



INTERNATIONAL POLICE EXECUTIVE SYMPOSIUM  
WORKING PAPER NO 3

**CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY POLICE LEADERSHIP**

*John Middleton-Hope*

FEBRUARY 2007

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## **Challenges in Contemporary Police Leadership**

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IPES Working Paper No 3, February 2007

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### **ABSTRACT**

Police departments across North America continue to struggle with the effects of the budget reductions of the 1990's while there are renewed demands to meet escalating community expectations. A highly competitive market environment has emerged in which departments must outmaneuver each other for scarce human resources. And while this pressure mounts, policing is experiencing a serious image problem. Exacerbated by a steady diet of media reports of police wrong doing, chiefs of police must learn new strategies to manage these competing challenges.

John Middleton-Hope

Chief of Police (retired)

6 Canyon Green West

Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

[JM-H@shaw.ca](mailto:JM-H@shaw.ca)

# **Challenges in Contemporary Police Leadership**

*John Middleton-Hope*

## **Introduction**

This paper examines the ethical, political and relationship challenges confronting contemporary police leaders in Canada; from the erosion of the public's trust to recruitment efforts within this fluid 21<sup>st</sup> century environment. Each interrelated perspective will assess the politically charged environment police leaders find themselves in today and present strategies to reduce the negative effects on the community, the reputation of the department and the chief of police.

## **Ethical Challenges**

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, ethics refer to "The rules or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession." And how do members of the public see our conduct?

Quite simply policing has an image problem. What the public sees on television, on the internet, and reads in the headlines of the daily news is their reality. In the wake of the 1991 assaults on Rodney King in Los Angeles, California, the public has become adept at video taping, photographing and audio taping the interactions between citizens and the police. Often capturing only portions of interactions, they are sold to the highest bidder and within a short period a potential scandal is in the making.

These events have helped shape the perception of the police while rarely affording the opportunity for police officers and departments to exercise a "do over."

The majority of the contacts we have with our citizens involves crisis or confrontation. We see them at their worst, at their most aggressive, at their most vulnerable and at their most stressed.

Whether the interaction involves a driving citation or an arrest, the public is often in a situation in which the police were called to right the wrong, intervene in the family disaster or protect the innocent. And through it all there is an expectation that the police officers that respond to the complaint will be courteous, professional and when appropriate, compassionate. At a minimum they are expected to reflect the core values of the police department.

The awesome responsibility with which police officers are statutorily empowered necessitates that they are held to a higher standard of conduct. Our failures have become legendary while our successes rarely noted with the same interest.

The public recognizes there will be police officers that engage in inappropriate conduct. What they expect police executives to do is identify and punish these officers. It is the public who demands we pursue the truth. Their trust in us depends on our undying commitment to reveal the truth even if it damages the reputation of the department.

Not only is the public perception negatively impacted when a police officer abuses the public trust but the relationship between the department and its city manager, city council or police commission is often damaged as well. The perception by various oversight bodies is that the chief of police is responsible for both the actions of the officer(s) involved in misconduct and for the department's timely response to hold the officer accountable. The proverbial buck stops with the chief.

The most difficult challenges for chiefs or senior leaders to manage are those that attack their personal integrity and honesty. They have often built a career on these tenets and it is in these two words many chiefs see their reputation embodied.

The ethical climate of a police department has often been judged by the actions and behaviors of the men and women that maintain the safety and security of our communities. In fact when it comes to the ethical climate of a police organization, it is all about the behaviors of the chief and the messages he or she conveys to the rest of the organization.

Chiefs by their positional authority over their subordinates and to a degree the place they occupy in the community must have well developed moral or ethical reasoning skills.

Conflicts arise when chiefs of police lose sight of their original vision and become obsessed with managing the various challenges to their administration. Their own behaviors can overshadow the moral reasoning that will have sustained them throughout their career to that point and are then called into question.

An acknowledgement that challenges are part of the job and not part of who the chief is personally is an important distinction to be made. The chief and the governance body need to develop very early in their relationship a process that will address the appropriate handling of ethical crises that will inevitably occur. Developing and agreeing on a process that will address ethical crises is critical to the sustainability of the relationship between chief and governance.

### **Ethical Climate Starts at the Top**

Ethical behavior in police organizations does not start with the introduction of an ethics program delivered to the officers on the street. It commences with a commitment by the chief of police to ensure there is an ethical climate established in the organization.

In order for police departments to achieve an ethical climate in the department, the chief of police and the executive must align their philosophy and observable behaviors, their communication and their decision making processes to ethical practices, not only when it is expedient or convenient, but at all times. This behavior is observed by every member of the organization and more clearly demonstrates what the organization stands for than any rhetoric.

Police officers are a tough crowd. They rapidly see through the haze of what they commonly refer to as “bullshit”. If the police executive demonstrates support for ethical programs, values and the mission and vision of the department and then goes about ignoring these edicts in favor of convenient responses, officers will pick up on this quickly and efforts to mitigate even a momentary lapse will be difficult to recover from.

It is rare that chiefs of police although openly supportive of models to enhance ethical practices within their department, become actively involved in the delivery of the instruction. It is also not uncommon for chiefs and executives to extol the importance of

ethical practices while neglecting the very important message their personal attendance in workshops or seminars along with their troops leaves with the organization.

### **What Gets Officers in Trouble?**

Virtually any police publication relates stories of poor ethical decision making not only by police officers but by chiefs of police who are expected to know better and act accordingly. It would seem that police misconduct is at an all time high and police officer “morality” is lacking if all the stories in various publications were the whole story, and of course they are not. However there does seem to be an alarming trend that may be explained in part by Edward J. Tully (1999) in which he posits that there are at least six explanations for the increased number of complaints of police officer conduct. They are liberally expanded on below:

First, law enforcement agencies are more alert to officer misconduct. Professional standards or internal affairs units of police organizations have developed more vigilant practices to identify and investigate accusations of inappropriate and criminal conduct by officers. Often driven by public sentiment there is evidence police organizations are moving to make the process of investigation more transparent and so the inappropriate behaviors of officers are more visible to the public.

Second, the numbers of opportunities for temptation are greater. Inappropriate levels of force used to subdue culprits high on illicit substances require officers to manage events they are often ill equipped to contend with. Justification for excessive force may be shrouded in a dark veil of self deception that the culprits “deserve” to be treated as less than human. Exposure to large quantities of illegal drugs can be a temptation for some to cash in on the obscene profits generated by the lucrative drug trade. Providing organized crime members with information or less restrictive access to markets fuels corrupt practices where some officers benefit directly from engaging in criminal acts. Both activities reinforce a sense of entitlement that sets up officers against the communities they serve.

Third, our society is producing individuals who may not exhibit strong character. Many departments are struggling with the challenges of identifying quality recruits. Through

our best efforts our entrance requirements are more stringent today than they were 25 years ago and yet young officers involved in inappropriate conduct are all too common.

Applicants today often need only demonstrate a departure of three years prior to hiring from previous inappropriate conduct. Whereas 25 years ago marijuana use may have precluded selection by some agencies, few eliminate candidates today if they have three years clear conduct prior to selection. This behaviour is now perceived to be minor in nature by comparison to the expectations our forefathers had of previous generations of “coppers.” In part, this demonstrates that times have changed and applications out of necessity are viewed with less jaundiced eyes.

However the majority of behavioral issues young officers are involved in are based on what they observe in senior patrol officers. Serious corruption is often a product of experience while bad decisions are the behaviors of younger members. Appropriate ethical decision making is still a matter of character.

Fourth, the work environment of our police officers has become more multi-racial and a greater number of women are entering the previously male dominated occupation. This positive change is causing organizations and chiefs to rethink how they interact with a diverse organizational population. Pin ups in locker rooms that were prevalent 15 years ago no longer adorn the walls and off color remarks about gender, sexual orientation and race are less tolerated in the work place.

Fifth, we now have a well entrenched generation of law enforcement professionals whose focus is about what’s in it for them? This attitude of entitlement creates a cohort of officers determined to put self above community and the department. These behaviors jeopardize the relationship with a supportive public.

And sixth, politicians, activists, and special interest groups apply pressure on police organizations to adhere to a more inclusive ideological position that at times sacrifices the wants and needs of the community while upholding the rights of individuals. As a balanced process there is clearly merit in engaging all sectors of the community in the decision making process but surely not to the detriment of society as a whole? The challenge for chiefs of police is to maintain a delicate balance between each constituent.

## **Ethical Challenges Facing Chiefs and Senior Leaders**

Chiefs face the same types of challenges as those faced by their members, but rarely are the actions of any one member of a police department more potentially damaging than the inappropriate actions of the chief of police.

Some of the many ethical challenges that chiefs of police have been confronted with are summarized as follows:

- Irregularities in expense account submissions such as claiming per diem or allowances that are in excess of those to which they are entitled. In their examination of police officer victimization, Kevin Gilmartin and John Harris (1998) looked at the conditions that exist in which police officers justify inappropriate conduct. This exemplifies a sense of entitlement in which police officers and indeed chiefs that succumb to “padding their expense account” view themselves as victims in one sense or another in which they feel they deserve more than they may be entitled to. In part this occurs because of the way they perceive they are treated by the organization.
- A supplier offering “perks” to executives such as trips, free equipment use or gifts that the chief takes personal advantage of. This may be combined with inappropriate sponsorship opportunities in exchange for brand identification or exclusive status as supplier of a police or business product without the benefit of RFP (request for proposal) or other tender process.
- Promotion favoritism or interfering in processes within the organization that will provide an unfair advantage to a person or group irrespective of skills. Organizations view this controlling behavior as inappropriate and unfair. A chief’s control over such activities challenges the ethical climate of the organization and may erode the relationship between chief and the membership.
- An intimate relationship with a subordinate whether or not it is a contravention of policy. This activity has unseated more than one senior police executive who has failed to recognize the necessity of distance between him self or her self and those whom they command.

- Discrimination or other forms of harassment based on primary grounds of gender, age, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. This would include permitting offensive language, behavior and activities intended to demean a segment of the organization. To tolerate sexist or homophobic “jokes” or pinups in the locker room merely serves to reinforce what is tolerated within the police culture.
- Protecting the organization from scandal by attempting to influence the outcome of an investigation, whether a criminal offence or internal disciplinary matter they both have the potential to negatively impact the reputation of the department. However, merely protecting the organization is not the issue alone. When a senior police executive interferes in an investigation, it may be construed as criminal conduct or a breach of statutory legislation. In any case exercising undo influence strikes at the moral fabric of the organization and the integrity of the chief.

There are numerous examples in which police officers are involved in misconduct and are provided severance to leave the organization or are permitted to resign to avoid embarrassing the organization. These examples are readily available in daily newspapers, police publications and academic research. Recently the Toronto Police Service has undergone an embarrassing and very public scandal involving corruption in the centralized drug unit. Former Chief Julian Fantino worked diligently to ferret out those involved and to hold them accountable. Regrettably failure by other leaders to hold officers accountable for corrupt or discreditable practices sends a message to other officers that these behaviors are acceptable.

The key message is that ethical decision making and adherence to core values starts at the top. They are not solely to be embraced by the officers working the street.

### **Strategies to Manage Ethical Challenges**

Although there are numerous business decisions chiefs make daily the decisions that often create the greatest challenges are ethical choices.

The points that follow provide some strategies to manage these challenges during a chief’s tenure.

- Be actively involved in the delivery of an ethical program for your members. Ethical decision making is a top down responsibility and requires unwavering leadership. Officers replicate behaviors that they observe in senior personnel. It is important to lead by example and set the tone for the organization.
- Have an “ethical advisory committee” of trusted advisors to whom you can turn for guidance in difficult situations. This provides an opportunity to examine challenges the organization will face and provide thoughtful and considered leadership that demonstrates a commitment to the core values of the police service.
- Before making a critical decision, ask yourself what your response might be if your decision ends up on the front page of the daily newspaper and is criticized by everyone. By applying the A.C.T. model<sup>1</sup> of examining alternatives, projecting consequences and telling the story, chiefs of police are able to apply this ethical construct to the decision making process and arrive at a well grounded position.
- Increase the transparency of your decision making by exposing the decisions and their reasons to a number of individuals within your executive before taking action. This vetting process helps ensure as many of the possible outcomes are examined and anticipated. It also enhances the chief’s leadership skills by providing for an examination of the potential solutions to problems.

### **Political Challenges**

All police leaders are affected by a number of key constituents that influence their administration. Depending on the reporting structure of the chief or department these groups may exercise significant dominion over the chief and may affect even the day to day operations of the department. The challenge for police leaders is to effectively manage in a climate where political realities may compete to influence the chief.

The community, including neighborhood groups, business organizations and service clubs has expectations of the chief that may include attending functions, meetings and

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Law Enforcement Administration, Center for Ethics Train the Train model (1994). Plano, TX. (ACT is an acronym for Alternatives, Consequences and Tell)

events in person. The chief, as the public face of the department, provides the vision necessary to achieve the mandate of the department. This is an opportunity to communicate the best efforts of the department to groups that look for ways to support the police. Successful chiefs monitor the pulse of the community by ensuring surveys, town hall meetings, events and functions are used to elicit input from the public.

There are 6 major political challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century chiefs and senior leaders:

First, manage the relationship with the *media*. Much of the public's perception of the police is formed by the media. Police managers are expected to provide feedback to the various news outlets in their jurisdiction and in the case of a major event, to national news teams. Developing a comprehensive, professional relationship with the media is critical. Although most departments use public information officers (PIO), it is also important to ensure that when major events occur, the chief is out front of the cameras and accessible to the media.

The media often feeds the interests of the public to find out what the police are up to. Well managed media relationships can be and often are an asset to the police. Poorly managed, a distant relationship will at a minimum inevitably affect the public's perception of the police, and at worst, damage the department's reputation.

The media is a business and like most businesses media outlets are motivated to make profits. By working with various media outlets to reinforce positive messaging and to provide timely information that meets the needs of the outlet and the police department, chiefs are able to effectively influence outcomes. Training public information officers to represent the department will assist in optimizing the department's exposure. Wherever possible, utilize subject matter experts that reinforce messages of public safety and ensure accurate information is provided to the media.

A critical piece in media relations is to ensure that whatever and whenever messages are delivered to the media they are first delivered to the police department's personnel.

Failure to ensure timely communication often results in misunderstanding. In order to support the organization, the members need to be informed of on-going issues, and the position of the department concerning these issues.

Second, manage the “political” face of the position of chief of police and the role of a public figure. The position of chief of police is a *political* one and the person occupying that position is often regarded as a public figure.

Events may occur that strain this relationship with other public officials. Governing bodies, such as a Commission or Police Board, for example, need to be considered essentially as political entities even though their members may not be elected. Most governing bodies are not likely to go down with the chief. Maintaining a business relationship that allows both the chief and the governing body to understand their individual roles will support the relationship in times of crisis and afford the governing body the opportunity to support the chief.

Ensuring that the Commission, city manager or council are provided ongoing education about the operations of the police department is an effective tool in avoiding political interference and reinforces a collaborative relationship

Third, amass a *collaborative executive team* that works together. Creating an executive team that works together on the decisions that have to be made empowers the executive members to be a part of the process rather than external to it.

The chief must surround him or herself with the best people the organization has to offer. These key people must be capable of making the critical decisions needed for the organization and take effective action to advance the department’s priorities. Members of the executive must also realize that not everyone in the organization will get on board with every decision and they must be prepared to move ahead in spite of barriers to progress. This consensus model of leadership requires time to build and does not happen overnight. It takes time to assess input and render decisions that have a greater likelihood of acceptance.

Fourth, devise plans for times when things go wrong. A key impact on the career of chiefs of police is the failure to understand and implement prevention strategies. Failing to *plan* for times when things go wrong leaves the chief and ultimately the organization vulnerable. There will be occasions when members and sometimes the chief will face harassment allegations, votes of non-confidence, and scandal due to member’s conduct that attack the reputation of the department.

Each assault on the integrity of the chief or the department makes the job of the chief that much harder.

If chiefs understand the fluid environment of policing and individual markets, funding changes, business challenges and opportunities, they are able to leverage budgets in support of achieving the business priorities.

In order to be effective, chiefs need to understand the driving forces affecting policing such as changes in social standards, the impact of demographics on recruiting, shifts in the organized and serious crime paradigms to a more transnational perspective. Without that understanding, senior leaders have a seriously narrow view of their role in the community.

Many governing bodies do not understand the interconnectedness of police activities in response to criminal enterprise. A chief that travels to meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops to receive or deliver information is taking advantage of growth opportunities that will benefit the chief and the organization and not just exercising his or her “globe trotting wings.”

In order to be effective it is important to author multiple futures for the department by writing the story in advance and mentally preparing for change. This is achieved by understanding driving forces and changing social standards. Staying on top of news, the latest business strategies and by providing flexible approaches that consider the best interests of the community encourages organizations to stay out in front. Looking for changing trends and drivers allows the department to respond to these challenges rather than reacting to them.

Fifth, make provision for a comprehensive *contract* for chiefs that clearly outline expectations, compensation and tenure. By seeking legal advice and assistance in contract negotiations prior to taking the position of chief, chiefs will be clear on the relationship and what measures will be applied to their performance that will indicate success. An assessment tool to evaluate the performance of the chief against measurable outcomes will ensure that there is less room for misinterpretation.

It is important to remember that the hand shake deal with the Chairman is not worth much if a less supportive commission, city manager or council replaces the ones that hired the chief. This can create significant distractions that may derail the relationship between the chief and the governing body.

And sixth, it is important to reinforce with the governing body that the actions of some officers are not a reflection of the chief's performance. Nor is a crisis necessarily a show stopper when there is a disagreement between the police department and governance over the handling of a contentious issue.

### **Providing Leadership in the 21st Century**

Leadership as an activity asks us to take a strategic look at how we as leaders provide leadership, how we identify and develop people in our organizations and how we commit to growing the organization from a more holistic perspective.

Policing has evolved from a command and control leadership style popularized by the Professional Model of policing developed in the late 1940's and lasting until the 1970's. This model to a large extent was replaced by the problem oriented or community policing models of the 1980's and 1990's and has recently been eclipsed by an intelligence led paradigm that relies on the analysis of information synthesized as intelligence to strategically direct and deploy the department's resources. This new model requires leaders to engage an entirely new approach to decision making and managing of resources. In turn, this requires leaders with new skills and leadership styles.

There remain portions of the earlier models in use today as there has not been a seamless move from one model to the next. Rather there exists a synergy of approaches that allows organizations to use portions of the various models at will.

Communities today want chiefs of police who are street savvy business people capable of managing multi million dollar organizations that provide responses to meet the demands of diverse communities. Police departments certainly at the executive level are every much a business as any corporate entity. The product may differ and the motivation may be public safety rather than profits, but the principles of management are similar and the business practices used to achieve success are the same.

Not everyone will agree that police organizations are businesses and chiefs are more like CEO's than cops but the truth is the current practices used in business to develop employees, establish processes that ensure fiscal accountability and strategies designed to ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency are strikingly similar.

Unfortunately there are numerous examples of leaders today who do not lead, they manage. The distinction is that we lead people, while we manage process. The most effective leaders believe that their job is to nurture their subordinates to become interdependent members of the organization (Anderson, 1998) while managers are focused on process and with less consideration for the wealth of experience and skills available within the organization. There is of course a time and place for both approaches and a command of both skills enriches leadership.

To be an effective leader in today's police organization, executives are expected to be competent, confident, articulate and inclusive. This requires superior critical thinking skills, decisiveness and effective communication abilities as essential competencies.

Leadership demands an understanding of generational differences, diversity opportunities, employee empowerment, collaborative decision making and transparency of actions in order to be effective.

Most employees, union representatives and community members do not understand that leadership is a process and *not* a position. Many chiefs do not understand the difference either making them less effective than they otherwise could be.

Leaders are expected to lead change, lead people, drive results, possess business acumen and build coalitions and communicate effectively (both internally and externally). The days of the traditional chief who rose through the ranks without the benefit of external learning have gone by the way side. In addition chiefs today must not only possess an understanding of the dynamics in their communities, they must also understand how organized and serious crime is interrelated on a national and international level. Certainly in the wake of 9/11 our world has become much smaller and the artificial bounds set by governments do little to deter international criminal operations.

To a degree, police organizations remain insulated from the changes in our environment. Traditional police leaders (both Executives and Union leaders) want desperately to cling to the ways “we used to do it.” The community on the other hand demands accountability and transparency from its public institutions. This is born out of the cultural revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Unions seem to want greater involvement in the decision making processes of police organizations. This includes everything from being consulted or involved in shifting and deployment to discipline, promotions and health and safety issues and includes hiring the chief of police.

### **The Number One Challenge - Developing New Leaders**

Taking responsibility to identify and develop new leaders in the organization from the onset of the chief’s tenure prepares the department for inevitable transition and embraces growth as a necessary step. When focusing on the top talent most likely to provide continuous leadership for the organization, it is incumbent upon police executives to provide the necessary resources to ensure the new leadership cadre has every learning opportunity to assist in achieving success.

Engaging performance coaching programs to work with prospective candidates allows officers to plan their futures. By ensuring a comprehensive leadership program is developed or made available positions candidates to take on greater responsibility for the direction of the organization while committing to the necessary accountability so critical to success. Along with coaching and leadership training, mentoring by senior police, business and government leaders enhances new leaders’ overall potential effectiveness.

Providing the organization with strategic vision is essential for leadership to grow. A critically articulated pathway will provide those being led with an understanding of the steps that are necessary in order for the organization to evolve effectively and for prospective leaders to assume the responsibility of leadership. By communicating the vision of leadership broadly within the organization, emerging leaders are able to more effectively participate in the process of leadership and be more active in the legacy the chief leaves the organization.

To leave such a legacy, the leader must:

- Identify people within the organization who have high performance track records.
- Attend to developing talent through growth and learning opportunities.
- Foster creativity and innovation by developing a culture of risk taking and decentralized decision making that is both encouraged and rewarded. In spite of good leadership characteristics and developing a legacy of future leaders, political issues that chiefs face have an impact on their ability to truly be effective. This challenge is played out across North America as chiefs tenures are all too often cut short before they are able to execute a plan to leave a sustainable legacy.

### **Succession Management Strategy**

One of the greatest legacies of leadership is to identify potential successors and commence from day one to provide them opportunities and greater responsibilities that will help them grow into senior leadership roles.

Succession management is more complex than identifying a successor for the chief and the process of identification is compounded when an outside chief takes over an organization. It takes time for the chief to learn about the organizational culture, assess strengths, challenges and opportunities, and what gaps may exist in process before he or she becomes effective. It may take years to properly identify leadership successors. Creating the largest pool of prospective candidates possible that are comprehensively assessed and providing organizational and learning opportunities is important in growing leaders in the department.

By developing competency based assessment tools that include learning strategies that evaluate the performances of senior personnel and hold members accountable for their own outcomes, advances the development of prospective candidates. And by establishing learning and organizational opportunities where skills are developed and challenges met allows contenders to demonstrate their organizational commitment and fit.

At the end of the day, one of the greatest legacies a chief can leave the department is a deep bench of potential contenders. This is not easily achieved in a climate where the

average tenure of a chief in the United States is 2.5 years according to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and only slightly higher in Canada.

For both internal and external chiefs the first year is frequently spent learning about the department, reorganizing and realigning people to begin the process of moving toward achieving the chief's vision. The second year by contrast greets the chief with new challenges that may require repositioning the department. This may be accomplished by developing strategic and business plans that are designed to facilitate the budget process and that will adequately position the department to achieve planning outcomes.

This leaves little time to implement a succession strategy. In fact succession management should not only identify prospective candidates to succeed the chief, it should examine key positions throughout the department and create a process to identify, train and provide opportunities for officers to demonstrate the necessary attributes to compete for a broader array of leadership positions. This avoids gaps that are created when experience walks out the door or when tenure is exercised and positions become vacant. Having a plan reduces the potential for random outcomes.

The responsibility of developing a succession plan to replace the chief of police in Canadian law enforcement generally lies with the police commission. Although all too often they do not work with the chief to develop a strategy and are left to react when the chief retires or fulfills his or her contractual obligations and moves on.

Developing a plan that includes enhancing the strengths of senior officers in the department ensures a smoother transition from one administration to the next. A plan identifies how succession is managed, how it will be assessed and what it will look like when it has reached the desired outcome. The process should be incorporated in the policies/procedures of the commission to ensure a commitment to process is maintained irrespective of the corporate memory of previous commissions or chiefs.

### **Relationship Challenges**

In writing this paper several Canadian chiefs of police were contacted and asked questions around the challenges they faced during their tenure. Without exception the chiefs agreed there were four key relationships the chief must try to maintain and that to

be effective, these relationships needed to be nurtured continuously. They were the relationship with the department's officers and the police union, the community, city council (or government) and the body to whom they reported (police commissions, police committees or city management).<sup>2</sup>

In each case the chiefs from small, mid-sized and large agencies reflected that rarely were all four relationships intact at the end of their tenures and that at best the chief could count on sustaining two or three at any time.

It has become increasingly more apparent that commission members who are appointed; city managers who are hired or mayors and councils who are elected are attending to their roles with a personal agenda. This agenda may include getting spending under control, getting the chief under control, trying to manage the department or manage hot button issues to name a few. There are also those chiefs who do not respond well to this kind of "intrusive" direction. Such outcomes often produce dysfunctional relationships.

The key may be painfully obvious at the outset. To establish a communications process and to work collaboratively together to arrive at a common ground that engenders mutual respect for each other's roles and responsibilities. The world of policing is generally all new to governance bodies and it is the chief's job to provide insights into the activities of the department.

Previous relationships or experiences with law enforcement may have formed their opinions of the police along with those perceptions they get from the media. They may have had a family member or friend arrested or detained in the past. One single interaction can influence the outcome of the tenure of the chief of police. In speaking with several chiefs of police it was more likely that a single, sometimes innocuous incident triggered events that ended the chief's tenure rather than a crisis.

The fact that policing is changing is completely lost on many civic officials. Often their perception of a competent organization translates into how many officers they see on the street; the more the better usually.

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<sup>2</sup> Middleton-Hope, John (2006).

Opportunities to scrutinize the activities of a police department that may include zero balancing and justification of personnel and programs is often not welcomed by many police departments and officers alike. It is however a reality and as chief it is important to recognize a healthy mistrust or justification of police actions exists in the public. This is all part of operating a transparent public organization that is accountable to the representatives of the citizenry.

The “job” of policing and the activities of chiefs is inherently political as civic leaders will often use public safety and crime issues to support a particular platform. The chief’s support will be solicited and even expected at times to align the business practices of the department with those of the corporation. This is a difficult tight rope to walk to ensure neutrality and a distance from the “spotlight” of political partisanship.

Establishing and maintaining the relationship with the city manager is a key to the overall success of the chief’s tenure. The city manager may be the most trusted ally or the most feared enemy. Being mindful of whom he or she is aligned with (city treasurer, leadership team, council, city solicitor) provides the chief with the ability to leverage this relationship and enhance opportunities for the department and the chief to be more effective.

Keeping the city manager well informed about major events, budget issues and where appropriate, discipline enables the city manager to respond to the challenges the department faces but more importantly, it allows the city council to be better prepared when the community wants answers.

As an ally, the city manager may provide a buffer against political interference (i.e., when aldermen or state reps make requests ~ the chief may handle the request if appropriate and then channel the response back through the city manager). This behavior by elected officials may serve to undermine the authority or reporting relationship the city manager has with the chief or even with the elected official.

It is also important to develop and sustain relationships with other key corporate department heads that regularly interact with the police such as fire, EMS, fleet, building maintenance, IT and HR. It is also important to interact with the district attorney’s office, chief crown prosecutors, other chiefs of police and agencies and of course community

groups to broaden the base of support for the chief's vision and enhance cooperative links to assist in achieving goals.

Police chiefs should expect disagreements between the various departments of the city and outside agencies. One of the strongest strategies is to communicate needs and wants and ensure discussions are managed respectfully. There needs to be an understanding that friction will occur and an understanding there is a mechanism to move the relationship beyond these potential barriers.

Police leaders may be asked to question challenge or even discard one or more of the key tenets of their leadership approach. Leadership means having the courage to reconsider one's current paradigm, and the humility and self confidence to effect change in spite of personal misgivings. This does not diminish the capacity of a leader nor will it score points with politicians. It is simply a way to express that the chief of police is flexible and willing to change (Robinson 2001). A point of discord is frequently the relationship between the police commission and the chief of police. This often occurs when there is a lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities and a healthy respect to ensure the lines are clearly drawn. The police commission has a clear responsibility for hiring the chief of police and for providing clear direction on policy, budget and strategic planning. These activities are challenging and operate at a very macro level. They are not responsible for the day to day administration of the police department; an activity that many commission members will want to become involved in.

A clear understanding of responsibilities and duties and a process whereby the Board is able to convey instructions to the chief of police will reduce the potential for disagreement. The Board must clearly outline its expectations of the chief and a strategy for annual performance appraisal that is consistent with current industry standards and practices.

Unless otherwise statutorily prescribed, the chief is the sole employee of the commission. Governance is all too frequently inadequately prepared to assume its responsibilities preferring instead to encroach on the domain of the chief simply because these are the activities that are most obvious to the public (deployment, duties and functions of street level officers).

Chiefs on the other hand are responsible for the effective operations of the department. Without establishing and periodically reinforcing the ground rules, commissions tend to want to accept public complaints against various officers, try to influence investigations and direct other personnel within the department including but not limited to where to set up radar units. The discussion around roles and responsibilities is an important discussion that needs to be a recurring one in order to reinforce appropriate relationship practices.

It must be a conscious effort for the chief to be inclusive and communicative with his or her commission while it is the commission's job to respect the chief's dominion. Agreeing on who does what ought to be one of the first discussions when there is a new commission or new chief. There needs to be an agreement on goals and outcomes and a measurement tool that fairly and equitably assesses whether the chief has been successful and to what extent.

Preparation for an inevitable crisis requires a strategy that will leverage relationships developed and nurtured in advance. By the very nature of the business, chiefs of police are confronted by crisis during their tenure. When a crisis occurs, consider the following:

- Publicly disclose the problem and take affirmative action to deal with the issue. Tell people what you are going to do and do it!
- Ensure a transparent investigation occurs. This may require an outside agency being called in to air your department's laundry. This is a sign of strength, not one of weakness.
- Inform your Commission, city manager or council of the investigation and reassure them you are in charge and you are taking the necessary steps to thoroughly resolve the matter. Public safety is in good hands.
- Provide open and timely information both externally and internally. Your members want to know that they can trust that you have taken command of the situation.
- If the department is wrong ~ say so and what you will do to correct the situation.

## **Conclusion**

Police leadership at the executive level is difficult at best. A lengthy and successful career leading up to appointment as chief of police is often not enough to prepare and sustain a chief during his or her tenure. It is quite candidly like few other positions in the corporate world and certainly like no other within policing.

Daily challenges will tax the strengths of even the most resilient soul. And it is becoming more apparent that the position of chief is less and less attractive. Recently Chuck Wexler of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington, DC based police think tank and oft used service to conduct searches for chiefs of police and Gerry Oldani of the executive search firm, Waters-Oldani were interviewed about the contemporary picture in executive police recruitment.<sup>3</sup> Both suggested they were seeing a recent down turn of about 35% in qualified candidates applying for jobs as chief of police in the US.

Up until recently there were a substantial number of senior police officials who wanted to be chiefs in major centers. Not so any more and for some cities it is not unlike drafting a sports star. The concern is that senior police executives sought out for their leadership skills are shying away from the “brass ring.” This in part seems to be because deputy chiefs as the most likely successors to out going chiefs, have seen the commitment to the department and the community that is required of chiefs and the toll it takes on the their personal lives. The compensation does not appear to be worth it.

Unfortunately as the gene pool for leadership candidates dwindles, commissions and city managers seem to demonstrate a lack of understanding for this reality, preferring to terminate, fail to renew contracts and otherwise sever their relationship with an alarming number of existing chiefs in favor of picking a new chief. There is a mistaken belief, it would seem, that there is a “leadership tree” with low hanging fruit from which to select successors. This is occurring in both Canada and the US, among small, mid-sized and large agencies alike. Not only is there a crisis in recruitment of new personnel and

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<sup>3</sup> Butterfield, Fox (2001).

retention of potentially retiring officers, commissions and city managers alike are fuelling a crisis in senior police leadership.

Commissions and city managers share this blame with some chiefs who at the same time are reluctant to work on the relationships that keep them in office. In the end it requires a strengthening of relationships and establishing key partnerships that will assist chiefs of police in being effective at their jobs.

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The International Police Executive Symposium (IPES) brings police researchers and practitioners together to facilitate cross-cultural, international and interdisciplinary exchanges for the enrichment of the policing profession. It encourages discussions and writing on challenging topics of contemporary importance through an array of initiatives including conferences and publications.

Founded in 1994 by Dilip K. Das, Ph.D., the IPES is a registered Not-For-Profit educational corporation. It is funded by the benefaction of institutional supporters and sponsors that host IPES events around the world.

The International Police Executive Symposium's major annual initiative is a four-day meeting on specific issues relevant to the policing profession. Past meeting themes have covered a broad range of topics from police education to corruption. Meetings are organized by the IPES in conjunction with sponsoring organizations in a host country. To date, meetings have been held in North America, Europe, and Asia. The immediate past meeting was hosted by Turkey and the 2007 meeting takes place in Dubai.

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