table, if possible. Ideally, the second in command should be present as a consultant and to address the impact of the various issues being addressed.

Be careful of occasional attempts by some city managers to wedge you between them and the Police Officer Association or Union, with the police chief taking or sharing the "heat" in troublesome negotiations. Be cognizant that city officials typically fear a strong POA more than they fear a strong chief.

## **Seek to Continually Educate Municipal Officials**

Educating your city manager and members of the council in those areas where they have room to grow. This is not just a nice thing to do; it is an absolute necessity. In a very real sense, you want to do preemptive educational strikes in critical areas to avoid being asked to do inappropriate or unethical things. Be constantly alert for teachable moments. Examples of issues where the layman might think that latitude exists would include, but not be limited to: canceling traffic citations, use of automated systems, dropping of criminal charges, laxity in issuance of concealed weapon permits, favoritism in tow and other types of contracts, providing criminal history information, and other types of issues where people often make requests and inquires that cannot be honored. Don't wait for someone to make an inappropriate request in order to educate; seek to educate before being asked!

## **Dealing with Inappropriate Requests**

Hopefully your previous actions in educating appointed and elected officials as to what is and what is not legal and appropriate will minimize the number of situations where you are asked or expected to provide information or take actions when to do so is inappropriate. These types of situations can be very problematic, especially when the person asking feels that he or she is entitled to what is being sought, and does not realize or appreciate the ethical and/or legal ramifications involved. Your denial needs to be accompanied by as much of an explanation as is necessary, as you are also educating the person involved, and endeavoring to keep them out of trouble as well.

A helpful and educational approach can be the asking of rhetorical questions to the person making the request, such as, “should the media be aware of this request,” or “what if the union were to become aware of this request, or “what if our business community were to learn of this,” etc. Educate them without making them feel corrupt.

Despite your efforts to educate the council as to what is and what is not appropriate, you are still likely to occasionally get inappropriate overtures. Anticipate this reality and how to best respond. Remember to promptly advise the city manager of the conversation, for a variety of reasons including his or her role in the education of elected officials.

## **Do Your Homework and Be Prepared**

Work hard to develop a reputation as someone who does his (or her) homework, knows the issues, understands the stakes and consequences, and is well prepared for discussions and presentations. Be someone who gets it right the first time.

## **Don't Take Things Personally**

You have no business being a chief if you routinely internalize criticism! You need to have a tough hide and relatively tolerant personality in order to be effective in the often problematic and hostile environment where most chiefs occasionally find themselves. Without intending to cast negative

dispersions, being a chief is not for everyone. With the ease of creating instant criticism on social media, every day can yield troubling information. Your health and the well being of your family are more important than having a few stars on your collar.

### **Treat All Council Persons the Same and with Respect**

Realistically, they are not all the same, and have different levels of intelligence, common sense, perceptions and all of the other factors that constitute human behavior. Suppress your biases, reservations and differences and treat them all the same and with respect. Stay on the high road. Should you ever decide to try to find a city with the perfect council, it is likely to be a long and unsuccessful journey.

### **Your Credibility and Influence**

Never lose sight of the reality that your ability to influence will be directly related to the degree of credibility that you possess, or do not possess, with the City Manager and Councilpersons.

### **Disagree Without Being Disagreeable**

This is not a perfect world, not all decisions reflect the best course of actions, measures are often influenced by inappropriate factors, and that is just the way it is. You will not always prevail. Do your homework, be articulate in communicating your opinion, ensure that others have the full benefit of your perspective, and be as gracious as possible in reacting to the outcome. Reflect back on your immature sparring with defense attorneys as a new cop, and how you eventually matured and accepted the system for what it is. Graceful acceptance, after a good and appropriate effort, is the epitome of professionalism and a very positive reflection of one's character.

Your job is to give your best advice to your city manager and council. Do your homework and be candid about how you see an issue and/or how the issue should be addressed. Once the decision is made, you have an obligation to support it whether or not your advice was followed, just as you have the right to expect from your personnel.

## **Communicate Your Vision and Stay Focused**

Keep your eye on the critical ball and the reason you are the chief - PUBLIC SAFETY! As the chief it is easy to be so overwhelmed with other issues, especially those related to personnel issues, that you fail devoting the majority of your effort to the things that make your community a better and a safer place. Be a master of appropriate delegation and don't fall into the self-fulfilling trap of spending 90% of your time on 10% of your personnel. Institutionalize the element of public safety in everything that you do.

## **Professional Development for You and Your Staff**

Never let anyone forget that the "magic bullet" to effectiveness and morale is the issue of leadership, and that there is a direct correlation between leadership and public safety. On a related note, there is also a direct correlation between leadership and organizational drama; as leadership goes up, drama goes down (and vice versa!).

Don't be deceived by those stars on your collar and think that you have a decreased need for training, and it is others who need the training more than you. *As a police chief, you need just as much, most likely even more, continuing professional education as everyone else on your department!*

## **Recognize, Respect and Collaborate With Other City Departments**

Be an equal partner to other members of the management team and help them solve their problems. Be a good member of the municipal family.

While of critical importance, the police department is not the only department. Make clear by what you say and what you do that you intend to be a good partner in the municipal family. Always be mindful of the reality that other departments often play a key role in public safety.

In today's world, more than ever before, there is a strong need for police chiefs to develop solid working relationships with their counterparts in other city agencies, as so much of issues today overlap and intertwine with each

other. From the role of the recreation department in delinquency prevention to the involvement of the engineering department in traffic matters and everything in between, a strong municipal partnership is essential for quality public safety.

Some police chiefs have the reputation for not being team players, and act as if other city departments are not as important as theirs. Police departments often have the largest portion of the city's budget, but that does not mean that other departments don't also play a critical role in the community's well being. Avoid being seen as arrogant, a label that some chiefs obtain.

*Discussion: As an example, the wise chief is someone who if forced to decide whether another officer will be hired or the city will be able to build a municipal swimming pool will go with the pool!*

Avoid being the dominant personality in meetings and other activities. Too many chiefs are not team players.

### **Don't Make Excuses - Admit Your Mistakes**

Being wrong, making excuses, and providing inaccurate information is always problematic, but it becomes an even more serious issue when others depend on you for critical and accurate information. Being seen in a credible light by elected and other appointed officials is essential. Work hard to be accurate, don't be recklessly speculative, and promptly clarify any misinformation and acknowledge any mistakes. A chief who does not have his or her act together becomes real conspicuous real fast. Always be honest and tell the truth.

### **Dealing With The Media**

While books have been written on the issue of media relationships, a few reminders are worthy of mention.

**Who is going to represent your department in relations with the media, and under what circumstances?** Will you have the latitude to

make all statements of police concern, or is their a city media representative who also plays a role.

**Understand and respect the role of the media, and work to develop and maintain a solid relationship with media representatives.**

Honesty, respect, transparency and objectivity are the key ingredients, and will hopefully result in fairness and balance.

**Strive for transparency to the extent reasonable.** Recognize that withheld or only partially released information will likely fuel suspicions that something is being concealed or distorted.

**Do not show favoritism to one media source over the other(s).**

**It you initiate a story, it goes to everyone.** While not often and with obvious caution, an “exclusive” can be acceptable if the information came from a single source, and that single source came to you.

**Never lie.** Be honest, and if you cannot comment explain why.

**Multiple audiences.** Realize that in statements to the media you have three audiences; the public, your bosses, and your employees.

**Be informed.** Read all of the news sources that come into your community.

**Don’t respond to criticism with return salvos.**

**Clarification and accurate information.** Do respond to factually incorrect statements by clarifying and providing accurate information, and let the readers decide the credibility. Don’t attack the author.

**Don’t try to manipulate.** Remember that the public appreciates being informed, but resents being misinformed or manipulated.

### **Social Media Considerations**

Developing an understanding with the city manager on social media activities involving the police department. What type of information is



permissible for dissemination on a regular basis, and also under exigent circumstances. Is there some information that must first be cleared by the city manager, and if so under what circumstances. Subjects that can be particularly controversial, such as proactively putting out the identifies of persons arrested for driving under the influence or in prostitution stings, requires a great deal of discussion and mutual agreement.

### **Appropriate Behaviors When Dark Clouds Appear**

A key indication of someone's character is how well they perform when things are not going well. Most people do a good job when all is well, but the internal mettle of a man or woman truly becomes aparent to all when the going gets tough. Be dignified and continue to do the best job possible.

### **When Termination Appears Likely**

All eyes will be on you, and your actions when leaving – good or bad – will be part of your legacy. Strive for a professional transition where your successor will have the advantage of a predessor (you!) who continued to “lean forward” and do the best job possible, even though potentially being treated somewhat unfairly. Remember that any consideration for future positions will include a review of your performance and behavior in departing from a previous positions. Just as chiefs talk among themselves, so do city managers.

### **A FEW FINAL MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS**

*When in the city, you are in a constant fishbowl; act accordingly.*

*Become politically astute, but remain apolitical.*

*Understand the nature, motivations, and degree of actual influence of the various business and community leaders. Most communities have several persons who, typically with the best of intentions (well, sometimes), claim influence beyond what they actually have. An inexperienced chief can find himself or herself expending an inordinate amount of time and capital*

directed towards an individual and/or organization that actually has little or no influence in the community.

*Understand the difference between what is truly unethical and what you just plain disagree with.* The fact that we strongly disagree with guidance we are given does not necessarily translate into an ethical issue. As a chief, be prepared to be irritated and disappointed from time to time.

*Patronize local establishments.* Shop and dine locally. Any drinking should be done in private.

*Be active in the Chamber of Commerce.* These are the folks who generally are the most invested in the community, and who have the most to gain and to lose based on public safety and municipal vitality. This partnership with the police department is a must.

*Participate in service clubs.* Such participation typically becomes a great source for acquiring some assets (i.e., youth programs, etc.), and also for municipal employee recognition. The issue of affiliating with one in particular, to the exclusion of membership in others, can sometimes be problematic and is really an individual decision. If you do affiliate with one, make it clear that you will not commit to mandatory attendance, as to do so will limit your flexibility with respect to community participation with the other worthy organizations.

*Recognize the possibility of public record requests for information, including e-mails, about you.* Since some people will occasionally address business issues on personal e-mails, they too may be accessed under certain circumstances. Something good to know.

*Never stop loving and respecting those wonderful men and women who make up the Department, and do so conspicuously.* There are occasional times, typically during labor negotiations or in the aftermath of a painful termination, when you will want to wring the neck of some of your people; don't fall into the trap of reacting angrily to the organization by the actions of a few.

## GOOD LUCK

As mentioned in the introduction to this booklet, luck (along with timing and chemistry) is among the factors that will play a role in your success (or failure!). All you can do is learn as much as you can about those factors that are almost always considerations in the selection and survival of police chiefs, and incorporate those issues in your presentations and performance. I am deeply grateful to those persons listed in the *Acknowledgements* portion of this booklet as they have willingly shared their wisdom, much of it gained via copious amounts of “scar tissue,” with those who are following in their professional footsteps. The information in this booklet will be invaluable to those pursuing police chief positions, the only question is to what degree.

Recall that the average tenure of a police chief is three to four years. If enough people avail themselves of the information and wisdom and scar tissue found on these pages, perhaps we can add a few months to the average!

*Keith Bushey is a fifty-year veteran of law enforcement who retired from the Los Angeles Police Department as a commander, from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department as a deputy chief, and from the United States Marine Corps as a colonel (Mustang). He has also served as a deputy sheriff for Los Angeles County, a deputy game warden for the State of California, as law enforcement liaison on the executive staff of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, and as the Marshal of San Bernardino County. He is active in a number of professional organizations, including the FBI-Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA). He has written extensively and makes frequent presentations, primarily in the area of leadership, throughout the United States and Canada (June 2016).*

[Kdbs255@aol.com](mailto:Kdbs255@aol.com)

[KeithBushey.com](http://KeithBushey.com)

Amazon Books – Keith Bushey

Additional copies of this booklet may be downloaded without cost from the above website.