

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2013

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

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

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

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

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

Creating Leaders for the Future: III. The Role of the Leader at the Top

by

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Police leaders who will lead the organization of the future will find that their experience will differ significantly from the experience of past leaders. It is becoming increasingly clear that they will lead more open organizations with fluid boundaries, digital environments, and talent networks that encourage extensive collaboration and problem-solving engagements with other municipal and community agencies, all working to meet the goal of enhanced community-wide public safety. The organization of the future will challenge the traditional police culture dominated by hierarchy and its associated structures and processes. Most of today's leaders realize that "business as usual" will not suffice in the future. What do they need to do to prepare the leaders who will take police organizations forward and meet the needs of the future?

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership drew upon a wide range of police leaders to identify those factors and ex-

periences that were most determinate in shaping them. Combining what we learned from those leaders with key changes affecting 21st century leadership and learning, we believe that growing leaders for the future will depend more than any other factor on the environment they are provided. One of the most impactful things leaders at the top can do for the future of policing is to create a new local environment for developing people uniquely qualified to lead in that future.

In our preceding paper—“II. Shaping A New Environment: The Learner’s Marketplace”—we introduced a visual of an urban landscape of many apparently random billboards displaying a wide range of system values, intervention activities, and individual initiative(s) that provide unique learning paths and experience in the environment of the future ([The Learner’s Marketplace](#)).

In this third paper, we discuss what chiefs need to be doing to begin to build this growth environment. What should chiefs be doing to ensure that their power and responsibility is used to reinforce the types of experiences that will help to grow/prepare future leaders and allow them to get the most from the experiences that define the Learning Marketplace? What is required to create a new developmental environment?

As mentioned above, we drew upon police leaders in a variety of ways to determine those factors and experiences that they feel shaped them. We wanted to tap into the elusive subject of how leaders actually develop (as opposed to how they theoretically develop). Activities included:

- Over 20 former and current chiefs generated their own career history based on a template of questions, categories, and timelines.
- In-depth taped interviews were conducted with police leaders who had participated in various community-building efforts.
- A dozen recognized leaders participated in a videotaped, facilitated panel on various aspects of police leadership under the Work of Policing innovation team.
- Sessions at each of the principals’ meetings were devoted to future leadership challenges. In one meeting, each participant was challenged to quickly and spontaneously come up with an experience that significantly shaped them—hardly any two were the same.
- Finally, we took every opportunity to ask the question: What advice do you have for leaders in the coming decades? Many of these responses were surprisingly the same as reported below.

Overall, our goal was to gather empirical data from which to draw common themes and innovative thinking in the following areas:

- How Chiefs Can Initiate a New Developmental Environment Across Their Agency
- Key Things Chiefs Need to Do to Promote This New Environment ([The Learner’s Marketplace](#))

How Chiefs Can Initiate a New Developmental Environment Across Their Agency

Allow for a wealth of opportunities. Most leaders acknowledge that their developmental path was not a prescriptive one and that no single event was determinant. Many report benefiting from working for chiefs who provided them opportunities early in their careers to expand their vision of the potential of policing. Those opportunities influenced how they embraced experiences and made choices as they matured into leadership roles. These cited early opportunities come in all shapes and sizes, but they have some common elements:

- One chief created task forces to address specific problems that included patrol officers. As part of the experience, the officers had the opportunity for 3-4 day visits to other departments (Detroit, Michigan; New York City, New York; and Cincinnati, Ohio) in order to learn how other agencies solved problems being addressed by each task force.
- Other creative police leaders provided opportunities for police officers early in their careers to participate in community problem-solving engagements where enforcement tactics were only one part of the solution. As such, they learned the value of collaborative problem solving and came to appreciate that there were many approaches to addressing a public safety community problem over and above a law enforcement response.
- Others chiefs challenged their officers to look beyond how a police agency responds to a problem and encouraged them to look at the multidimensional nature and intersection of crime and social problems. As one chief put it, we learned we were but one tool in the toolbox and, along with the other local agencies, we all were part of the bigger toolbox.
- Some creative leaders brought their officers into problem-solving forums that addressed larger community issues such as neighborhood revitalization, school-based programs, neighborhood blight reduction, or drug market disruption. Again, they were working with a variety of stakeholders and learned the value of working on a collaborative problem-solving team to achieve a specific outcome.
- A common theme—the opportunity to work with “outsiders”—opened their eyes to new ways of doing business and developing professionally.

Other advantages of these experiences included:

- Opportunities to see different ways of doing business.
- Exposure to other people, their ideas, and how they approached problems.
- A better understanding of their cities and how they operated.
- Recognition of the value and the need for analysis, and subsequently an understanding and appreciation of research.
- Recognition that the public safety community/building safe neighborhoods portfolio extended far beyond a particular skill set and involved being part of a larger team working together to achieve a common goal.

Create the potential for early opportunities. From a career perspective, current leaders saw the value of opportunities to participate in deeper and broader responsibilities early

in their police careers and to develop more in-depth understanding of the problems facing their communities.

Instill the value of self-awareness. Leaders also acknowledge that they began, gradually, to tune in to their capacity for self-reflection, particularly as they came to see themselves in contrast to others, and began to realize the benefits of introspection. Given that 30 years ago self-awareness did not play a central role in leadership cultures and certainly not in the police culture, today's leaders for the most part developed self-awareness skills and behaviors on their own. However, most maintain that, had those reflective processes been encouraged early on, they may have realized those benefits sooner than later.

Develop multidimensional problem-solving mindset and behaviors. Problem solving has been expanding to include collaboration, but it could be further expanded to include the importance of self-reflection, which came up several times in the leader profiles and discussions. A common theme was that self-reflection not only helped build an understanding of solving problems from a multidimensional perspective; it also gave these developing leaders an opportunity to examine their own reactions to challenge and change. They were no longer an authoritarian cop giving orders; they were part of a team and had to absorb challenges to some of their ideas and thoughts about how business gets done. Public safety in the 21st century demands this broad perspective.

Key Things Chiefs Need to Do to Promote the Learner's Marketplace Environment

In discussions and meetings throughout The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership the focus inevitably turned to implementation: How could current leaders encourage and support innovative activities? How could they make them agency wide? The Learner's Marketplace is a framework to help create an environment where individuals and innovation can thrive. The four rules of the marketplace are the core beliefs that we recommend chiefs embrace to ensure success.

Rule 1: All Learning Is Individual. The traditional view is that leadership development flows from the top. In that view, enlightened leaders expose those they believe have potential to development opportunities—other ways of doing business and solving problems. In the organization of the future with a broad public-service delivery model, all officers will need opportunities to engage in critical thinking, to take a deeper look at issues, to be open to different ideas, and to grasp the budget implications of what they are doing. Although the idea of “everyone is a leader” has been out there for a long time, in a very real sense everyone will need leadership aptitude in the organization of the future. And they will to begin developing it from their first day.

Also in the traditional view, leaders provide and distribute opportunities. Officers receive them, compete for them, and accept them. This model extends across all professions and sectors and is part of the paternalistic, command and control model.

It is widely accepted that the top-down approach is changing and will continue to change in the coming decades. For one thing, the relationship between employer and employee is different, as the idea of lifelong employment has disappeared. New models of more par-

ticipatory cultures are taking over. Employees have expectations for their work environment, their personal development on the job, and their work/life balance. With expectation comes the responsibility to interact with their environment, manage their own career, and demand a workplace where they can learn. While the leader at the top must create an environment rich in opportunity, the individual must be responsible for identifying and pursuing opportunity for himself or herself. From the beginning of their careers, officers should be aware of their role in their own future and be held accountable for actively participating in their own development. In that sense, the marketplace is a tool to help create a system-wide environment of access and responsibility for all.

Another factor driving the rule that all learning is individual is the widespread changes in learning methodologies, formats, and venues. These changes have shifted authority from the teacher to the learner, allowing the learner to thrive in the 21st century marketplace.

Rule 2: All Experience Is Relevant. As the Learner's Marketplace illustrates, growing leaders involves far more than training in a particular role or skill. In addition, the public service delivery model is local and requires cross-functional learning beyond policing. Within that broader (horizontal) setting for the work of policing, current leaders need to ensure that officers begin to collaborate with others and create department initiatives that enable officers to test out new ideas and create relationships that extend beyond the department. Leaders must make a deliberate effort to put people into situations where collaboration is needed in order to be successful. Examples include special assignments where officers work with departments like zoning or with neighborhood development planning. In any of those activities, one is forced to step outside of the traditional police model in order to contribute.

Some of our profiled leaders referred to problem-solving initiatives or participation in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) as early examples of how collaborative engagements were started in some departments. They encouraged current leaders to seek out new and creative thinking along these lines, particularly in response to today's challenges involved in the ever-expanding use of technology, dealing with accountability and transparency, and promoting constitutional policing.

Another innovation cited was an Operations Resource Unit where officers learned about and tested change management strategies. Something similar could be done today, given structural and strategic challenges posed by the organization of the future and its interconnectedness with the digital age.

Leaders also need to support officer participation in activities that extend beyond the boundaries of a patrol assignment. Such activities could include involvement with the academic community, research partnerships, fellowships in organizations like the National Institute of Justice, or shadowing experiences in other departments. These activities are another way to build broader public service awareness and capability.

Rule 3: Paths Are Unpredictable. One thing that is clear from all our research with current police leaders is that the odd opportunity or the downright accidental opportunity can be a significant event in shaping a leader—the assignment they initially resented or serv-

ing on the library board in their community, for example. The Learner's Marketplace is designed to allow for and capture the unpredictable. The graphic lays out no paths; it invites the individual to begin paying attention to all assignments and opportunities early on and to chart and evaluate his/her progress.

In a learning environment that is open, non-linear, and unpredictable, coaching and mentoring take on a new importance. Coaches and mentors can provide guidance in a world of complex choices and they can provide the space and time for self-reflection. Through working with coaches, officers learn to be self-reflective and critical, and to analyze their experiences.

Unpredictability and ambiguity will play larger roles for the leader at the top. The leaders' personal introspection is important, as they need to focus on managing their reactions to challenges to their decisions, reflecting on why something didn't work the way they thought it would, analyzing their path forward, and not losing perspective. Equally important is maintaining a problem-solving framework that will help with analyzing issues and thinking through problems instead of moving ahead without a clear understanding of all the issues. Professional instinct based on accumulated experience is important to all leaders, but reliance on critical thinking helps to develop greater insight into problems.

Also on a personal level, today's leaders need to be aware that every decision will disappoint someone. Expect disappointment and conflict, but that should not distract one from pursuing the mission. Many leaders believe that collaborative problem solving can get in the way of law enforcement's cultural bias is to "get things done." In the mindset of the future, action orientation is a contribution police bring to collaboration, and collaboration leads to a better solution.

Rule 4: Culture Is the Glue. Our focus on learning how successful chiefs and executives reflect on their own paths revealed that leaders actually develop in non-linear and unpredictable ways. Their paths were often set in motion by an instructor, sergeant, or chief they met early in their career. To meet the challenge of creating leaders uniquely qualified to take on the challenges of the coming decades, leaders at the top should shape an environment in their own agencies that provides those potential leaders with the ability to emerge. The environment can be based on the many attributes captured in the Learner's Marketplace. It should be introduced to incoming officers and built into all positions. The top leader must also actively promote an environment in which learning, innovation, and self-reflection are valued.

In this more open, non-linear learning environment, officers themselves have to accept responsibility for making the most of their opportunities and for taking charge of their own growth and development. This may involve taking some risks and trying out new strategic approaches that have not yet been fully recognized in law enforcement. It may also mean being open to new experiences that satisfy personal intellectual curiosity. This new environment could evolve into individuals moving on to different jobs in different departments in the interest of a municipal-wide integrated approach to public service. In the years to come, the local environment will assume a new importance.

In the open, non-linear world of the Learner's Marketplace, the culture is the binding agent. It will be the job of the leader of the top to create and protect an environment in which we grow the leaders we need for the future.

Conclusion

The future will be different. The 21st century public safety delivery model is becoming a broad-based coalition of local governments and communities. We must build the police organization of the future to be able to participate and lead in that system. Our leaders must then find new ways to develop the leaders we need for that future.

The leaders engaged by the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, in reflecting on their careers, are pointing the way to the future. As a group, they have had highly successful law enforcement careers, have histories of contributions that have received national recognition and awards, and continue to produce in ways that advance the profession. What they told us and what we learned about how leaders really develop led to the idea of the Learner's Marketplace.

Going forward, police leaders at the top should strive to create an environment within a changing world of public safety that supports and encourages individual responsibility for seeking learning. We believe that is the leadership development model for the 21st century.

“Creating Leaders for the Future: III. The Role of the Leader at the Top” was developed with the contribution of Darrel W Stephens, Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, (retired, 2008) NC Chief of Police. Darrel is also Co-Director of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership.

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