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## To Protect and To Serve: Community Policing and Servant Leadership Through the Lens of a Lieutenant of 25 Years in a NJ Police Precinct

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# TO PROTECT AND TO SERVE: COMMUNITY POLICING AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

## THROUGH THE LENS OF A LIEUTENANT OF 25 YEARS IN A NJ POLICE PRECINCT

Tara DeWorsop

### ABSTRACT

*Police play a vital role in protecting communities and holding accountable those who have committed violent and property offenses. At the heart of this are the acts of protecting and serving the individuals that make up those communities.*

*This paper looks at how police officers interact, protect and serve the communities within which they work today. The history of policing and the way police officers are prepared to interact with the public are important. Servant leadership combined with community policing has the potential to create a positive impact that will have a ripple effect.*

*Using the example of a police precinct in central New Jersey where the Servant Leadership Model has succeeded, the author argues that combining this model with the most effective parts of community policing is the best way for police to not only improve community and media relations, but perhaps more importantly, engage in sustainable reform, peacebuilding, and reconciliation with the communities that have most negatively been impacted in the past.*

*\*\*Note: A lieutenant of 25 years from the aforementioned central New Jersey precinct was interviewed during the writing of this paper but declined to have his name published because he does not have media clearance.*

### CASE STUDY: A LIEUTENANT REFUSES CHIEFDOM

In Central NJ, a soon-to-be retiring Lieutenant (L.T.H.) of 25 years who was in charge of overseeing internal affairs and professional standards of his precinct reflected on his time serving and protecting his community over a two-hour phone interview.

L.T.H. served as a self-described liaison between the officers and the Chief, and also between the community and the precinct. He had grown up in this community where he served as Lieutenant, and both his brother and father had served before him at the same precinct with his father retiring as a Detective. As a child growing up in a family of

officers and professionally over the 25 years at his precinct, L.T.H. witnessed many dramatic changes. He grew up remembering when the town was openly and unapologetically racially segregated with black and white communities rarely mingling. He witnessed the influx of South Asian immigrants in the surrounding areas that turned traditionally Irish and Polish restaurants into Indian grocery stores and places to grab a dosa to-go.

Within the precinct he saw a sea change in who was attracted to the police force; noting that it went from having most recruits coming directly from the armed forces to policing to, in the past decade, the majority coming in with an undergraduate college

degree – typically in Sociology or Criminology. L.T.H. also saw the advent of body cameras being outfitted on the front of all patrol unit uniforms, leading his precinct’s adoption of them in 2016, just one year after funding became available by the U.S. Department of Justice. L.T.H. praised this new technology, saying that it made his work in internal affairs and professional standards investigations easier – especially when it came to grievances submitted by individuals in the community. “The ability to go to the video to see what actually happened removed the variability of perspectives from the conversation. There was no more ‘he-said-this’ and ‘he-said-that’. Having video footage also helped me remove the cops that shouldn’t have ever been in the force much more quickly.”

During our conversation, L.T.H. discussed a time when he decided to look at the data for ticketing and stops as a preemptive measure to see if there were signs of prejudice among his officers. This was at the start of the Black Lives Matter movement when protests were first bringing a lot of attention to police brutality. L.T.H. wanted to see if there were signs of misconduct or racial bias within their precinct and went first to the ‘traffic stop’ data. He was looking for prejudice against the black community and was surprised to see that there was a much higher incidence of ‘traffic stops and ticketing’ (as opposed to ‘traffic stops with a warning and no ticket’) among the Sikh population as compared to all other racial groups. Upon reflecting, he realized that the gradual increase in the South Asian population in the township next door might have led to an unconscious bias with his officers. He confirmed this through informal interviewing of his officers, asking why they made these stops and what prompted them to give them a ticket instead of a warning. The interviews revealed a confusion around the turbans the Sikh men wore and a general lack of awareness around the religion, culture, and customs of the Sikh population. And, as is the case with any community that receives a dramatic

increase in presence of a population with a visibly different appearance, identity, religion, and culture, there were both conscious and subconscious tensions.

L.T.H. took these qualitative findings and traffic stop data and went to a local community leader at the Sikh temple. He asked if he would come to his police precinct and speak to the officers and, more importantly, offer an opportunity for the officers to ask questions and learn. The Sikh religious leader gladly accepted and the dialogue, and dialogues that ensued, led to a decrease in the amount of stops and ticketing among Sikh individuals so that they were not higher than the rest of the population.

Over his 25 years, L.T.H. led many initiatives like this seeking to increase dialogue in both formal and informal settings. L.T.H. organized primarily in-person gatherings (swearing that ‘diversity training videos’ had little to no effect as opposed to in-person conversations) with community leaders from a variety of different cultural groups including Rabbis and Pandits (Jewish and Hindu ‘priests’). He also led food drives and encouraged his officers to answer calls requesting help for things that were as mundane as needing help turning off the water in a house or helping to find a missing pet. Systemically, he implemented a review that allowed for community members to leave positive remarks on interactions with officers. This allowed for more open, positive avenues of communication with the public and an opportunity for L.T.H. to commend officers on good conduct instead of only reprimanding the bad.

At the end of our interview, I asked L.T.F. if he had ever wanted to rise to the Chief of Police position so that he could make even greater positive change. He replied, frankly, that he had been offered the position and turned it down, stating that he had no desire to be “walking around with a target on his back”.

## Thought Questions:

*What does this story tell us about L.T.H. and his leadership practices? What methods did he employ in resolving a bias he identified through quantitative data and qualitative survey methods? Why would he turn down a promotion from Lieutenant to Chief of Police?*

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLICING

In 1963, “To Protect and To Serve” became the official motto of the “Los Angeles Police Department. Since then, this slogan has become almost synonymous with policing and has since been adopted as the motto of police departments across the country. Recent events have focused attention on police reform and led to public demands to rethink how police services are provided and how police leadership and recruitment might evolve. “To protect and to serve” is an ideal of precincts that is difficult to live up to 100% of the time, but it does not have to be unattainable the majority of the time.

Police forces have morphed over the years from a locally funded and managed entity to protect public safety, to also serving as a federally funded jobs initiative, an engine for surveillance, and a militaristic special forces agency engaged in a war on drugs, gangs, and youth. This has led to large police forces that are “disconnected from communities and operate in a punitive rather than preventative way, resulting in more arrests, more prisons, and more costs to taxpayers, among other negative effects on communities. It is not just the sheer number of police that leads to more arrests and more prisons, but also the style of policing, which treats entire communities as though they should be contained, surveilled, and punished” (Ashton et al., 2012).

This image of the police as an unthinking force of brutality, of course, is not and should not be taken as an uncontested blanket statement. Almost every police agency includes a majority of uniformed officers and plainclothes detectives who place polite, effective service above brute force. However, the rogue cops, although a minority, too often exercise

undue influence, infecting everybody with their negative attitudes toward minority populations and other citizens.

The servant leadership model is consistent with the image that most police departments *desire* to reflect. In 1996, Larry Spears, Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, refined Greenleaf’s philosophy of servant leadership and defined servant-leadership as:

*...A new kind of leadership model – a model which puts serving others as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; promoting a sense of community; and the sharing of power in decision-making.*

In 2004, Spears took this definition one step further and arrived at the following 10 characteristics of servant leaders: *Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the growth of people, and Building community.* Unlike other leadership models, servant leadership emphasizes moral, ethical leadership and personal integrity; it also focuses on the growth and development of subordinates through strong long-term relationships (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Liden et al., 2008). Police Chiefs who deliberately model this leadership style can instill servant leadership behaviors in their officers who already have an inclination to serve (Jackson & Lee, 2019), potentially creating a positive ripple effect in the overall culture and perception of police.

Additionally, the servant leadership model complements the already effective, if not well-implemented, community policing model that emerged in the 1960’s out of the civil rights movement and became more widely adopted in the 1980’s. At its heart, community policing is an approach to law enforcement that promised to improve police-community relations by working *with*, rather than targeting, racial and ethnic minorities. It held great appeal for local politicians concerned with pleasing their constituents (Willis,

2010). The easy-to-remember motto “To Serve and To Protect” also emerged during this time which helped with an overall re-branding of policing.

Media has placed an enormous amount of negative attention on policing, and with good reason. In the wake of the egregious murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, thousands of Americans from across the country have been standing up for racial justice and demanding fundamental reform to the way this country conducts policing, and to put new pressure on states and cities to scale back the force that officers can use on civilians. Requiring body cameras for police officers, modifying what restraint techniques can be used on civilians, investigating and (in some cases revoking) qualified immunity, implementing de-escalation training, impartial policing, and social justice methods are some of the reforms demanded and implemented since the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 (Rummler, 2020, September 30; Preddy & Andrews, 2021, January 20).

### HOW DOES LEADERSHIP FACTOR IN?

The media, the public, and government officials were and are looking to leadership within law enforcement to reverse the negative trends. Reform, however, is a more complex and interlocking reality for law enforcement administrators than what the media portrays, and the recent rallying cry to “defund the police” seems overly simplistic, at best, and completely ineffectual, at worst. In fact, in the past year alone, federal funding to police precincts across the country has actually increased through The Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) COPS Hiring Program (CHP).

The process of enacting police reform is as important as the reform itself. And, the history of the institution of policing must be taken into account in order to understand the context in which it exists today and how we might explore methods to create a better system and culture moving forward.

### THE HISTORY & EVOLUTION OF POLICING

Policing as we know it today in the U.S. was born in Europe as a result of the monarch’s need to control power, people, and resources. *In War Making and State Making as Organized Crime* by Charles Tilly in Peter Kivisto’s book *Social theory: roots and branches*, we learn that:

By the later eighteenth century, through most of Europe, monarchs controlled permanent, professional military forces that rivaled those of their neighbors and far exceeded any other organized armed force within their own territories. [...] The elimination of local rivals, however, posed a serious problem. Beyond the scale of a small city-state, no monarch could govern a population with his armed force alone, nor could any monarch afford to create a professional staff large and strong enough to reach from him to the ordinary citizen.

Eventually, European governments reduced their reliance on indirect rule by means of two expensive but effective strategies: a) extending their officialdom to the local community and b) encouraging the creation of police forces that were subordinate to the government rather than to individual patrons, distinct from war-making forces, and therefore less useful as tools of dissident magnates (Kivisto, 2021)

In the mid-1800’s, the policing functions which had previously been performed by private police started to be performed by publicly supported police. These police had broad responsibilities: to maintain public order, to regulate economic activity, and to provide emergency services. A variety of developments between 1870 and 1970 resulted in a narrowing of the police role to that of professional crime fighter, with a focus on violent crime and serious property crime. This professionalization process freed police from the unmitigated control of federal government, but also meant that police now answered primarily to themselves, which enabled them to become self-interested. This process transformed the police into a new type of authoritative political actor (Schrader, 2019).



Professionalization has reduced corruption, improved due process, and produced improvements in police training. This shift in focus and increased use of technology, however, has resulted in weakening police ties with communities. Police officers might have been able to respond more quickly and efficiently but it did not lead to an improvement in the ability to reduce or solve crimes (Moore & Kelling, 1983).

Community policing emerged slowly from the civil rights movement in the 1960s and a crisis in police-community relations which exposed the weaknesses of the traditional policing model. Community policing reflected a more general underlying trend in the decentralization of structure, management, and marketing practices of large organizations in this time period. In contrast to rigid bureaucracies and their dependence on standard rules and policies, decentralization created smaller, more flexible units to facilitate a speedier and more specialized response to the unique conditions of different organizational environments. Rather than emphasizing control through a strict organizational hierarchy, management layers were reduced, organizational resources were made more accessible, and both supervisors and their subordinates were encouraged to exercise autonomy and independence in the decision-making process (Willis et al., 2010).

Much like the servant leadership paradigm, community policing challenges police to look outward to build partnerships with the community and work together as co-producers of police services. Community policing also emphasizes preventative measures - proactive problem solving in a systematic and routine fashion. Rather than responding to crime only after it occurs, community policing encourages agencies to proactively develop solutions to the immediate underlying conditions contributing to public safety problems. Problem solving is infused into all police operations and guides decision-making efforts. According to the Department of Justice, agencies are encouraged to think innovatively about their responses and view making arrests as only one of a wide array of potential responses.

Police professional responsibility as an organizational practice and component of community policing also emerged during this time, challenging law enforcement leaders to look inward to understand the mind, body, and spirit of the organization and apply that knowledge to create transformative change that truly represents “reform” or “innovation.” Like the servant-leadership theory, professional responsibility requires that leaders internalize leadership as a calling to serve others before self. While servant-leadership has deep roots in philosophical and spiritual literature, the concept has been embraced by chief executive officers in the American business sector for years. Such leaders behave as ethical stewards of the power given to them. They use their position’s power to increase levels of trust and loyalty throughout the workplace and with the public.

Preddy (2021, January 20) offers five recommendations to help law enforcement leaders understand the mind, body, and spirit of their organizations and help move their agencies toward a professional responsibility focus:

1. Examine the culture of the organization
2. Teach and practice the SM2aRTUR policing concept
3. Supererogation of duty and obligation
4. Assess the emotional intelligence of the organization
5. Develop robust policies, standardization, and evaluation practices

While 1, 4 and 5 in the recommendations above are relatively straight forward in their description, teaching and practicing the SM2aRTUR policing concept and the supererogation of duty and obligation require further elaboration for the layman.

The SM2aRTUR acronym stands for self-management and skills mastery that is applied with reliable tactics and unconditional respect. In terms of performance, whether the officer is performing a traffic stop, immersed in a critical encounter, or standing on the front line of a protest, police

leaders and the public expect officers to manage their emotions and demonstrate proficiency in the skills and tactics employed. They expect officers to use appropriate tactics that do not exceed their legal authority. Most important, they expect officers to treat everyone with unconditional respect.

Setting implicit and explicit biases aside, the expectation of leaders and the public is that officers treat others with empathy, restraint, and fairness regardless of any identified affiliation—to simply meet others where they are in the moments of their need or crisis. If officers are not performing their duties in alignment with these basic expectations, then the police leader must ask why and work to redirect officers toward meeting these expectations.

## **DUTY AND OBLIGATION**

Duty and obligation must be distinguished and understood for there to be supererogation of police professional responsibility. While “duty” defines the tasks a police officer and/or police agency are required to perform, “obligation” encompasses a moral commitment to exercising those tasks. Obligation, is defined by the way these fundamental duties are performed. Supererogation seeks an action beyond that which is minimally accepted.

## **THE EVOLUTION FROM WARRIOR TO GUARDIAN**

From the perspectives of social-identity theory and self-categorization theory, police officers form an attachment to the social construct of being a police officer, which has demonstrated effects to one’s self-esteem, perceptions, behavior, and cognitive processes. For decades, officers have been indoctrinated in a warrior mindset and taught various techniques to ensure their safety and survival. They have been symbolized by themselves and the public as the “thin blue line,” which connotes their role in maintaining separation between criminal elements and society. However, there has been a shift in recent years to transform this ethos into a less authoritarian one in the hope of redirecting the culture of policing (Preddy & Andrews, 2021, January 20).

In 2015, criminologists Sue Rahr and Stephen Rice wrote an article that questioned the appropriateness

of the “warrior” ethos and offered the “guardian” mindset as an alternative. They referred to the warrior mindset as a mental attitude characterized in terms of power and control, driven by a deep commitment to survival. Conversely, they described the guardian mindset as a service-first commitment to policing that emphasizes relationship building, information sharing, the effective use of soft skills, and procedural justice as essential practices for 21st century policing (Rahr & Rice, 2015, April). While noble in the distinction, the philosophies come into conflict when peaceful interactions become violent and officer safety and survival become a serious concern (Preddy & Andrews, 2021, January 20).

Across America, police officers have already become de facto social workers after deinstitutionalization policies closed many psychiatric hospitals, leaving some patients with nowhere to go — and the right to refuse treatment. Recently, the NYC mayor called mental illness the primary reason that crime in the subway has increased by almost 40 percent from last year. However, the Police Department has been slow to develop the skills to handle it.

In October, the NYC mayor and Gov. Kathy Hochul announced a broad plan calling for 1,200 additional overtime officer shifts each day on the subway, two new “transition to home” units for those with severe mental illness living on the street or in the subway, and two new dedicated 25-bed units at psychiatric centers. How will they be prepared for this behemoth task, you might ask? Through a multiday training workshop, which includes mental health clinicians and personal testimonials from civilians who suffer from various forms of illness, officers are taught how to calm crisis situations by developing a rapport and remaining courteous and empathetic.

## **WHAT IS REALISTIC?**

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to answer the Goliath call for police reform or an easy process to transition the centuries long militaristic mindset of policing to one of peacebuilding. And multi-day workshop training for police officers is certainly not an adequate response.

Greenleaf believes that if the leader cares for his or her employees, only then will the team recognize him or her as a leader by giving not only obedience to the authority but, more importantly, the moral authority for which the team has faith in the leader. Today, much of the public, and especially minority populations, do not feel a sense that the police are there to care for the public. Likewise, many police officers or would-be police officers are feeling that the greater public does not see them in a positive light. Additionally, the challenge for the law enforcement leader is knowing how officers embody and demonstrate the mission and core values of the organization as they perform their daily tasks.

An assessment of this begins with knowing how officers and the community define duty and obligation within the context of policing and how they each define what is minimally acceptable performance to “service beyond the call of duty.” This is an important step because an agency cannot move toward supererogation of police professional responsibility without first knowing what is minimally accepted in terms of duty and obligation from both the officer and the greater community. Therefore, community involvement and officer engagement are critically important to the conversation and to the sustained movement by an organization to police professional responsibility as a practice (Preddy & Andrews, 2021, January 20).

Police leaders should also consider using EQ (Emotional Quotient or emotional intelligence) assessments as a function of monitoring staff for significant changes in their emotional health and well-being. As leaders continue to explore ways to address the health and wellness of their officers, they must become more proactive in identifying when a potential problem exists. If police agencies are to have a robust early warning system, they must have quality data with multiple points of reference to properly evaluate what is being triggered and why it is being triggered and to diagnose next steps for a “red flag” notification (Preddy & Andrews, 2021, January 20). Additionally, implementing a system where “green flags” are also brought to the

attention of leaders, as L.T.H. did, may also help us to identify where to focus our energy, funding, and attention.

A meta-analysis on link between EI and servant leadership found that (a) EI has a significant positive relationship with servant leadership ( $\hat{\rho} = .57$ ); (b) the relationship between EI and servant leadership is stronger in studies having a lower percentage of well-educated subjects, in low power distance cultures, and in high institutional collectivism cultures (Miao, et al., 2021). Institutional collectivism is the degree to which organizational and societal institutions encourage individuals to be integrated into groups and organizations. For example, police officers identifying as part of the “Blue Lives” group demonstrates how group loyalty is encouraged, even if it undermines the pursuit of individual goals. How do we increase our perceptions of a group so that we can see that we are unified as a human race?

Outsourcing community services to only social workers is an equally untenable solution because then you really are distilling the role of the officer down to a militaristic one that allows them to only protect and no opportunity to serve. At the same time, putting police officers in the position where they are not only required but expected to lead social services, as we are seeing now in NY with the mental health crisis, is equally unfair without adequate training and support systems. A blended model and partnership between police officers and social workers and social service providers has the best bet at being successful. To make long term change, require emotional intelligence assessments in recruiting practices, prioritize regular social and emotional learning professional development for all officers, and integrate tenants of servant leadership within existing management structures that include positive reinforcement for officers that model effective servant leadership.

Recruitment is another area of opportunity. At a 2018 PERF gathering of police chiefs and commanders from across the country, many attributed declining numbers to a few factors: (1)



diminished perception of police following the 2014 shooting and unrest in Ferguson, Missouri; and (2) an increase in public and media scrutiny of police due to the proliferation of social media (Jackman, 2018). Changing recruiting patterns to emphasize the shift in applicants with a military background to that of one with degrees in sociology, community relations, and other humanities topics might also lead to long-term, positive change.

As L.T.H. noted, a sociology degree can be very useful and relevant degree for any career in the criminal justice field. For example, a sociology degree is especially helpful to a police officer in that it allows one to examine situations with knowledge of the structural issues that surround a society. An understanding on how socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and age intersect is incredibly important for understanding specific conflict situations. It is always important to understand the effects that stereotypes have in how people perceive a community problem. By understanding this and being trained to ask certain types of questions, a police officer may be able to get a more holistic and accurate depiction of a crime without as much bias or stereotyped influences.

## **CONCLUSION**

Police officers face no easy task today with internal and external challenges that include a lack of standardization across precincts, inadequate or ineffective implementation of trainings, attrition,

and negative media coverage. A blended model and partnership between police officers and social workers and social service providers has the best bet at being successful. Emotional intelligence is required to make long term sustainable changes. Implementing EQ assessments in recruiting practices, prioritizing regular social and emotional learning professional development for all officers, and integrating tenants of servant leadership within existing management structures that includes positive reinforcement for officers that model effective servant leadership are possible ways forward. This combination of authentic leadership strategies, with an emphasis on servant leadership and community policing, could provide leaders with the realistic chance to create enduring transformational change.

## **QUESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH**

Why doesn't community policing work across all communities?

What are the challenges to implementing the servant leadership model in areas with high levels of violent crime and trauma impacted citizens?

What role can formerly incarcerated individuals play in fostering a servant leadership model in their communities?

What role does the negative portrayal of policing in the media play in servant leadership and community policing?

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