

**PASSING THROUGH THE HOURGLASS...  
LEADERSHIP  
DURING PARTICULARLY  
CHALLENGING TIMES**



**KEITH D. BUSHEY**

**LEADERSHIP**

**During**

***PARTICULARLY***  
**CHALLENGING**  
**TIMES**

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## INTRODUCTION

The application of solid leadership is always a necessity; however, there are times when the magnitude of the challenge(s) being faced by an executive are so critical that selected behavioral and strategic reminders may be helpful. The intended audiences for this booklet are law enforcement chief executives and senior staff members.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide thoughts on selected actions and behaviors that may be especially helpful to an executive who is facing particularly challenging times. Without exception, the contents of this booklet reflect issues that are always important, but which – certainly in the eyes of the author – are especially important when circumstances become particularly challenging. Such circumstances may even include a perception (or reality) that the executive’s position may be in jeopardy.

I am not aware of any approach that is guaranteed to be helpful in all instances, as there are as many variables and personalities as there are stars in a galaxy. This booklet reflects my perspective and that of a number of other executives; the biggest factor in forming those perspectives is experience-based scar tissue, and a lot of it! While I can attest first hand to the value and wisdom of some of what I suggest, I can also absolutely attest to the pain and failure of not practicing some of the actions and strategies I now recommend for consideration.

The majority of the issues discussed in this booklet are equally applicable to agencies of all sizes; it is just a matter of degree. While most of my career has been in larger agencies, I also have considerable experience in the management of smaller

agencies and can say without reservation that bigger is not better; it is just bigger! Also, smaller does not mean simpler or less complex. There are both advantages and disadvantages associated with agencies of every size and nature. I shall leave it to the reader to adapt his or her situation to the contents of this booklet.

This booklet is not directed at any particular type of challenging situation, whether fair, unfair, internal or political. The hope is that this booklet will be helpful to the process in terms of increased effectiveness and reduced trauma.

This booklet does not suggest to provide recommendations on every situation that might arise. To the contrary, there are no shortages of potential actions for which the reader will have no ability to even attempt to influence, but for which knowledge of those dynamics may overall be of value. A good example may be loss of loyalty of someone who was a key and trusted subordinate; something you are not likely to reverse, but with potential consequences that may be helpful to be aware of.

Every police executive can look back on some truly challenging times, and I am certainly no exception. One of the final sections of this booklet contains a number of example situations and candid discussions of shortcomings and mistakes made by others, plus a few of my own. It is always good to learn from our mistakes, but it is even better to learn from someone else's mistakes; I hope the readers of this booklet can learn from mine!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Note that the cover of this booklet, designed by *John Hollenbeck*, depicts a graphic image of one of my often-used expressions; that of an executive enduring tough times who is experiencing the narrow portion of a career hourglass, with most likely a great past and hopefully a solid future. How he or she performs while passing through the narrow portion of that hourglass will have a big impact on that future.

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## **REALITIES TO KEEP IN MIND**

Without suggesting that other issues are not also important, the following are realities that you should always keep in mind. Some of these will be elaborated upon in subsequent pages.

**The “Magic Bullet” to Command Effectiveness is Leadership Knowledge.** Just as the military warrior trains physically hard in order to prevail in combat, the police executive needs to train hard in the development of a full range of leadership skills so as to successfully manage whatever command challenge(s) may arise.

**Your Personal & Professional Principles.** These are the anchors from which your actions and behaviors flow, keep them always conspicuous and unyielding in your persona. Do not permit them to fade or become murky in the fog of chaos. These are typically identical in tone with the Department’s Mission and Values.

**Police Chief Selection Processes.** The issues discussed in this booklet reflect key considerations in police chief selection processes. There needs to be a comfort level that chiefs can perform adequately during stressful times.

**When All is Well, Enjoy it While You Can.** It is not a matter of if, but when a crisis(s) will occur. Be mindful that what one chief sees as a crisis, another may see as a typical day at the office. *Effectiveness typically increases the growth leadership and anxieties typically decrease it.*

**Be Honest With Yourself.** Are you a victim or a suspect, or somewhere in between? Are you the victim of a challenging personality, or are you the challenging personality?

**Behavior During Difficult Times is the Key Indicator of a Person's Character.** Most people perform just fine when all is well, but performance during difficult times is the key indicator of leadership and competence.

**Things are Seldom as they Initially Appear.** Never lose sight of this absolute reality. Those who do, often spend time addressing the wrong issues, fixing things that are not broken, and badly damaging things and people. Be sensitive to ensure that you are truly addressing the real issues, and not the symptoms of the real issues.

**You are Absolutely in an Organizational Fishbowl.** Walk by an aquarium and you cannot resist watching it! Officers and civilian staff members enjoy watching their executives in action, especially when situations are beyond the ordinary. And never forget that they have eyes and ears everywhere. They evaluate the way you talk, walk, and drive and everything else. Be assured that folks who do not care for you will exaggerate even your most minor missteps.

**Many Troublesome Situations Fade Away on their Own.** There are times when the best thing to do is nothing, as some issues pretty much become non-issues without any action, and may only be kept alive by your actions.

**We Tend to be Our Own Harshest Critics.** This is often the case, and is typically one of the traits of new leaders. We tend to perceive a brighter spotlight on us than is being shined on us by others.



**When Potential Problems Arise, Our Minds Often Default to the Worst Possible Scenario.** Be sensitive to this reality, and don't let self-doubt and paranoia blow things out of proportion.

**The Loyalty of Your Staff is Not Blind and Likely Has Limitations.** All members of the organization, including your staff, are understandably sensitive to their careers as well as yours. The degree and duration of their loyalty will most likely be influenced by your professionalism and the appropriateness of your actions.

**Unpopular Guidance Sometimes Loses Emphasis.** In a chaotic command environment, it is not uncommon for some persons, if they think they can get away with it, to stop performing tasks that they dislike or disagree with. Robust, yet user-friendly control and tracking systems are critically important in identifying and correcting such behavior.

**Routine Things Often Fail to Get Done.** This is especially true if you are weak in the absolutely critical task of delegation. A person can only do so much, and if you have burdened yourself with an abundance of tasks, especially some that you should have delegated, there are some things that will not get done. This is especially true when you are focused on a particular challenge(s) that you may be consumed with.

**Silence is Most Often Your Friend and Impulsiveness is Your Enemy.** Ask yourself how many situations you can recall where you wish you had kept your mouth shut; and then how many times you regret not having spoken!

**Hypersensitive People Make Lousy Police Executives.** A thick skin has always been a valuable asset, but is pretty much a necessity for survival in today's world. Yesterday's idiot had a soapbox and a small crowd. Today's idiot has social media with a potential audience of hundreds or thousands of people.

**Remember that First Impressions are Seldom Accurate.** Be very careful about whom you listen to, whose advice you take, and those in whom you confide thoughts, information or direction. It *always* takes some time and exposure to really get a handle on another person.

**Don't Be Deceived by the Stars on Your Collar.** It is critically important to be honest with yourself about what you don't know and where you need to grow. This is not a simple issue because most of us have a relatively high opinion of our abilities and ourselves. Self-confidence is a good thing, but can sometimes mask reality.

## **DEALING WITH CRITICISM**

The nature of criticism, and the impact that it can have on you is worthy of a category of its very own! There will always be criticism; it is just a matter of degree and where it comes from.

**Placing Your Worries in a Separate Cranial Container.** Being able to segment your worries into a different part of your mind, and not let yourself be overwhelmed to the point of near paralysis, is an essential trait of an effective administrator. For many, this is easier said than done but a trait that must be pursued and hopefully – at least to some degree – be developed. A good analogy is the wonderful

program for the family of alcoholics, AL-ANON, where participants are conditioned to not let the foolish behavior of a single loved one diminish the wholesome interaction with all of the other family members. Conversations with fellow executives, especially those with considerable scar tissue, can be helpful in developing your own tough hide.

**Don't Be Hypersensitive to the Actions of Others.** All of us, including the people who have influence over you, have "their moments" when behaviors can be misinterpreted as criticism or dissatisfaction of you. Being hypersensitive can cause you to take offense when no negative connotations were intended, and to take actions or behave based on a misconception. Work on developing that thicker skin.

**Don't Over-React to Social Media Criticism.** You must avoid the temptation to "bite on the hook" that others will send your way. Impulsive and immediate response is never in your best interests. In those instances where a response may be appropriate, let there be a delay that provides for thoughtful reflection.

## INTROSPECTION

Being just as honest with ourselves as we are with other persons is absolutely essential. In our profession, our best and worst qualities are often the same; confidence in our abilities to deal with the myriad of issues necessary to effectively lead our organizations. This is a problem when our confidence outweighs our skills and abilities.

Every one of us has room to grow; it is just a matter of degree. Unfortunately, most of us (with me at the top of the list!) are

often slow to recognize our limitations and too often attribute the consequences of our own failures to something or someone else, at least in part. While ashamed to admit it, there have been a few weaknesses in my past where it has taken a few years and some additional scar tissue before I grudgingly acknowledged that I had at least some ownership in past command weaknesses; somewhat of a human tendency that all of us are wise to consider.

The absolute best way to engage in introspection is to avail yourself of the perspective of other executives whose judgment you respect. There is no stronger positive influence than through the candor toward and mentoring of others, especially those who have an abundance of experience and scar tissue. Proverbs 27:17 provides some pretty solid perspective on such people, "As Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens (and influences) another (through discussion).

Be sensitive to the reality that many folks take the position that *Advice not asked for is seldom appreciated*, and for that reason may not offer a potentially helpful perspective unless you solicit that perspective. Do not hesitate to reach out to others.

While not seeking to automatically behave as others might recommend, solicit thoughts and recommendations on all aspects of your command performance, both internally and externally. The input you receive from others will help you decide what, if any modifications you might believe to be appropriate in the way that you lead and interact with others. Learn and modify where appropriate, but don't let your leadership wings be clipped in a way that may negatively impact your initiative and personal growth process.

Command actions and survival are neither simple nor consistently the same, and what may work in one agency and with a certain set of players may fail catastrophically elsewhere. There are few situations where the executive is completely right and the person(s) at the next level is completely wrong. In many instances there is no clear right and wrong, but some level of ownership on the part of all concerned.

You may not be able to influence the actions and behaviors of others, but you do have the ability to influence the way that you behave and command. Being honest with yourself and committing yourself to constant internal candor and improvement is essential.

## **ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS**

**Get Your Sleep!** For some people (me included!), there are times when workplace conflict makes sleep near impossible. The result is fatigue and a deterioration of performance and demeanor. Reasonable people have an appropriate aversion to any unnecessary medication, but I believe an occasional sleep aid can sometimes be helpful.

Avoid over indulgence in alcohol for sleep inducement. That occasional cocktail may be fine, but the lingering odor of alcohol and the risk of dependency are great. To protect your legacy you must avoid even a single alcohol related lapse in judgment that could impair the remainder of your career.

**Don't Over-React to Troubling Information.** Over-reacting can be just as bad as under-reacting. Your best course of action

is to avoid being judgmental and to determine as much as possible before taking any action or arriving at conclusions. It is important to develop the ability the ability to recognize what is a real problem and what is not, to the extent that such is possible.

We have all seen leaders that react to certain issues when they are not all that important. This often happens when pressure comes from above, and triggers additional over reaction, when what really needs to be done is tempering the concern with reality.

**Document and Retain Critical Information.** Remember, if something is not in writing, it does not exist. Further, if in writing but not retained by you, it might not exist either. A wise executive is one who ensures that critical information is constantly recorded and upgraded. Without suggesting paranoia, a wise executive typically recognizes those issues, which have a potential for difficulties, and ensures documentation and *absolute* retention. By absolute, I mean either personal retention, or transmittal of the information to another location where retention is ensured. In the case of personal retention of certain categories of public and personnel information, it is important to do so in a lawful manner.

We have long been in an era where the retention of information pertaining to our personal, legal and career is essential. To anyone who might suggest that such retention is disloyal or inappropriate, I would just ask that they respond honestly as to whether they themselves retain such information; we know the answer.

**Be Careful with Your Use of Emails.** In the absence of a few positive or supportive words, emails often come across as cold, impersonal and harsh. Be careful not to interpret an email as negative when such may not have been intended by the sender (especially your boss!), and then you returning a stinging email response based on your misinterpretation. Email messages are like toothpaste; once out of the tube there is no return. Under all circumstances, in good times and in bad, in the absence of an absolute necessity it is a good idea to let some time pass for reflection before responding to a troublesome communication (email, letters, etc.).

**Don't Talk Any More Than Necessary.** This is a very big issue and a lesson that more people need to learn. It is wise to recall the words of a couple of folks: Confucius said that it is best to remain silent and be thought of a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. Xenocrates said that he often regretted his words but seldom regretted his silence. Few words and a confident demeanor can mask a great deal of anxiety and incompetence!

Most of us have probably noticed some people who have talked a great deal and others who have listened more. When the leader who was a good listener talked, most everyone took notice. Conversely, the person who talked all the time was many times ignored. While certainly not an absolute, this frequent dynamic is worthy of consideration.

**Develop the Necessary Mindset.** Your biggest asset is your ability to influence your own mind with a genuine commitment to determine if there is an issue and its scope, and what truly needs to be done to fix any problem and to prevent reoccurrences.

**Investigation of the Situation(s).** Do whatever you must do to get it right from the beginning, and remember that 95% of what occurs will likely be influenced by the first 5% of your efforts. Just as a one-degree off mistake on a military field march means several miles off course down the road, initial missteps can doom any investigation. There is no reverse lever for poor initial decisions.

**Don't Fall Prey (or perpetuate!) to the 90% - 10 % Myth.** Most of us have been taught that we typically spend 90% of our time dealing with 10% of our people, and we have unfortunately permitted this to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Our goal, by virtue of strengthening leadership skills at all levels, should be to reverse these percentages, and to spend the majority of our time on the majority of our people. The issue of delegation is critical to this goal, as the leader who fails to adequately delegate will just perpetuate this sad practice.

**Develop a Plan of Action and Strategy.** Take the time and do what you have to do to accurately assess the situation and determine the most appropriate course(s) of action. Break your plan into logical and sequential steps. While your goal is obviously to develop a good and solid plan, *remember that just about any plan is better than no plan!*

**Stay the Course.** Work hard to stay focused, on track and do not permit yourself to take your eyes off the ball. Particularly difficult times often cause other issues, some significant and some not so significant, to pop onto your radar screen. Don't permit yourself to become distracted and drift away from the things that are the most important. Keep the department's mission and values, and your personal and professional principles at the top of the list.



During difficult times a person can be so consumed with administrative and legal challenges that he or she might lose focus on our street roots. The most important thing for any of us is to ensure that the men and women we are privileged to lead go home safely to their families.

**Quick Fixes Are Not Likely.** Attempted shortcuts often fail, and just make the appropriate resolution even more difficult. Take the time to establish a strategy towards the most appropriate path forward.

**Constantly Fill Your Reservoir With Goodwill and Credibility.** Each and every moment of your tenure, from the date of hire until the day of retirement, should have as a goal the continued strengthening of the confidence of others in your professionalism, integrity and solid intentions. The depth of that reservoir will often influence the resolution of issues.

**Be Conspicuous.** There may be times when you want very badly to avoid others, but leaders recognize the critical necessity to be visible during difficult times. There will likely be people who will recognize that you are experiencing tough times and will look for signs of physical and mental fatigue; remain sharp and squared away and get that adequate rest, so as to not let your difficult times be revealed by your appearance. Remain aware that your demeanor will influence the actions of your troops, to various degrees. Hunkering down behind closed doors will drastically reduce your situational knowledge, and can be a long remembered cowardly act.

Be on the point when the crisis strikes. Be the one who faces the music, takes the blows, is up front and handles the tough questions.

**Your Demeanor and the Environment.** You might just as well be in a fishbowl! Your demeanor will be a reflection of your competence and confidence, and will also be a factor in the performance and demeanor of your people.

**Acknowledgment of Responsibility.** Admit your mistakes, including things that might well have been done differently. Remember, the truth will eventually be known. The longer you conceal your involvement the worse for you and the organization. *The cover-up of a situation is typically worse than the situation itself.*

**Don't Fall Under the Spell of a Single Influence.** It is very common for multiple interests and multiple people to offer guidance, and sometimes it is very difficult to know whom to believe. A wise executive is one who avails him or herself of the perspective of multiple persons who have established a track record for credibility and solid intentions. This is a good time to be reminded that initial impressions of people are seldom accurate.

**Be Very Cautious About Whom You Confide In.** It is also wise to realize that most executives can recall situations where a person whom they previously believed to be a loyal subordinate was covertly undermining their activities, often involving a person who believed that he or she should have been appointed when you got the job. These behaviors might include covert meetings with the city manager, elected officials, the union, etc. This is a potential reality to be aware of.

**Recognize That Loyalty is Not Always Blind and the Loyal Opposition Often Isn't.** Your staff should be expected to act appropriately and professionally, but not to become

unnecessarily embroiled or to take sides in matters involving you. Your good judgment and professionalism is essential in not subjecting your people to the ill will that can stem from disagreements between you and others, both internally and externally. There will come a time when you will no longer be part of that organization, but most of your staff will, and they need not be burdened by the trauma and hard feelings that can result from a command level conflict.

There is a reason why that great secretary with twenty-five years of service and who has worked for numerous chiefs is still there. She (or he) figured how when to hold and when to fold, and to strike the appropriate balance between loyalty and survival.

Expecting your staff to support you in your battles is unrealistic and unreasonable. Just as a smaller vessel cuts the mooring line to a sinking ship, your staff has a responsibility to their careers and to their family to cut ties with you in the event that you act foolishly and or declare administrative war with those to whom you report. Your vulnerability to internal sabotage is directly related to your leadership skills and your behavior.

On a related note, do not ask or expect, (or tolerate!) a staff member to lie for you. Even simple things like telling people you are out of the facility when you are just not available, or that you will be back any time when it will likely be a couple of hours, eventually damages the credibility of all concerned. Such a practice is a poor reflection on you, and sooner or later is likely to have unpleasant consequences.

**Don't Let Up on Mentoring and the Continued Development of Leadership Skills at All Levels.** There are typically no shortages of distractions during particularly challenging times. Do not permit the critical role of continued leadership development (at all levels) to be a victim of these distractions. In terms of mentoring, coaching others as to your actions and thoughts in the midst of challenging times can be quite an education.

**Be Sensitive to Key Components in Decision Making.** The murkiness and drama of a challenging environment can sometimes be reflected in decisions that are not always that great. These decisions might fall into the category of "*today's solution and tomorrow's nightmares.*" While all components may not be in play, ask yourself if your actions are in the best interests of the *individual, group, workforce, organization* and the *community*.

**Avoid Preconceived Impressions.** Never lose sight of these three realities: 1. Things are very seldom as they initially appear, 2. There are at least three sides to every story and finally, 3. Things most often look different a day later.

**Give People the Benefit of the Doubt for Good Intentions.** We have all made mistakes, although our intentions were good and honorable. Don't forget your past, and give the men and women who work with you the same courtesy and benefit of the doubt that you would have appreciated a time or two during your career.

**Related Disciplinary Actions & Penalties.** Are your disciplinary actions fair, balanced and objective, or are you bending the standard of appropriateness based on pressure

and political interference? While a mediocre manager might throw someone under the bus, a true leader never would.

**Potentially Related Organizational Changes.** Significant events often call into question the wisdom of potential organizational or structural changes such as the strengthening or elimination of programs. If circumstances truly justify such actions, fine. But don't support a knee-jerk modification or elimination of worthwhile programs (gang units, explorer/cadet posts, apprehension programs, surveillance teams, etc.) based on political pressure.

**Don't Let Up on Delegation.** Taking personal control over issues that are more appropriately performed by subordinates can sometimes be tempting, especially during particularly challenging times. In the absence of a truly compelling reason, don't do this. Provide appropriate guidance to people and let them do their jobs.

**Ensure Timely and Accurate Internal Communications.** *Information will be distorted in the absence of measures to prevent such from occurring!* Remember that information passed by word of mouth from one person to another will just about always be distorted to some extent, by either facts or tone. Further, communicating through a third party creates another level of potential misunderstanding and confusion. Endeavor to personally communicate to the intended audience, both internally and externally. This can be done in person, by video or in writing.

**Determine the True Nature of Special Interest Groups.** Is the group(s) truly representative of a measurable portion of the public or business community, or an exaggerated effort to advance a special interest or questionable perspective? Special

interests are often good and helpful processes that can be very valuable to executives, but it is important to determine accurate intentions and constituencies. All special interest groups work to advance their goals by touting the wisdom of what they seek to achieve and the level of support they enjoy. It is up to the police executive to arrive at a level of understanding.

**Determine the True Nature of Involved Individuals.** Does the community activist truly represent a portion of a community, or just another two or three people? Is “The Reverend” truly a minister with a flock or a person with a mail order “doctor of divinity” degree? Is the merchant truly a representative of the business community or someone trying to advance a personal or commercial endeavor?

**Don’t Be Pressured into a Commitment that you Would Not Otherwise Make.** It is very common during particularly challenging times for persons or interests to seek changes in policies, programs or strategies. Work hard to ensure that those decisions are made based on quality reflection and actual necessity, and not the result of political or special interest pressure.

**Dealing With a Potentially Intolerable Situation.** When a situation evolves that you feel you may not be able to accept (such as drastic budget cuts, troublesome ordinances, etc.), it is wise to factor in the reality that the need for leadership may be stronger than ever, and that your department may cause you to feel some satisfaction, but then what? When it is all said and done, we ultimately work for others and our only moral options are to either leave or do our best in playing the cards that have been dealt.

**Off-Duty Down Time.** Some time away from the workplace is not just desirable, but essential as a de-stressor in your life. Work at having a fulfilled life away from the office to give balance. Spend time on your relationships, your faith, hobbies and sports. While serving as a significant health benefit, interests and distractions from your official role enrich your life and make you better able to serve.

Most executives have room to grow in this area, and it is something that should be continually pursued. With each professional crisis in our lives, the importance of this off-duty down time increases.

## **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Acquiring Personal Legal Support.** Strongly consider acquiring outside legal representation if you perceive the possibility of personal adverse consequences. Because of the way such a move may be perceived by others, keep such a matter between yourself and your attorney until and unless disclosure becomes appropriate.

**A City Attorney or Counsel is Not Your Personal Attorney.** These folks represent the municipality and its employees, and certainly the executives of the various departments. Most typically, they are your partners in exercising your responsibilities and defending your actions and decisions. However, should a potential conflict arise between and your best interests and the best interests of the municipality, it is time for you to obtain personal legal representation.

**Attorneys Are Staff Advisors – Not Decision Makers.** Do not *automatically* embrace legal advice, and do not permit an

attorney to inappropriately drive your actions and decisions. Listen carefully and take seriously what you are told, but do not be hesitant to question that advice, or to request additional information, and if necessary to seek another legal opinion.

**Never Ask An Attorney What You Should Do!** Seek perspective as information for the decision that you will make. It is most often a wise approach for you to tell the attorney what you seek to accomplish and to determine a legal strategy to do so. Attorneys are just like all the rest of us in that they sometimes make mistakes and do not always possess all the skills they need to do the best job possible. Additionally, there are occasionally times when strong personal perspectives inappropriately affect their objectivity.

**Prosecutorial Involvement.** If a situation may potentially involve criminal activity, get the concerned prosecutorial agency involved immediately. Failure to do so may well result in behaviors and actions that can jeopardize the filing of criminal charges.

## **LIAISON WITH and the ROLE OF ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICIALS**

**Among a Chief's Greatest Challenges.** Generally speaking, I continue to believe that often the most difficult challenge facing law enforcement executives is dealing with elected and appointed officials. Without intending to minimize the importance of what we do, making arrests and conducting investigations are the easiest part of our job. Along with internal personnel issues, dealing with our civilian bosses can be pretty tough.



**It Ain't a Perfect World.** Winston Churchill really knew what he was talking about when he said that, "Democracy is horrible, but the best we have been able to come up with." The spectrum of elected officials run the gamut from well-educated and well-meaning people to illiterate crooks with evil intentions, and everything in between. The vast majority of this Nation's elected officials are good and decent people with honorable intentions. Unfortunately, considerably smaller percentages have the full range of skills that would be desirable for the positions they hold.

As we are all aware, some of our elected officials fit the mold of gadflies who in a perfect world probably should not hold positions of responsibility. Unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world and the ability to work with unique individuals is among a law enforcement executive's most critical skills.

**Primary Responsibility to the Community.** Notwithstanding an employer-type of responsibility to municipal employees, including law enforcement executives, in the final analysis the elected officials, city managers and mayors owe their primary allegiance to the citizens. In significant situations (even some not so significant!) where there is a conflict between the best interests of the community and the best interests of the law enforcement executive, the one with the badge is likely to lose.

**Seek to Educate & Inform Elected and Appointed Officials.** Educating key officials is a continuing process that must be taken seriously, and not undertaken only because a problem is occurring. Every law enforcement executive has or will receive criticism based on honest lack of understanding and requests for things that run the gamut from inappropriate to illegal. Preemptive informational strikes, before the troublesome

criticism or requests are received, can prevent a great deal of pain.

**Encourage Joint Statements.** Joint statements involving key law enforcement officials and elected officials can be very helpful in educating the public. To the extent reasonable, and where all are inclined to participate, it can be a good thing. Be sensitive to the reality that officials outside the law enforcement agency are typically and legitimately hesitant to participate in something that may backfire on them.

When speaking publicly, realize that you are communicating to three groups of people, your superiors (chief, council and city manager, as appropriate), the public and your employees. Forgetting his reality can create problems by sending out the wrong message.

**Finding Your "Line in the Sand."** When an issue goes beyond the subject of dealing with particular challenges, law enforcement executives need to be clear about their "line in the sand," or better described as what they are prepared to lose their job over, if necessary. Hopefully, such scenarios were discussed as a precursor when the position was obtained, but sometimes need to be conversationally reinforced with the passage of time and changing of personalities. If not, better late than never. Make sure that you and others are clear about the lines you will not cross.

Problematic examples may include but are not limited to the following: Refusal for political purposes to fire someone; Expected for political purposes to hire or promote someone; Being expected to deceive the public; Expected to use a less qualified but politically connected contractor; Expected to use

restricted automated databases for illegal inquiries and other types of troublesome behaviors.

A wise leader is one who anticipates inappropriate requests and organizes his or her thoughts on how best to deal with them. I recommend actually practicing the preferable verbiage to address the various types of situations that could arise (ask to cancel a ticket, access a data base, etc.).

If an executive stays in the position long enough, those “line in the sand” moments will come; it is just a matter of when and by whom. There is less shock and more resolve in the ultimate decision to leave if one has “pre-thought” the consequences.

**Actions if Termination Appears Likely or Possible.** While much easier to discuss than to accept, an unhappy ending is possible and may be unavoidable. However, troublesome behavior on your part is completely avoidable and your actions – strong or weak – will be a big part of your legacy and have a likely impact on your future. Remember that a major indicator of a person’s character is how they perform when things are not going well. Do the best job you can, both in deed and in spirit, as long as you have that badge on your shirt. Leave in a professional manner and realize that your actions when departing will be closely securitized by others for the rest of your professional career.

The final of ten recommendations in a 1989 book written by a former city manager was to, “prepare to be fired” (*How Bright is Your Badge*, Bill Kirchhoff). This is not a pleasant topic but it does reflect the realities of the police chief career path. Wise chiefs always hope for the best but structure their lives (and employment contracts) to potentially prepare for the worst.

Note: A review of the booklet, *Establishing & Maintaining RELATIONSHIPS With Municipal Officials*, is strongly recommended. It may be downloaded at no charge from KeithBushey.com

## **MEDIA RELATIONS**

**Few of Us Have the Skills that May Be Required in a Major Troublesome Situation.** Recognize this and seek the guidance of someone who does possess those skills. A well-intended poor choice of words (even one word) can become very problematic and haunt you for a long time (maybe forever).

**The Media Decide What to Report – Not You.** Try as you may to encourage the media to stay the course with the topic and focus which you feel is appropriate, they decide what they are going to cover and what is going to be said. Your professionalism and goodwill are likely to be among the factors considered by the media in their treatment of you, your department, and our profession.

**Media Often Pursues a Specific Theme.** There may well be times when what is a big and major topic with you becomes just more supportive material for another narrative being reported upon. An example might be what you see as a justified use of force by a fine officer being reported as a proclivity for younger officers to use force more often than senior officers. Don't depend on the reporter to get it right, the editor back at the newspaper or television station most often calls the shots and makes the final decision.

I am still angry about an incident involving the terribly unfair coverage of LAPD's Dispatch Center when I was the captain, overseeing its operation, many years ago. I invited a reporting team to come to the Center and show the good work being continually performed by the personnel. Conversely, the editor's theme was that the assignment was actually a "dumping ground" for marginal police officers! This was absolutely untrue and created a great deal of pain and embarrassment for many employees and their families. My plea for a retraction or at least additional objective elaboration, fell on deaf ears. The sincere apology of the initial reporter, who was critical of the actions of the editor, did little to ease the pain. Remember, in a live interview you control the theme; in a taped interview, the editor controls the theme.

**Seek Editorial Understanding.** Seek the opportunity to meet with the editors and editorial staff, and to educate them with respect to your perspective. While I may be naïve on this issue, I continue to believe that the media, by and large, wants to do a good job. Your candor and educational efforts can be helpful to fair and balanced media coverage. It is also a good idea to encourage the media outlet's leadership that your department not be a Petri dish for young and inexperienced reporters to develop their skills and "make their bones."

**Never Lie or Otherwise Provide Misleading Information.** There is no recovery and most often a catastrophic ending, sooner or later, for those who lack honesty in media relations. Also, freely discussing those things you want reported and taking the "no comment" positions on things you don't want reported will not work. Again, seek the guidance of a person skilled in media relations.

**Consider Carefully Prepared Written Statements.** It is pretty hard for someone to misinterpret your statements when they are in writing. A carefully worded statement, where others contribute to the appropriateness of your remarks, is typically a very wise move.

In responding to critical letters or editorials, it serves no purpose to perpetuate a war of words. If the information is factually incorrect, respond with professional clarification, do not attack the author and sign your name. Terms such as, “ I would like to correct some inaccurate information” or “provide additional information that may be helpful to the readers,” send out the right message of professionalism.

Do be sensitive to the almost universal tendency of attorneys to recommend that little or nothing be said. While certainly helpful to their defense as they don’t have to address issues that haven’t been discussed, silence may be very harmful to an agency’s efforts to be transparent. You need to seek the appropriate balance in determining what will be said.

## **PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS & CONSEQUENCES**

I wish that I could say that I always got it right, but such would not be anywhere close to the truth. For the sake of my ego, I found some marginal comfort in the remarks of many of my fellow colleagues who believed themselves to be less than perfect as well! What follows is a discussion of some of our failings, and the consequences of our leadership missteps.

**Recognition of Limitations.** On occasion, especially early in my career as an executive, I had more confidence in my abilities than was merited. This occasionally caused me to bite

off more than I could chew. In conversations with virtually all of my colleagues, it turns out that I was not alone in this regard.

**Discussion:** If I were to choose just one topic where most of us have examples where our performance fell short of our expectations and those of others, it would have to be the overall topic of leadership skills. Just as a sea captain needs experience in a smaller vessel before commanding a larger ship, command officers could also greatly benefit from assignments of increased responsibilities. Frequent specific limitations include, but are not limited to: Methods to gain organizational control; Establishing credibility; Truly understanding and being able to influence the budgetary process; and other issues related to overall command leadership skills.

**Maintaining Focus.** Between the things that represent our personal agendas and the often-present thorny human resource issues (gender, ethnicity, orientation, workers compensation, accommodations, etc., etc.), it is very easy to take our eyes off the issues of crime, traffic and community activities.

**Discussion:** I need go no further than my own experiences to provide examples of how difficult it can be sometimes to maintain focus on the key issues of why we exist. In just about every command where I have served, allegations (merited or otherwise) of harassment, discrimination or bias of one sort or another had the potential to be all consuming, to disrupt the work force, and to divert energy and focus that should have been on crime to the resolution of the allegations. As I gained command experience I typically delegated the myriad of issues related to these

types of investigations to others, and wish that I had done so earlier in my command career, where I had neglected other portions of my leadership activities because of micromanaging sensitive investigations.

**Overly Sensitive to Criticism.** Most command officers, primarily because we tend to be conscientious, take things pretty seriously. As a result, sometimes our antennas are extended just a tad too much and we see criticism where it may well not have been intended, at least not to the degree perceived.

*Discussion:* I wish I could get back some of the weekends that I spent worrying about things at work, when I should have been able to focus primarily on my family. A good reminder for all of us is the reality that text messages and emails, in the absence of a few additional thoughtful words or comments, are often received in a harsh manner that was not intended by the sender.

I sadly reflect on a couple of separate situations in separate agencies, both involving lieutenants who had great potential but were struggling to some extent, and who interpreted what was intended as helpful guidance into personal criticism. Both of these overly sensitive individuals saw evil where it did not exist and behaved and responded to some situations based upon their paranoia, and in so doing exhibited behaviors that damaged their continued upward mobility.

**Failed to Delegate to Appropriate Degrees.** This is a huge issue that can easily make the difference between success and failure. Our desire to get things done well and promptly must



be weighed against the need to develop others and not be burdened with tasks that truly need to be performed by others.

**Discussion:** Again, I need go no further than my own experiences to provide adequate examples. Early in my command career, in both good times and in bad, I had a tendency to personally perform tasks that I should have delegated to others. Those who take the position, as I once did, that “sometimes it is easier to just do it yourself,” are badly mistaken. For me, in just about every instance where I failed to appropriately delegate, my actions were an immediate solution but caused future problems. This troublesome tendency became even more problematic during particularly challenging times.

**Good Night’s Sleep.** The human body, including the mind, needs rest. We all miss a good night’s sleep on occasion, but a steady pattern of inadequate rest, such as can occur during particularly challenging times, will trigger a downward spiral that absolutely will result in a degradation of your effectiveness.

**Discussion:** All of us have experienced situations where subordinates, peers and colleagues have exhibited “short fuses” and troublesome actions that were the consequences of inadequate rest. Like most of us, I have an aversion to taking medication unless I really need to, and as a result did not take any sleep aids. Those many early (like 4:00 AM early) mornings when unable to get back to sleep, when I just got up and prematurely started my day, sapped a great deal of physical and mental energy that I really needed for my command duties. Additionally, I know that a lack of adequate rest sometimes caused my disposition to suffer as well.

**Slow to Seek Assistance.** All of us need to recognize that we want others to succeed, and are almost unanimously committed to the tasks of coaching and mentoring. I cannot even count the number of situations where I could have benefited from the wisdom of others, or where my subordinates could have benefited from my assistance, but all too often those mentoring opportunities were not pursued.

***Discussion:*** There were times when I was in over my head and did not realize it. In one instance, as a new Los Angeles Police area commanding officer, my boss assigned a more seasoned area commanding officer to me as a mentor. That was a very wise and much appreciated action. Don't hesitate to solicit the mentorship of another executive, especially one with a record of scar tissue based effectiveness. It is wise to reach out for a little help, and foolish not to do so.

**Staff Loyalty, Considerations and Consequences.**

Regardless of who is right or who is wrong, or what is good and what is bad, or as is often the case a mixture of all of the above, your staff is often caught in the middle of an administrative crossfire. While completely reasonable to expect them to perform appropriate and customary duties with goodwill and professionalism, it is not reasonable to expect them to show blind loyalty in supporting issues involving you personally. Further it is an administrative mortal sin to involve them in any conflict that may well place them in an awkward situation whenever you might leave the organization.

***Discussion:*** The most troublesome and unique situation that comes to my mind are the several months in the Los Angeles Police Department when it was clear that Chief

Daryl Gates was being forced out. Notwithstanding the multitude of great things that he did, he was involved in a long-time and simmering feud with the mayor and some members of the city council, and stubbornly behaved in a way that had the effect of widening the gap between the department, city government, and many of the city's power brokers. It was painful to watch a number of the staff and command officers, who had once been loyal supporters and beneficiaries of his assistance, publicly distance themselves from him, especially those who sought to replace him as chief of police. Regardless of skills and qualifications, there is no way that the mayor or his appointed police commission was going to select as chief anyone who could be described as a product of Daryl Gates. I believe most staff members who were close to Chief Gates would concur that their dogged loyalty to Gates during those turbulent times did nothing to advance their careers, and in some instances spelled the end to their organizational prosperity.

While the above example (Chief Gates) demonstrates a high degree of loyalty to the chief, just the opposite is often the case, especially when it involves a chief from "the outside" when there are "insiders" who believe they should have been selected as chief. To the extent that there is a classic example of a lack of loyalty to the chief, and where covert measures may be employed to hasten the chief's downfall, it would be a long-term and popular insider, who had an equally long-term and friendly relationship with the secretary to the chief of police, both of whom believing that the insider should have gotten the position. In these types of situations, it is also common for the "insider" to have cordial relationships with some elected officials and community leaders. An outside chief with lean skills, who is unable to gain an organizational and community foothold,

and a degree of loyalty from each, is likely to experience these predictable problematic dynamics.

Most of us with multi-agency law enforcement executive command experience could write a book about the internal dynamics and trauma associated with executive survival, where the number of variables and considerations are endless. However, one thing is clear; there is typically an absolute correlation between the degree of leadership skills and rapidity of exercising those skills, and positional survival. The sooner an executive can make a positive professional and personal impression, internally, externally and politically, the greater the likelihood of success.

**Creating & Maintaining Documentation.** There is no such thing as a conflict or disagreement of any nature that does not depend on documentation for resolution!

***Discussion:*** I need look no further than my own experiences to provide the first example. Years ago, as the commanding officer of the Personnel Group of the Los Angeles Police Department, I was the top personnel officer on the Department, and also the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer (EEOO). Based upon an extensive investigation conducted by one of my subordinate units, I opined that an employee who was alleging discrimination was not a victim of anything other than experiencing the predictable consequences of poor performance. Unfortunately for me, this employee was well thought of by another person in the chain of command above me, who disagreed with my finding. When I refused to amend my findings, I was summarily transferred to a very humiliating assignment. Recognizing the reason I was reassigned, I had made and retained a copy of the very extensive

investigation. Shortly after the transfer, I retired from the LAPD and became the head of another law enforcement agency. Approximately one year later, when called as a witness in a federal lawsuit related to this matter, I learned that *the day following my reassignment*, the Department's copy of the extensive file that led to my findings of "no discrimination" disappeared, and that a one page document was generated by the Office of the Chief of Police finding that the employee was the victim of discrimination. My retention of that file, and making it available in federal court, resulted in an appropriate outcome of the lawsuit.

Another superb example of wise retention was that of a colleague who continually declined to use the department's automated systems to make personal inquiries by the mayor of that jurisdiction. Recognizing that his insistence on doing the right and legal thing could lead to his termination, he kept copies of emails from the mayor, and his own "memos to the record" made subsequent to each overture, which later cost the city dearly on the basis of unlawful termination.

Finally, I am aware of several situations, *not involving any alleged or suspected criminal activities*, where executive's officer files and computers were seized as part of the reassignment or termination process. In one particularly unique situation, during an unexpected impromptu termination conversation with the police chief, a command officer's computer was being removed by the city's telecommunications services in an obviously orchestrated process.

**Blindly Accepting Some Legal Advice.** Please read this carefully and learn from my many early mistakes; *never ask an*

*attorney what you should do!* Explain the situation, the outcome that you seek, and ask for guidance to achieve the resolution that you desire. Attorneys are staff advisors and not decision makers, and they are just like the rest of us in not possessing all the wisdom that might be desirable. There will be instances where you will find yourself taking actions with which you disagree, but don't go down without a fight and blindly accept what you are told by the first attorney that you talk to. Be polite, appreciative, make him or her feel like a member of your team, but don't be hesitant to seek additional legal perspective. Bad advice can create troublesome precedents that can haunt an agency for a long time.

***Discussion:*** I could literally create an entire booklet of human resource nightmares stemming from poor legal advice, provided by well-meaning attorneys who knew the law but not how to balance that law with the realities of the workplace. In far too many situations, the strong advice to take a particular legal path resulted in the classic immediate solution and long-term disaster. Examples where I personally have received problematic advice includes, but are not restricted to the following: Insisting that "past practice" precluded ability to modify working conditions, even though needs of the position had changed; inability to apply administrative sanctions to a poorly performing key person without a minimum of two bi-yearly negative evaluations; inability to interview an employee under investigation for serious charges for fear of aggravating a (bogus) claim of psychological job stress; inability to notify a state regulatory agency that licensed psychotherapists of an employee, licensed by that agency, who was terminated for well-documented sexual abuse; and a requirement to provide unreasonable accommodation to an "injured employee" merely because others had been accommodated.

In each of the above examples, the advice given resulted in immediate solutions and long-term adverse consequences.

As a troubling example, at the time of my retirement from the Los Angeles Police Department, the practice of “accommodating injured employees” had reached such proportions that several hundred police officers and supervisors were on permanent light duty status and not available for field assignment. In San Bernardino County, where I served with both the Marshal’s and Sheriff’s Department, injured employees were retired once they reached “permanent & stationary” status, resulting in fewer claims of disability, and a workforce where almost 100% of the employees were qualified for field duty.

**Confiding in the Wrong Person.** First and foremost, we do the right things for the right reasons and should never have to trust someone to conceal troublesome actions or behaviors. Having said that, there are times when we discuss subjects that have to do with personnel intentions, engagement strategies, labor relations, budgetary and resource acquisition, and other internal issues that an adversary can use against us and to his or her advantage. We can never be 100% certain that our confidence will not be betrayed, but it is important to be sensitive to the realities discussed above.

**Discussion:** I doubt that there are any executives out there who cannot share a personal troublesome situation where their activities were not betrayed, in one manner or another, by someone in whom they had misplaced confidence. Examples include an ambitious assistant chief who was conspiring with the police association to undermine the chief, the sergeant who was lobbying the council to fire the chief and hire him, the secretary who was feeding potential

derogatory information to a potential chief candidate from outside the department, and the administrative staffer who was literally a “plant” from a person higher in the chain of command.

**Inadequate Internal Communications.** Information that is passed by word of mouth usually suffers some distortion with each person involved. There were times when what I said to Person #1 was completely misunderstood when it got to Person #4, with the degree of distortion often influenced by the people involved, the complexity of the issue, and the degree of controversy that might be involved. As said previously, there are only three ways to ensure that what you say is interpreted accurately by all concerned: Tell the intended audience personally, make a video tape and ensure that everybody watches it, or put it in writing. Obviously, the only practical solution is to put in writing those things that are the most important, and to verbally reinforce what you wrote. A word of caution: Don't permit written communications to reduce your physical presence and interaction with your people.

**Discussion:** Many years ago, a long retired Assistant Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department told me that his greatest disappointment as a new command officer was discovering that many people did not perform as he directed. It did not take me long, as a new command officer, to recognize this same reality! Notwithstanding the fact that distortion often occurs under all circumstances, it is pretty much a fact that generally the degree of understanding is related to the popularity or support of whatever the topic happens to be.



I shall draw on an amusing historic situation to illustrate an example where information was passed without distortion. Chief William H. Parker prohibited short-sleeved uniform shirts because of his aversion to tattoos, but on the hot summer day following his death, when the acting police chief authorized the wearing of short-sleeved shirts, the entire day shift in the entire department were wearing short-sleeved shirts before the end of that day shift. That was a good day for every tailor in Los Angeles who knew how to modify a shirtsleeve!

As for situations where information was either not disseminated or distorted, there is no shortage of examples. Examples that come to mind have been deployment “confusion” where personnel assignments were out of sync with daily needs, audits that were either not performed or done so in a manner less than expected, reports that were not done properly and/or submitted in a timely manner, and many other situations, including those where the employee took the position that, “it is more preferable to be forgiven than to get permission for non-compliance.” As mentioned previously, executives are wise to implement and maintain control and tracking systems.

The above examples were not necessarily related to particularly challenging times, but examples of how information is often distorted. In the absence of measures to ensure accuracy, the predictable distortions that occur under just about all circumstances are guaranteed to be exacerbated during difficult times.

**Determining the True Nature of Involved Individuals.** The actions and recommendations of law enforcement executives oftentimes have huge economic and personal consequences for

others, especially business interests. Command personnel need to be continually cognizant of individuals and organizations that advocate for various types of actions under false or exaggerated pretences. Strong community lobbying efforts, especially when pressure is also applied to elected officials, can sometimes create some of the problematic challenges that we face, and there are times when the actions are being done to advance troublesome and sometimes illegal special interests.

***Discussion:*** Three of my personal experiences provide example of these troublesome types of activities.

The first example involved a “Neighborhood Organization” whose “leadership” lobbied me long and hard to recommend denial (to the state regulatory agency) of various beverage control license applications. It turned out that the rogue organization was made up of just the two “neighbor leaders,” and that they were essentially extorting new businesses to “contribute” to their community group as a condition of non-opposition of beverage control license applications. At one point before their true nature was revealed, these individuals made a complaint to the Office of the Chief of Police that my refusal to recommend denial of certain applications was contributing to increased crime resulting from an overconcentration of licensed premises!

The second example involved a very legitimate community support umbrella organization, and a representative of a portion of the portion of that organization that represented an emerging immigrant community. The “representative” of that immigrant community was constantly bringing members from that community to the police station to meet and to have a picture taken with me. It turned out that the

“representative” was basically selling alleged access to me, to include a “photo op with the captain,” by inflated association dues, with the excess going into his pocket. The trips to the station were done to illustrate the alleged special access and relationship to the police department.

The third example involved what initially appeared to be a solid community organization that served as a referral agency for youth who were diverted to community service from the courts for minor infractions, such as graffiti, truancy, etc. This organization kept the juveniles busy with community clean up, graffiti removal, alley cleaning, etc. I was most impressed, until learning that this “Neighborhood Improvement Association” was a front group for a very controversial religious order!

## **SUMMARY**

As mentioned in the *Introduction*, there is no approach that is guaranteed to be helpful in all instances, since there are as many variables and personalities as there are stars in a galaxy. However, I feel comfortable in providing assurance that reading and taking seriously the contents of this booklet will increase, to some degree, the likelihood of a more favorable outcome and process than might have occurred without such review. This booklet reeks with the scar tissue and experiences of a number of folks who have encountered and survived particularly challenging situations, and whose perspectives should be of value to the reader.

Finally, be continually cognizant of the reality that the best time to prepare for command challenges is long before they occur; just as the military warrior trains for combat challenges, the

police executive needs to train hard in developing the full range of leadership skills to successfully manage whatever command challenge(s) may arise.

### **KEITH D. BUSHEY**

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