

New Mexico State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Management and Development

Core Value Leadership in Law Enforcement

Policy Paper: A Proposal

Nathaniel Lacey
nclacey@nmsu.edu

Paper Prepared

for

EMD 350

Introduction to Educational Leadership in a Global Society

Dr. Fred J. Rodríguez

Spring, 2010

Core Value Leadership in Law Enforcement

There are split feelings about the profession of law enforcement in America. On one side, there are people who support police officers wholeheartedly. They admire officers as people who are willing to put their own lives on the line to protect the public. They think highly of the officers who sacrificed themselves to save others during the 9/11 attacks. Alternatively, there are people who don't have such positive feelings toward law enforcement. People in this category often see law enforcement as a profession for those who were not smart enough to go to college or as a job for somebody who was bullied growing up and is compensating for being picked on.

In a free society, law enforcement should always be carefully monitored. After all, it is the police officer who has the ability to deprive somebody of their liberty, the most basic of our natural rights. However, professionalism can build trust between the police and the public, and professionalism can be increased through strong leadership.

There are some recent trends in law enforcement that have created some misperceptions or negative perceptions about the professionalism of law enforcement. First, there is entertainment media. Through the magic of television, police can complete complex investigations and solve a crime all within the thirty minutes or hour allotted to the show. In reality, complex investigations might take weeks, months, or years to complete, but some part of the public has come to believe that police work is similar to what they watch on television. Additionally, the show COPS has been airing for more than twenty years now. While the show is comprised of footage of real police officers doing their jobs, the magic of editing distorts reality. In a half hour episode, a viewer might view a car chase, a foot pursuit, a drug bust, and an officer involved fight. These are certainly some of the most exciting parts of police work, but those incidents are few and far between. COPS tapes for weeks at a time in order to get thirty minutes of exciting footage. The show doesn't show the hours of paperwork and other less glamorous duties of the average patrol officer. This not only distorts the perception of the general public but also the perception of potential police recruits who believe that the chases, fights, and excitement is what the job is truly all about.

The advent of YouTube and other social media websites has also affected perception of law enforcement. In today's age, there are video cameras everywhere. There is a very good chance that the actions of a police officer might be caught on tape and end up on the internet. Perhaps the most famous example in recent history was the shooting of an unarmed citizen by a Bay Area Rapid Transit officer in California. The video captured by a citizen is shocking, and the case is still being adjudicated. It is yet to be seen what the outcome will be. In some cases, these videos are valuable pieces of

evidence that help document police misconduct. Other times, the videos, which can be very shocking to watch, capture an incident out of context where the police officer was actually doing his job correctly. Those types of video can unjustifiably lead to a negative public perception of the police.

There are also generational differences in today's officers that can affect the professionalism of a police department. Members of Generation Y are described as being more family centric. New officers of this generation might not view their jobs as police officers with as much dedication and passion as those from past generations.

Today, both law enforcement and the public it serves can benefit from strong leadership to increase professionalism and service to community. Today's leaders must be visionary. They must be able to envision the continuation or in some cases the return of a commitment to core values. These core values guide law enforcement officers in their duties to the public and to themselves. However, it's not enough for these leaders to just be visionary. These leaders must be able to communicate their vision to members of the law enforcement community. They must be able to describe the benefits of policing guided by these values. Furthermore, these leaders must be able to inspire officers to take action and commit to these values.

There are a number of core values in police work. These values increase the professionalism of the job, and this leads to increased trust and cooperation with the public. Community involvement and service are two important values. There is more to police work than just taking people to jail. Officers should be actively involved in the communities they work for. As officers, the public has chosen them to serve the community faithfully. By engaging with the community, it reduces an Us versus Them attitude that can become common in police work.

Justice and equality are two more critical values in law enforcement. As the world becomes more diverse, a commitment to justice and equality helps ensure all citizens are treated fairly. Today, racial profiling and other race related issues are common topics with regard to law enforcement. A strong dedication to the values of justice and equality helps insure people are treated right despite the color of their skin.

Integrity is a key trait for a police officer. This value gives an officer a moral compass to help guide him or her in difficult situations where the right decision is not always clear.

A commitment to training allows an officer to be constantly improving. This makes for a more complete person. Medical, legal, and other professions all have continuing education requirements. Law enforcement should be no different.

Safety is another important aspect of police work. An officer knowingly places their life on the line when they take an oath as a police officer. However, this doesn't mean they shouldn't take their life and health seriously. A commitment to safety provides a better working environment for officers and less chance of citizens being injured.

Law enforcement should value optimism. Police officers see some of the worst behavior humans have to offer. It is easy for an officer to become cynical and think that all citizens are bad. In reality, the vast majority of people are normal, honest citizens. Optimism can combat cynicism.

Empathy and caring are two more values critical in law enforcement. Policing can be emotionally draining, and officers will often suppress these emotions in order to remain detached from a disturbing situation. This can be a survival mechanism for officers in very distressing situations, but there is a problem when officers start suppressing these emotions during their day to day contacts with citizens. When that happens, officers can come off as aloof and distant. Having empathy and caring increases an officer's professionalism.

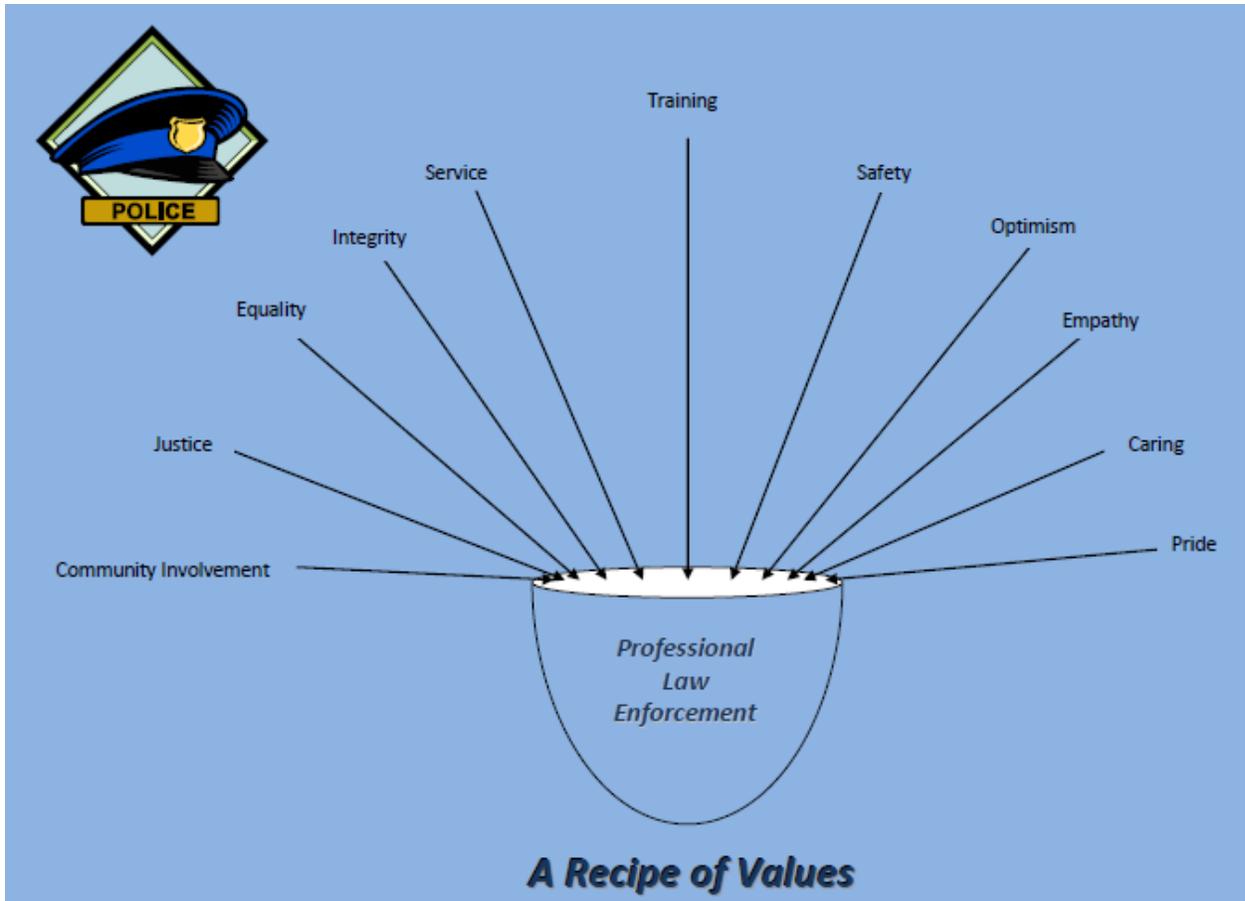
Lastly, pride is an important value. Law enforcement is a valuable job in our society. If an officer does not take pride in the job they are doing, then it will reflect in their professionalism. In any profession, it's easy to tell when a person does not have pride in their job. Their lethargy for their work is easily observed, and it is no different in police work.

These values are by no means all inclusive. There are many others that are important in law enforcement, but these are some of the most critical in contributing to the professionalism of the job and to creating a police department that provides great service to the community.

Strong leaders will not only exemplify these values. They will also be able to inspire officers to adhere to the values themselves and improve the law enforcement community as a whole.

In conclusion, the law enforcement profession must adhere to certain core values in order to build a strong relationship and trust between the police and the public they serve. In today's age, there are constant challenges for police departments to build and maintain this trust. It is critical for this profession to have strong leaders with vision, communication skills, and the ability to inspire officers to internalize the core values. By doing so, stronger bonds are built with the community, more trust is exhibited, and the job of law enforcement becomes an even more honorable profession.

Appendix I



References

CodeSixWithOne, . (2009, January 11). *Police shooting*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfFAMaffQiY>

Kouzes, J, & Posner, B. (2007). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

KTVU, . (2009, November 23). Bart police to present case on arrest video in court. Retrieved from <http://www.ktvu.com/news/21694181/detail.html>

Langley Productions, . (n.d.). *The "cops" story*. Retrieved from <http://www.cops.com/cops-history.html>

Patsche, W. (2007, March 30). Mayberry v. starsky & hutch: public perception of police work. Retrieved from <http://www.policeone.com/news/1232809-Mayberry-v-Starsky-Hutch-Public-perception-of-police-work/>