

Values-driven leadership in difficult times

By Phil Hansen

It is late summer as I sit down to share these thoughts, and the attacks on our fellow officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge are still fresh in our minds. I pray that by the time this is published we haven't suffered more of the same, but that seems questionable given the evil that permeates a faction of our society.

Between widespread criticism of law enforcement by our "responsible" leaders and the media, and the proliferation of premeditated attacks on our personnel, it is a wonder that we are able to recruit sufficient numbers to fill our vacancies. Many of today's young officers may be asking themselves if they made the right decision when choosing a law enforcement career. Thank goodness this country has so many fine men and women who are still willing to step up and make a difference.

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As law enforcement personnel, and in particular as tactical officers, we often limit the focus of our attention on leadership to poise and decision-making during crisis situations.¹ We may tend to think in terms of leading people during a crisis and managing resources between crises. Decisive, ethical leadership is obviously essential during critical field operations, but the vast majority of leadership opportunities actually take place in the more routine setting of day-to-day operations and interactions with our personnel. It is during these contacts that we have the greatest opportunity to exert our influence as leaders.

PRACTICING VALUES-DRIVEN SPEECH ON A DAILY BASIS

I recently attended the opening ceremony for this year's NTOA Tactical Operations Conference and Trade Show in



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Louisville, Kentucky. The opening ceremony is mandated for all attendees because, among other things, it includes information about bus schedules, student lunches, weapons storage areas, etc. Despite the humdrum administrative aspects of the event, I found the occasion to be inspiring, and I left the assembly with an invigorated sense of pride, cohesion and encouragement regarding the future of our profession. What's more, I could sense the same feeling of pride and unity shared throughout the room. How could this be? How could these emotions and a sense of cohesion be aroused amongst total strangers during a relatively brief, predominantly administrative gathering?

The answer is rather simple. Woven throughout the routine administrative objectives of the meeting were rituals, acknowledgements and discussion of matters related to

our shared values and the nobility of our service as law enforcement professionals. Each of us in attendance was affected by the pride and patriotism we felt as the colors were posted and our national anthem was performed; by our devotion to God, however we chose to worship during the invocation; by our appreciation for courage and our sense of compassion as we honored a young man suffering from life-threatening illness, whose dearest wish is to be a police officer; and by our commitment to service as we prepared for training that would make us better protectors of our communities.

In retrospect, the question we should be asking ourselves is why such considerations should be limited to ceremonial occasions and not addressed during everyday interactions like patrol briefings or staff meetings. It is too easy to limit the content of briefings to administrative concerns, case law updates and information on recent crime activity. As leaders, we must continually make room for and engage in conversation relating to pride in our profession, courage, compassion, the ethical treatment of others, adherence to constitutional values and the nobility of our service — the very values we too seldom discuss but which initially attracted us to this profession.

To be sure, there will be cynics who sit in the back row and roll their eyes when you talk about things like the nobility of our mission or about having compassion for others, but most of those in attendance will listen, relate to what you say and respect you for openly expressing your ideals. Great leaders are truly effective and admired over time because of the values they espouse and project through their words, actions and character on an everyday basis. This holds true for iconic leaders like Abraham Lincoln as well as for those we are familiar with in our own life experiences.

We cannot try to lead others by simply pushing them in the direction we want them to go. This is particularly true with the new generation of police officer. “To be effective, leaders must begin by setting aside the culturally conditioned ‘natural’ instinct to

lead by push, particularly when times are tough. Leaders must instead adopt the unnatural behavior of always leading by the pull of inspiring values.”²

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**WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH;
CHARACTER AND CONSISTENCY
ARE THE KEYS**

The caveat here is that as leaders, our actions must consistently mirror our words. We cannot expect our personnel to have compassion for others if we treat each other in a callous, demeaning or disrespectful manner.

True leadership is values-based and requires some substantive moral or ethical underpinning. In other words, the aim of leadership is to align others to pursue or achieve some noble purpose. In contrast, the simple exercise of control over others for political or monetary gain fails the test. Lacking some honorable principle as the purpose for alignment, leadership tools like active listening, communicative skills and DISC behavioral assessments are nothing more than techniques for manipulation.

Do not ever confuse a strong personality and skill at manipulation with leadership. I have personally endured so-called leaders whose manipulative skills were powerful, but their accumulation of power and advancement was only for the sake of personal aggrandizement. As a result, they caused the decline and near destruction of teams, units of assignment and agencies large and small. It is no stretch to say that a culture of self-promotion and a lack of strong, values-based leadership has much to do with the current national dilemma with respect to the public's fundamental distrust of government.

True leadership encompasses shared values and the alignment of followers toward a noble purpose. It is ultimately measured by results. Shared values allow groups of followers to coalesce, undergo substantive change and achieve great things. Common values fuse members of a group and support

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them in times of adversity. "Cohesion is the factor that enables a unit or team to survive shock, and cohesion is achieved through adherence to common values."³ The men and women of the Dallas and Baton Rouge police departments will survive and ultimately thrive despite the terrible losses they suffered, largely because of their cohesion based on the values so many of us share in this noble profession.

The best leaders operate in the realm of core values, not technical expertise or skill at manipulation. They model the way and create disciples of their exemplary behavior. People like NTOA founder John Kolman are admired and effective leaders because they maintain and model honorable values such as courage, integrity and devotion to duty. Think of someone in your own life who you truly admire and would wish to emulate. I am willing to bet that your admiration for that person is based on the character and values he or she demonstrates on a daily basis.

**MOVING FORWARD IN TRYING
TIMES**

We all share in this unusually trying and divisive time in our history. This country craves skilled, ethical leadership at all levels of government, and there is a widespread sense of fragility with respect to our security and way of life. This is the time for law enforcement to shine. Rather than be a source

of controversy, we have an opportunity and a potential to be a dominant stabilizing influence in our society. The public at large wants to respect our profession and put faith in us as objective, courageous defenders of their families, homes and way of life. The path to professionalism, unit cohesion and restoration of public confidence begins with leadership. Seize this moment and model the way. ■

ENDNOTES

1. For more information on poise and leadership during crisis, see "Setting the Operational Tone," *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 2015.
2. James O'Toole. *Leading Change, The Argument for Values Based Leadership*. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1995, p. 11.
3. Lt. Col. Michael Parkyn, USMC ret. University of Southern California, July 20, 2010.



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