

Leadership Development Creates Chiefs of Police

Alan Youngs

“Leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.” Tom Peters, management consultant

In the world of college football, the University of Southern California is known as “Tailback U.” That nickname was created to reflect the steady stream of top rated tailbacks that have populated the ranks of the USC football squads over the years. If the names Mike Garrett, Ricky Bell, Charles White, Marcus Allen, Reggie Bush and LenDale White sound familiar, keep in mind that they all came from “Tailback U.” If there is an equivalent to “Tailback U” in the world of law enforcement, the honor would surely go to the Lakewood (CO) Police Department. Call it Chief of Police U. if you will. Though modest in size and budget, LPD has been the breeding ground of 63 chiefs of police since it’s founding in 1970.

Is there something in the water in Lakewood that spawns chiefs of police? Is the thin air of the nearby Rocky Mountains somehow responsible for creating excellence in the ranks of the local police department? Not exactly.

To understand the culture that produces so many chiefs of police from within its ranks, one must go back to the beginning of the department. The Lakewood Police Department was founded in 1970, shortly after the City of Lakewood – a fast-growing suburb of Denver – was incorporated. This was right on the heels of the tumultuous ‘60s that had been marked by an unpopular war that continued into the 70s, civil unrest, and race riots in places like Detroit and Watts (Los Angeles). The Democratic Convention of 1968, held in Chicago, was deeply scarred by riots that to some degree may have been exacerbated by police misconduct that some pundits referred to as “police riots.” In short, police departments at the time suffered from unpopularity and a waning sense of self confidence.

In the late 1960s a presidential commission conducted a study on how to make law enforcement more professional. Lakewood’s city fathers, along with newly appointed Director of Public Safety (aka chief of police) Ron Lynch embarked on a bold and daring (some called it

“radical”) experiment to create the police department of the future. At the core of the experiment was the requirement that all Lakewood Police Agents must have a four-year college degree. Through the years the “Lakewood experiment” adapted to its successes and failures, in some cases reverting back to the model of a more traditional police department. For instance, they did away with the controversial blue blazer and necktie “uniform” that had made the agents indistinguishable from the civilian population, and reverted back to the traditional police uniform. What did not change, and what lies at the heart of the U. of Chiefs of Police, was the requirement for a four-year college degree. Coupled with an unflagging desire to create and promote excellence, LPD flourished.

Current LPD Chief Kevin Paletta recently reflected on why an astonishing 63 members of its ranks have been hired elsewhere as chiefs. “Chiefs were sought from Lakewood’s ranks because of their educational requirements, their reputation for professionalism, their innovation, and their adherence to the highest standards of integrity and character,” Paletta noted. “Other departments wanted a chief who promoted and modeled Lakewood’s culture of excellence. The demand for Lakewood-style leadership grew out of the successes of those early chiefs. “Word spread quickly about the culture at Lakewood. Lakewood began attracting the best police officers from all over the country. If you wanted to work for one of the best police departments in the 1970s and 1980s, you wanted to work for the Lakewood Police Department. Success breeds success and a culture of excellence was created and sustained,” Paletta said. Today, one in every 10 Lakewood officers goes on to become a chief. Understandably, it is not difficult for Lakewood to recruit the cream of the crop.

James O’Dell, who was hired by Lakewood in 1970 and went on to become the chief in Kettering, OH, believes that one key element above all others set Lakewood apart from the rest. “Courage,” he said. “They were not afraid to try new things.” Chief O’Dell linked courage with “a healthy emphasis on education. ...The agency made sure employees mastered interpersonal relations, communications, and customer service skills. ...Lakewood became the melting pot of lateral entry recruits from across the country. These new hires brought so many different perspectives to the table. ...Lakewood was not afraid of failure.”

Sidney Klein, also hired in 1970 by Lakewood, became the chief of police in Clearwater, FL. "It began for me in early 1970 when I completed several years as a deputy sheriff with the Dade County (FL) Public Safety Department, and was recruited to come to Lakewood to help start a new department, the likes of which the police world had never experienced," he said. "By request, I arrived with long hair and a beard, was sworn in by the mayor and chief in a motel room, given a wad of money, a code name, and told to go out and buy narcotics. It was truly the Wild West, like shooting fish in a barrel. There were only a few of us from all areas of the country. We had no building, cars, uniforms, and radios – nothing! It was then that I really learned the true meaning of teamwork," Chief Klein said.

David Dial, hired by Lakewood in 1973, later became the chief of police in Naperville, IL. Reflecting on his Lakewood experience, Chief Dial recently observed, "During the 1970s and 80s, it was truly a special place to work. Higher education and leadership training were encouraged in the department. It was there that I went back to school and received my first master's degree from the University of Colorado," he noted. "Just as important as the education and training was the opportunity to work in virtually all divisions in the police department," he said. "...The national recruitment that was being done at that time gave me an opportunity to work with a very diverse group of people and to learn from their diversity of ideas. In summary: Ethics and integrity; education and training; diverse assignments; and exposure to diverse people and ideas," Chief Dial concluded.

While the four-year degree requirement is an article of faith in LPD, it is not a shared value throughout the country. Can a candidate for chief of police not be qualified without a college diploma? Why are years of distinguished service and leadership not sufficient to run a good police department? The answer is yes, a candidate can be highly qualified without a degree, but that candidate will be even more qualified with a degree. It is not so important what subject or discipline the degree reflects; what is important is the intellectual and cultural rounding out that occurs when an officer expands his or her horizons in a rigorous academic environment.

Changing demographics and a changing culture often demand that the police officer of the new millennium approach situations with an eye for nuance, flexibility, innovation and

creativity. Leadership development, then, must be viewed as more important than ever in creating excellence in police departments. Leadership development has been extensively studied and written about in the private sector and the military. In law enforcement the picture is not as complete. To address the issue, in 2006 the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance funded the Law Enforcement Leadership Initiative (LELI), tasking the project with “identifying the critical core competencies needed in a contemporary law enforcement leader, regardless of rank.” In other words, what are the critical, core factors needed to produce superior leadership skills within the law enforcement community?

According to a draft document from the LELI, “The compilation of these competencies will reflect core values such as integrity and commitment to the principles embodied in the Constitution, as well as skills such as effective communication, understanding of social context, and problem solving in multi-cultural settings.” The draft further states, “The objective of LELI is to develop these competencies in conjunction with key law enforcement organizations, then deliver them to local, state, federal, private, and academic institutions that provide law enforcement education and training.”

The LELI project includes an extensive review of existing literature on the subject of leadership development within law enforcement, and an in-depth case study centering on corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department. Specifically, the case study sought to identify issues of failed leadership that might have contributed to corruption, as well as issues of ethics and integrity failure. Additionally it was intended to identify management practices that would help in identifying potential misconduct or corruption at an early state. The study also sought to determine the impact the corruption had on the community where it occurred and to highlight lessons learned within LAPD as a result of the investigation. In order to identify core competencies for leadership, the LELI also interviewed key individuals within law enforcement and city management. In the early phases of the process, interviews were conducted in person. It was eventually determined, however, that survey responses were “more insightful than originally anticipated.”

The people interviewed for the project were: Carlos Alvarez, mayor, Miami-Dade FL; Greg Anderson, sheriff, Hopewell, VA; Kevin Beary, sheriff, Orange County, FL; Steven

Borchardt, sheriff, Rochester, MN; Pat Bradley, peace officer standard and training, MD; Sam Cochran, sheriff, Mobile, AL; Michael Crews, criminal justice standards and training, FL; Pat Fitzsimmons, former chief of police, Seattle, WA; David Goad, sheriff, Allegany, MD; Sheldon Greenberg, Johns Hopkins University, MD; Victor Hill, sheriff, Clayton, GA; Ted Kamatchas, sheriff, Marshall County, IA; Gil Kerlikowske, chief of police, Seattle, WA; Phil Mask, sheriff, Saline, AR; James Montgomery, chief of police, Bellview, WA; Chuck Ramsey, former chief of police, Metropolitan Police, Washington, DC; Tim Rogers, sheriff, Coshocton, OH; Howard Rasmussen, Center for Public Management, FL; Ron Spike, sheriff, Yates, NY; Leonard Territo, Ph.D., University of South Florida; Randy Thorp, sheriff, Licking, OH; Jim Tracey, sheriff, Utah County, UT; and Jerry Williams, University of Colorado, Denver.

The interviews consisted of six open-ended questions intended to allow for an expression of views on a variety of issues. The questions are included below with a sampling of the responses provided by the study participants:

1. What core competencies are needed to promote ethical and effective law enforcement leadership?

- Modeling behaviors (based on values).
- Mentoring/coaching
- Accountability
- Performance measurement
- Ethics
- Integrity, including the ability to influence organizational culture, selection process, training, and supervision.
- They must be taught how to become an advocate for public policy including making effective policy arguments and presentations.

2. How can we promote the development of those competencies?

- Strategic planning requires exposure to other agencies to find best practices.
- Encourage people to look outside their own agency and work with other organizations.
- Organizations need to live their values.
- Not compromising integrity of core values.
- Submerge an aspiring leader in psychology and human development courses to they can understand other people.
- Teach good and bad leadership styles.

3. What partners are critical to promoting effective law enforcement leadership?

- Leadership is contingent upon partnerships.
- Political sectors must understand an organization's goals and help them achieve those goals.
- Trust requires transparent outreach to all segments of the community with honest dialogue.
- Recognize that, like it or not, the media can "make or break you."
- The academic community is a critical partner.
- Private sector leadership, especially those with demonstrated success.

4. What assets or resources do you think are important to promoting core competencies?

- Patience!
- Meaningful relationships are an extremely important asset including open and honest expression and acceptance.
- Diversity is required in the classroom, on the leadership team and in training positions.
- Meaningful inclusive process for developing values, e.g., how we treat each other and how we treat our customers.

5. What obstacles exist that must be overcome to promote ethical and effective law enforcement leadership?

- We need to find a better model to teach ethics so that leaders do not inadvertently act unethically.
- Inability to hold supervisors accountable for the actions of their subordinates.
- Overcome the notion that the best way is also the easiest or safest way. People can be driven to mediocre decision making if they believe that will prevent them from being harmed by their decisions.
- Trust/relationship building is inseparable requiring honest and open dialogue.
- Culture of the organization.

6. Do you see any new core competencies emerging over the next 10 to 15 years that may alter the current list of core competencies?

- No – the competencies of a good leader are historical and core values remain the same.
- We need to be more global in our thinking.
- We must be conscious of and responsive to the needs of emerging generations.
- Emerging technologies will affect...our service delivery and the way in which we manage information.

7. Other comments

- If we don't take the initiative, less qualified people will continue to fill leadership positions.
- Whatever model is developed must not only assure education in the competencies, but require their application.
- Agencies are frequently "over led" and "under managed." There must be a balance.

While the survey respondents reflected a range of ideas and opinions, it is clear that qualities such as ethics, integrity, and high standards are keys in developing strong, competent leaders. The question remains then, how to move these lofty notions from the realm of the theoretical into the real world. Using the Lakewood Police Department as a model, the first step might be determining whether law enforcement is to be viewed as a trade or a profession. From its inception, Lakewood was determined to have one of the most professional police departments in the country. The bar was set high in terms of education and ethics. Having fostered 63 chiefs of police (or sheriffs) in 38 years, the conclusion must be drawn that Lakewood is succeeding.

In the Lakewood model, an unwavering commitment to the goal and the processes that lead to it, are essential. There can be no tolerance for corruption, for instance. The LELI pointed out in its case study that little transgressions can easily morph into large scale corruption. "It is easy and often popular to ignore simple infractions," the study noted. "Yet it is those simple infractions that can lead to much more serious violations." Lakewood also takes pride in its policy that officers serve in a variety of departments, thus creating officers with an appreciation for the "big picture," that is greater than the needs of any single department. In Lakewood, anyone above the rank of commander is transferred every two years to a different division or section.

Lakewood intentionally set the bar high when the department was founded, and the bar is as high today as it was in 1970. The department continues to innovate but does not lower its standards when an innovation fails. Persistence, high ethical standards, education, and an unyielding demand for excellence are essential elements in creating a culture that consistently produces police officers who are able to carry out their duties professionally and to grow and mature in their profession in order to lead others. In producing so many police executives and officers of high quality, LPD has proven that individuals will rise to the level of expectation

presented them. Bringing a police department up to a level of excellence requires leaders who, as Stephen Covey says, work on the system not just management who work in the system. Commitment to higher standards at time of employment, training inside and outside the organization and expectations of integrity and high ethical values are elements of a model that has worked for the Lakewood Police Department.