

SUBJECT TO DEBATE

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New Orleans Police Superintendent Michael Harrison: We Are Fully Committed to Peer Intervention

EPIC EDUCATES, EMPOWERS, AND supports the officers on the streets to play a meaningful role in “policing” one another. EPIC is not a “tell on your partner” program. EPIC is a peer intervention program; a program that teaches officers how to intervene to stop a wrongful action *before* it occurs. It’s a program that empowers officers—no matter what their rank—to stand up and say to their partners, colleagues, and even their managers, “What you are about to do is wrong; it will hurt someone and will hurt you, your family, and your career.”

And it’s a program through which we all say, “I *authorize* you, regardless of your rank, to intervene upon me if I am about to do something wrong.”

Peer Intervention programs have been successful in many contexts across the country, including reducing sexual assaults on campus, reducing high-risk sexual behavior, and curbing bullying in schools. Other industries, including airline pilots, surgeons, and the military, have implemented intervention programs with great success. While some police departments have implemented peer intervention programs that focus on discrete elements of policing, no Department to date across the country has undertaken a program of EPIC’s scope.

Our commitment to EPIC is reflective of our commitment to transforming NOPD into a premier law enforcement organization, a model for the nation. My management team and I are fully committed to the community we serve, to constitutional policing, and to continuous self-improvement. EPIC is one big step along the path of this exciting journey.

—Michael Harrison

Superintendent of Police, New Orleans Police Department



New Orleans Police Implement Peer Intervention Program

This issue of *Subject to Debate* focuses on a “Peer Intervention” program that was developed last year by the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD). The program, which is called “Ethical Policing Is Courageous,” or EPIC, is designed to teach officers that an important part of their job is to intervene if they see a fellow officer engaging in misconduct—or ideally, to step in and help *before* any misconduct occurs, if they notice that a colleague is becoming angry or frustrated and may be on the verge of doing something improper.

NOPD officials emphasize that EPIC is about protecting the careers of police officers as well as preventing misconduct.

THE NEW ORLEANS MODEL

A Look at NOPD’s Innovative and Career-Saving Peer Intervention Program

By Jonathan Aronie

Monitoring Team Lead, New Orleans Consent Decree

A FEW YEARS BACK, I WATCHED A police use of force that has stuck with me. A patrol officer was being verbally abused by a detained suspect. After enduring five minutes of despicable racial slurs, and becoming noticeably angrier with each repulsive epithet, the officer finally lost his cool and punched the suspect in the face.

Four other officers were present, and all watched it happen. None stepped in to de-escalate the situation at any time. Not one officer suggested to the target of the racist slurs that he should step back from the suspect, or leave the room, or simply take a breath. No one had that “courageous conversation.” They all just watched. And following the punch, not one of the officers stood up to his/her colleagues and said, “We should report this.”

All five officers ultimately lost their jobs, their chosen careers, their income, and probably more. Yet the whole sad affair could have been avoided if just one of the officers in the room had been taught what it means to be an “active bystander.” Had one officer in that room been given the skills to intervene effectively and safely (either before the punch was thrown, or at least before the decision not to report the incident was made), all five careers likely would have been saved. Considering the abuse he was taking, even the officer who punched the detainee probably would not have lost his job.

The whole incident was very frustrating—from the excessive use of force, to the bad decision-making, to the unnecessary cessation of five promising careers.

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Shortly after my 2013 appointment by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana to serve as Monitor over the New Orleans Police Department, following the City's entry into a far-reaching federal consent decree, I made two promises to the citizens of New Orleans and to the officers charged with protecting and serving them. First, I promised I would be a fair, honest, and vocal critic when the NOPD's performance was sub-par. Second, I promised I would be an equally fair, honest, and vocal advocate when NOPD did something worthy of praise. I write today to honor that second promise.

EPIC: "ETHICAL POLICING IS COURAGEOUS"

Earlier this year, recognizing that events like the one above happen all too often in departments across the country, a number of NOPD officers, with full support from NOPD management and the community, created a program called **EPIC**. EPIC stands for *Ethical Policing Is Courageous*, and it is a program like none I have seen in the United States. EPIC is a department-wide peer intervention program (actually, it's more a philosophy than a program), crafted to harness the abilities of rank-and-file officers to serve as the first line of defense in preventing mistakes and misconduct among their peers. EPIC empowers and gives officers the strategies and tools they need to step in and prevent problems before they occur; and then protects those officers who have the courage to apply those strategies and tools in the field.

EPIC is not a discipline program or a "rat-on-your-colleagues" program. EPIC is a practical *prevention* program tailored to the reality that officers too often lose their careers to misconduct that could have been avoided.

In designing EPIC, the men and women of the NOPD started by asking themselves a simple question:

Why are officers so quick to risk their lives for their peers, but so slow to stop them before they do something that may end their career?

In the words of Mark Twain, why is it that "physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare"?

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE BYSTANDERS

To answer these questions, the NOPD brought in some of the nation's leading thinkers on the topic of "active bystanders" to form a working group along with police officers. An "active bystander" intervenes when he or she sees something happening or about to happen that is wrong. "Passive bystanders" fail to intervene for various reasons. They may be afraid they are interpreting the situation incorrectly, or they think it's not their job to intervene, or they have a misplaced sense of loyalty to a colleague. The EPIC training is designed to attack these "inhibitors" to intervention head-on.

Passive bystandership not only allows bad things to happen; it also has a corrosive effect on standards. If no one intervenes to stop misconduct, it creates a sense that the misconduct is normal behavior, resulting in more misconduct.

The NOPD's working group included a psychologist, a historian who has studied passive bystandership during the Holocaust and other international atrocities, the author of a forward-thinking policing text, community members, police association members, and officers at all levels.

TRAINING GOALS

The resulting peer intervention solution revolves around five simple goals:

1. Help officers understand the career-saving benefits of intervention, and the huge risks (including the growing legal risks) of non-intervention.
2. Help officers identify the signs that an intervention is necessary.
3. Teach officers how to intervene effectively and safely.
4. Teach officers how and why to accept intervention respectfully.
5. Protect officers who intervene and those who accept intervention.

The NOPD pursues these goals through training at all levels—recruit training, in-service, and roll calls. The training teaches peer intervention science, skills, and strategies through a multi-media approach.

As part of the training, officers participate in a number of role-playing scenarios that simulate (a) the situations that present a need for intervention and (b) the common inhibitors to action. Just as with firearms simulation-based training, the NOPD's peer intervention scenario-based training is designed to give officers a tactical advantage in the field, and prepare them to deal with the potentially career-ending situations they will be called upon to handle over the course of their time in blue.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE APPROACH

NOPD's peer intervention philosophy does not stop at the Academy gate. The Department has called upon each of its leaders to incorporate and promote EPIC within their units. And, so far, each is answering the call. The Department's Internal Affairs function, for example, has taken a meaningful step in this direction by adding successful peer intervention as a formal mitigating factor against any related misconduct—both for the intervenor and for the officer who was intervened upon. (Of course, as in the example that began this essay, had intervention come early enough, there would have been no misconduct to report in the first place.)

Peer Intervention programs are not a 21st Century invention. The medical, airline, and education professions have been applying peer intervention techniques for years. The military likewise has embraced this philosophy in many areas. Elementary schools, high schools, and universities have figured out that peer intervention programs are an effective tool for combating bullying, sexual abuse, and mental health issues. But few law enforcement agencies have realized the advantages of giving officers these same career-saving and life-saving tools. New Orleans' EPIC program fully embraces peer intervention at all levels of the department.

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EPIC Training Is About Officers Helping Officers

By Jacob Lundy, EPIC Program Director
New Orleans Police Department

WHEN I WAS FIRST APPROACHED TO RUN THE EPIC program, which was in its infancy at the time, I was aware the task would involve input on content and logistics. I learned very quickly, however, that the primary duty of the position would entail something far more fundamental and important to its success. Our early participants, including Dr. Joel Dvoskin, Dr. Ervin Staub, and Michael Quinn of the International Ethics and Leadership Training Bureau, understood that to be successful, the EPIC program could not be *imposed* on officers. My primary responsibility would be designing a program and strategy that results in officers who *want* to attend the training and embrace the concept. This was quite a task, given the natural reluctance in law enforcement to take direction from bystanders.

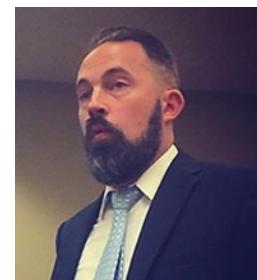
But with one-third of the New Orleans Police Department now trained and the feedback overwhelmingly positive, I am often asked to name the single most important aspect of EPIC training in gaining this success so far. And the answer is that EPIC is premised on the idea that police officers are human beings who must respond to immensely stressful scenarios, day in and day out, and they *will* have human reactions to stressful events. We cannot create “police-robots.” We are here to train humans to better negotiate a challenging job.

So as we conduct the training, we don't just “tell,” we *ask* the class questions about their experiences. When we talk about “danger signs” that stress may be affecting an officer, we solicit examples from the class. That way, it is not a hypothetical

discussion. Everyone has seen warning signs in coworkers over the years. And each of us has either helped a coworker in similar circumstances—or *wished* we had helped a coworker.

Effective interventions are broken down into two types: Is the situation an “emergency” that must be handled immediately? Or is it a situation where you can take your time?

We teach classes that if a fellow officer is using excessive force or doing something illegal, they really cannot be subtle about intervening, and it will require immediate action. But if it is about a personal problem or minor courtesy/professionalism issues, we teach officers to take some time and think about the best approach.



NON-EMERGENCY INTERVENTIONS

In non-critical situations, it may be best to speak to a coworker privately. Maybe there is another officer who is close to the person and may be in a better position to approach him or her. We also discuss approaching people with courtesy and respect, and explaining that they are receiving an intervention. We instruct classes to emphasize that they are intervening to help the person involved.

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>> from **NOPD's Peer Intervention Program** on page 2

THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS

NOPD Superintendent Michael Harrison, a champion of the Department's EPIC program, applauds his officers for developing such an innovative program. Harrison sees EPIC not only as a career-saving tool, but as a life-saving tool. “As police officers, we operate in a highly stressful environment,” he said. “As a profession, we suffer from depression, alcoholism, family problems, and suicide more than most other professions. EPIC will help us all recognize the moments when that stress is getting the better of one of our colleagues, and will give us the courage and the tools to step in and offer help. I believe the program will save families and lives.”

While the NOPD presents EPIC to its members as an officer survival program, EPIC is just as much a community survival program. In the same way airline passengers benefit when a co-pilot says to a pilot, “I think you're coming in too low; recheck your gauges,” the community benefits when one officer says to another, “I know you're frustrated (or mad, or scared), but don't do what you are about to do.” NOPD EPIC Project

Manager Jacob Lundy, an NOPD veteran and ranking member of the local Fraternal Order of Police chapter, views EPIC as the “perfect win-win strategy,” because “the community and the department clearly benefit when mistakes and misconduct are prevented.”

In sum, NOPD's EPIC program reflects an astute realization that intervention techniques can be taught and learned just as well as any other policing strategy. The men and women of the NOPD deserve great credit for their development of this innovative solution to a vexing national problem. I have little doubt the New Orleans peer intervention program soon will become a national model—*the New Orleans Model*. Officers simply can't afford not to take active steps to protect their own careers, their families, and their chosen profession. And the community can't afford it either. 

Jonathan Aronie is a partner in the internal investigations and civil fraud practice group of Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton, LLP in Washington DC. In August 2013, Jonathan was appointed by the U.S. District Court for the District of Louisiana to lead the monitoring team over the NOPD Consent Decree. In addition to Aronie, the NOPD Monitoring Team includes five former police chiefs, two criminologists, and a former civil rights prosecutor.

We also teach about the requirement to *accept* an appropriate intervention. We discuss in class that a person who is seemingly resistant to an intervention may go home and continue thinking about what was said. It may eventually sink in. So we encourage officers to follow up in some way.

Additionally, and importantly, we teach about “escalation.” An intervention is a tool to help a coworker, but if a coworker dismisses your offer of help, you may have to escalate the intervention to a higher rank or another officer, to make sure you’ve done enough.

EMERGENCY INTERVENTIONS

A different set of issues are raised with “emergency interventions,” sometimes called critical interventions. In emergencies, you need to stop improper behavior immediately, or step in to prevent improper behavior if you sense that a fellow officer is under stress and might be on the verge of doing something wrong, such as using excessive force. We teach officers to assess the urgency and react however they need to react. This can include telling someone flat-out that you are taking over. We also teach that you may need to tell a coworker that you are taking them to the station and they are not going back on the street until they calm down.

Such an intervention may need to be physical. In the case of excessive force, we have to teach officers that it is their job to restrain someone.

IF POSSIBLE, BE DISCREET

Depending on the situation, you might be able to be discreet about an intervention and allow the officer to back down without losing face. For example, you might just say, “I’ll handle this” in a routine manner, as if you are doing the officer a favor, rather than questioning his judgment or temperament.

In New Orleans, we have a signal “10-12,” which officially means “be discreet,” as in, “Don’t use plain language in front of a violent felon who is about to be arrested.” Over the years, this signal organically became adopted as an

intervention signal that, depending on tone, means anything from “calm down” to “stop right now!” EPIC specifically teaches 10-12 because it is discreet; it does not notify the public that an intervention is happening. More importantly, signal codes are better than plain language at breaking the “tunnel vision” and “auditory exclusion” that can prevent an officer under extreme stress from comprehending what you are saying.

INHIBITORS TO INTERVENING

We also discuss “inhibitors” to interventions—factors that make it difficult to intervene. Officers may witness something happening that they know is not right, but not do anything to stop it, because they have a mistaken idea that their job is to always support their fellow officers, right or wrong. Or they may be reluctant, or think it’s not their job, to correct a higher-ranking officer.

In our training, we address these issues by first asking the class to tell us what *they* think are the most common inhibitors to intervening. Then we show a slide with several inhibitors that are often mentioned. And then we discuss counter-measures.

One important counter-measure is a top-down commitment from the chief of the agency to the concept of intervening and the reasons for intervening. And the EPIC training itself is an important countermeasure, because it’s a strong signal that this is an issue the department takes seriously. We also mix all ranks in each class, so that everyone experiences the training together and realizes that everyone is receiving the same training. Police agencies also can reduce inhibitors by adopting policies against retaliation, transfers, or other actions against officers who do an intervention.

Finally, I want to mention, just as I do in class, that EPIC’s main advantage is teaching officers to look out for signs they can act on *before* they find themselves forced to intervene in a serious situation.

I want to credit NOPD’s Public Integrity Bureau for embracing this concept and helping to create one of this country’s most progressive disciplinary policies, which provides every incentive for officers to intervene in each other’s lives and behavior.



EPIC Philosophy Is Similar to A PERF Guiding Principle on Use of Force

The New Orleans Police Department’s EPIC philosophy is similar to Guiding Principle #6 in PERF’s March 2016 report, *Guiding Principles on Use of Force*.*

POLICY

6 **Duty to intervene: Officers need to prevent other officers from using excessive force.**

Officers should be obligated to intervene when they believe another officer is about to use excessive or unnecessary force, or when they witness colleagues using excessive or unnecessary force, or engaging in other misconduct. Agencies should also train officers to detect warning signs that another officer might be moving toward excessive or unnecessary force and to intervene *before* the situation escalates.

* <http://www.policeforum.org/assets/guidingprinciples1.pdf>. See pages 41–43.

Excerpts from the EPIC Program Guide

Following are brief excerpts from the NOPD's EPIC Program Guide, which includes guidance for eight hours of training to be provided to all NOPD officers.

To obtain the Program Guide, please e-mail NOPD EPIC Program Director Jacob Lundy at JHLundy@nola.gov.

WHAT IS EPIC?

At its core, EPIC is an officer survival program, a community safety program, and a job satisfaction program. While we often refer to EPIC as a program, it really is more of a way of thinking. EPIC represents a cultural change in policing that equips, encourages, and supports officers to intervene to prevent misconduct and ensure high-quality policing. EPIC not only empowers officers to step in and say to a colleague, "Don't do what you are about to do; you will regret it forever"; it transforms such interventions into a survival skill that is teachable and that is expected from all officers.

Accordingly, EPIC, first and foremost, is designed to protect police officers from losing their job and destroying their personal lives as a result of misconduct or, in some instances, as a result of a failure to intervene to prevent misconduct by others. But EPIC is as much designed to protect citizens. Everyone benefits when potential misconduct is not perpetrated or a potential mistake is not made.

Police officers today readily understand what an *active bystander* is, because they take on that role every day as they interact with the community. Officers step in to help others all the time. However, officers are far less quick to step in to stop a fellow officer from doing something wrong, unethical, dangerous, or even illegal or immoral. EPIC seeks to overcome this disconnect, to inculcate active bystandership into everything an officer does, and to provide officers with the tools and resources needed to do it well.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE TRAINING: WHAT IS ACTIVE BYSTANDERSHIP?

EPIC is founded on the principle that good police officers want to do the right thing, but that even officers with the best intentions sometimes lack the tools and moral courage to intervene effectively, safely, and without repercussion, when faced with potential police misconduct. The best way for officers to avoid having to report a fellow officer, of course, is to *prevent* the misconduct from occurring in the first place, thereby protecting both officers from career-threatening reprimands, suspensions, prosecutions and lawsuits (not to mention the benefits to the citizens).

Most officers, at some point in their career, will find themselves caught between two very unsatisfactory choices, or simply

frustrated to the point of being about to make a bad decision. While most officers do not perpetrate serious misconduct or crimes, some may be bystanders and

observers to the misconduct or mistakes of others. A passive bystander looks on, but says nothing. An active bystander, on the other hand, steps in and makes a difference.

The research of Dr. Ervin Staub and others clearly shows that most humans are inherently passive bystanders—perhaps not in all circumstances, but in many. The research also clearly identifies many critical *inhibitors* to intervention, inhibitors from which police officers are not immune.

The research further shows that passivity, or failure to intervene, creates a tacit acceptance and approval for deviant behavior, which thereby slowly changes the acceptability of that behavior. In other words, the more people allow misconduct to go unchallenged, the more that misconduct becomes accepted as the norm.

While we all can point to a time in our life where we did intervene, chances are we also all can point to a time in our life where we did not intervene. Humans are inherently passive bystanders for many reasons.

Interestingly, the research shows the reasons for such non-intervention are no different for officers: fear of being wrong, a feeling of "it's not my job to step in," fear of being ostracized, and perhaps most importantly, the belief that loyalty means supporting your colleague regardless of the rightness of your colleague's actions. These are strong inhibitors to action from which officers are no more immune than other members of the community.

NOPD's EPIC program strives to redefine critical loyalty by teaching officers to recognize situations that require intervention, giving them the tools they need to successfully intervene, and supporting and protecting them when they do. EPIC concepts and lessons will be incorporated into every aspect of the NOPD and will be viewed by all, over time, as an essential component of being a professional officer and a good partner. Peer intervention is one of the best ways officers can support their fellow officers and support the citizens at the same time. It is a tool for an officer's own survival, the survival of our citizens, and, frankly, the survival of the department as a whole.

The EPIC Program Guide includes a lesson plan, teaching guidelines, 12 scenarios for role-playing exercises, information about relevant case law, examples of peer-intervention programs in other professions, a Frequently Asked Questions section, and additional resources.



The New York Times

New Orleans Program Teaches Officers to Police One Another

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON AUG. 28, 2016

The EPIC program was featured in an August 28, 2016 article in the *New York Times*, which is available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/us/a-new-orleans-program-teaches-officers-to-police-each-other.html>

Two Classic *Subject to Debate* Columns

by John F. Timoney

On August 17, former PERF President John F. Timoney died of cancer at the age of 68. Chief Timoney had one of the most impressive careers in American policing, having served as Chief in Miami, Commissioner in Philadelphia, and First Deputy Commissioner in New York City, where he began his career shortly after finishing high school. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler touched on some of the high points of John Timoney's life in a column for Irish Central, which is available online at <http://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/others/irish-cop-john-timoney-taught-america-how-to-reform-policing#>.

As President of PERF from 2007 to 2009, Chief Timoney wrote a number of columns for Subject to Debate. Two of those columns, from March 2008 and May 2008, are reprinted below.

Why Is It Considered Disloyal To Apply for a Job as Police Chief?

By Chief John F. Timoney

Last month in this space, Chuck Wexler said it's becoming more difficult to find people willing to apply for the position of police chief. I'd like to expand upon that thought with a few words about my experiences applying for the top job in policing.

In 1990, as a bit of a lark, I applied to be the police chief in Phoenix. I was a young guy, and I just wanted to see what the process was like. I think they started with 56 candidates, and I got down to the final six. They brought the six of us in for interviews, and it was a very impressive process. There were three days of interviews. First we were questioned by a group of business leaders, including the head of the number-one TV station and some bankers. The next day it was community groups, and the third day was the city council and the city manager. Even though I didn't get the job, I left Phoenix with a very good feeling about the whole process and how professionally it was handled. There was a feeling of legitimacy about it; you were treated like a professional.

Now it's different in a lot of ways, and I don't mean better.

There seems to be a feeling that if you work in policing, it's somehow disloyal to apply for a new job. If you're a chief and you are seen to apply at another agency, your officers—and your mayor—say, "Look, he's trying to get out of here." If you don't succeed in getting the new job, the fact that you looked elsewhere is going to foul you up.

This discourages chiefs from considering new challenges, and it dampens the ambition of assistant or deputy chiefs. If you're a deputy in City A and you apply to become the chief in City B or C, you'd better hope you get the job, because you may have damaged your chances if the chief position in City A opens up.



Second, these job searches have become quite uncomfortable. It's almost like a blood sport now; you really are thrown into the arena. You think you're a pretty decent person, and you innocently put in to be police chief somewhere, and suddenly there are all sorts of people with political agendas surfacing to attack you. You don't even know these people, you're not even from the same city; but they're saying you're too much this or not enough that, and tearing you apart. And you think, "Where is all this anger coming from? All I did was interview for a job."

And it's not just the political groups, it's the police unions. About 10 years ago, police unions began to organize toward removing chiefs. At police unions' national conventions they actually have sessions where they train their membership in "how to take out a chief" with votes of no-confidence and other tactics. If you're a one-star chief or a two-star chief and you watch the battles between the chief of police and the unions, you start to think, "I've got a nice position, a decent salary—why would I want that?" If you do take the plunge and apply for a chief's job, you'll find that the unions will check out all the candidates. If you haven't gotten along with the unions in your hometown, you'll be excoriated as being hostile to unions and unable to get along with other people.

Once Bill Bratton and I applied for the same job in Los Angeles, and there was a newspaper columnist who just eviscerated both of us on a daily basis. Fortunately, we came from New York and we'd had bad things written about us before, so we were toughened up. But if you're some young chief or assistant chief ready to take that first step, it can be a bit unsteady. All of these things come together, and you start to worry that this is a lot more difficult than it should be.

One way to reduce these problems is for cities to give candidates confidentiality. When PERF is hired to help with a search, Chuck Wexler has been very good about pressing the local officials to promise confidentiality. You can never really guarantee confidentiality, but it helps if the city tries to keep the candidates' names out of the newspapers.

Running a police organization is much more complex than it was a generation ago, and more than ever, we need good, talented people with a broad world view to step forward. There is no “chief’s school” where you can learn how to deal with all this, but PERF can help fill the gap.

If you look at PERF, you can see that it is a young people’s organization. There are a lot of members in their 30s or very early 40s who are the future leaders in policing. We need to cultivate them and bring them along. As a police chief, I have made a point of trying to identify the rising stars so I can help them join the next generation of police leaders. That means sending them to schools like PERF’s Senior Management Institute for Police, moving them around within the department so they’ll get a wide range of experience, giving them special projects, sending them to conferences so they’ll be exposed to the critical issues and meet their colleagues from across the country, and so on.

Finally, we need to reassure our younger members that even though this process of becoming a chief looks tough, you can get through it. And we should constantly tell them that while it’s great being a Number 2 or Number 3 person in an organization, where there’s not too much pressure, there is nothing like the reward and satisfaction of actually running a police agency, with all of its problems.

“Timoney Rules for Police Chiefs”

By Chief John F. Timoney

Often I hear about things happening in other police departments around the country and I think, “That’s just like what happened to me 20 years ago in New York,” or “That reminds me of a situation in Philadelphia a few years back.” Of course things are always changing in policing, and new issues and problems are always cropping up, but some of the same types of issues keep happening over and over, because some things never change, like human nature.

So it occurred to me that maybe I can use my PERF column to take some of the lessons I’ve learned in 40 years of policing and share them with new chiefs. Who knows, maybe I can help some young chiefs sidestep a few of the pitfalls that I’ve run into over the years. I’ve made some mistakes along the way, and I hope I can share with others what I’ve learned. From time to time, I’ll be writing about what I’ll call “Timoney Rules for Police Chiefs.”

Let’s start with **Rule Number 1: When a police department hires a new chief from outside the department, it’s usually because people are looking for change—so don’t disappoint them.** In fact, some people think that being an “agent for change” is an inherent part of the job for any police chief. But certainly in cases where a department has had some problems and they bring in a new chief, you shouldn’t be shy about shaking things up. If things were going swell, they wouldn’t have brought you in, would they? So right from the start, you should be thinking about new personnel, new policies, and new ways


of looking at things in the department—and how to make it happen.

That takes us to a Corollary of Rule 1, which we’ll call **Rule Number 2: If you’re going to make changes that some people aren’t going to like, do it fast.** If you come in to a new department and want a new command staff, don’t ask for permission, and don’t drag things out with some long process. It will only make the pain last longer, and give the people you want to demote time to challenge you. And of course the news media love any story that involves conflict, so they’ll get into the act too, which can throw a monkey wrench in your plans. You’re the chief, so act like one: Be tough, confident, and decisive. People will be less likely to fight you if they sense that you’re strong. You may be surprised at how easy it is to make changes if you do it fast and don’t give people an opening to fight you about it. You probably will only have a window of about three months after you arrive to make your big changes. That’s when your bosses and the public are anticipating changes and are most likely to accept them. So don’t waste your opportunity.

Moving along to another area, here’s **Rule Number 3: Whenever there’s a crisis, the first piece of information you get is always wrong.** Part of this is just human nature—Your people will be afraid to tell you about things that went wrong, and they’ll want to tell you what they think you want to hear. And part of it is that there is often a lot of confusion when something bad happens, so you have to expect that a lot of the early reports will be wrong. I’ve seen it time and again where chiefs go out and say something too soon and then, an hour later, a day later, a week later, they have to backtrack and explain how things got mixed up and the information was bad. That’s not good, because it makes the chief look weak.

Of course you can’t just clam up and say nothing until every detail is nailed down. But what I advise is that you take the early information and look at it from a couple other perspectives before you use it. Talk to other people and get some confirmation before you take the information out on a limb, only to have the branch cut off from underneath you.

Here’s another rule. **Rule Number 4: Don’t ask your officers to do anything you wouldn’t do yourself.** For example, if there’s a big public protest or other situation where you need your officers to act with restraint, it helps if you can be out on the front lines with them. Now this can have a major drawback; sometimes you can’t see the forest for the trees if you’re right in the middle of things. But if the situation allows it, by being out with your officers, you can serve as an example of the kind of approach you want them to take. Actions speak louder than words when you’re trying to show your troops how to perform well under pressure.

Over the coming months I’ll add to the “Timoney Rules” as issues arise. I hope that some of my younger colleagues will find the rules useful. I’ve benefited in my career from some great mentors, and I hope there’s some wisdom I can extract from the experiences I’ve had since I started in this great business of policing. 



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