

Modernizing the police disciplinary system

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One of the things that officers often complain about when they are disciplined is the way it was done.

"I was not treated with respect," said one officer. "They were attacking me personally as if everything bad with the department was my fault." It wasn't long until that officer's humiliation turned to anger and then to resentment. An angry, resentful officer is not good for the organization.

Most law enforcement discipline systems rely heavily on punishment as a means to an end. It is not easy for someone in a leadership role to administer discipline.

No one enjoys it. Indeed, if someone does enjoy it, they have no business in a leadership role because they are not a leader. They're something else, but not a leader.

Sometimes in trying to run our organizations we get so caught up in the minutiae that we fail to see the forest because there are too many trees blocking the view. Fun-

damentally, the nation's peace keepers are about protecting and defending the rights of all people by preventing crimes, confronting injustice and keeping the peace. A key component of being a leader is to treat everyone with respect and dignity.

There is a serious conflict if the leader treats one of his or her officers without respect and dignity during the administration of discipline.

In effect, the so-called leader is modeling behavior that teaches the officer that it is okay to humiliate people and treat them with disrespect.

Most discipline systems fail to achieve their intended goals because the structure of the system is outdated and antithetical to modern policing.

Last month in *American Police Beat*, I wrote an article about the new program at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD).

The Education-Based Discipline (EBD) system implemented by Sheriff Lee Baca eliminates the old haphazard

paradigm in which there was little or no connection between the consequences for errant actions and the misconduct.

EBD, on the other hand, establishes a rationale-based training system which focuses on correcting the errant behavior; the distinction being discipline with the intent to teach better behavior as opposed to punishment, which has the intent to inflict pain.

The EBD program is a component of a larger effort by Sheriff Baca to transform the culture of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. The overarching principle is that through education and training, peace officers become more professional.

Peace officers who are more professional provide better service to the communities and therefore are better able to achieve the goals of law enforcement.

The EBD system dovetails with other Sheriff's Department innovations including the Deputy Leadership Institute, which is based on the principle that leadership is intrinsic in the professional

law enforcement officer and that everyone can learn to be a leader.

Another program is the LASD University Consortium, which helps Sheriff's Department employees who want to resume or begin formal college level programs leading to an associate, bachelor, master, law or doctoral degree.

Another educational program helps deputies better understand the hundreds of cultures which make up the fabric of Los Angeles County.

The LASD Cultural Exchange Program is a voluntary curriculum where deputies can journey to other countries.

The travel is completed on the deputy's own time and expense but the organized learning tour is under the auspices of the Sheriff's Department. The educational visits greatly expand a deputy's knowledge and understanding not only of our own cultures but other cultures as well.

Leaders have to keep focused on our mission. As

peace keepers we are about protecting and defending the rights of all people, preventing crime, and keeping the peace while doing so in a professional manner. Fundamental to that is treating everyone with respect and dignity and that includes our own.

These are the principles of Sheriff Baca's educational enhancements, including the pioneering Education Based Discipline system.

This brings us full circle. Professionalism is the proper implementation of the highly specialized knowledge and skills we gain as peace officers through education and training, and that is how Sheriff Baca is transforming his agency.

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