

# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

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Traditionally, we make resolutions when we enter the new year. This year, I ask all of you to recommit yourselves to being the best. As our 2018 conference keynote speaker Clint Bruce so well stated: Don't settle for excellent, be exceptional! In particular,

focus on safety. The year that's passed was even deadlier to officers than 2017, and as of this writing, eight officers have been killed in the past 21 days. These deaths are unacceptable and we need to do everything in our power to reduce them.

In that effort I want to direct your attention to the article "LAPD Hostage Shooting: A Failure of De-escalation Policy" on page 30 of this issue. In this article, Lt. Col. Mike Wood addresses the failure of the recent emphasis on de-escalation and how it led to the fatal shooting of a hostage during a standoff. These principles and practices are not new; de-escalation training was emphasized when I attended the police academy over 30 years ago. Yet the emphasis today on de-escalation has had the unintended consequence of officers engaging in poor officer safety to avoid administrative trouble. These policies are, as Wood argues, inverting the safety priority model we all practice by putting suspect safety above all others. This has to stop immediately or I am afraid we will continue to see officers become victims of well-intended but flawed actions.

When I first read the article I wondered why the message was not being delivered by a chief or sheriff, or at least someone in the law enforcement profession — even myself. Yet the author is a bright and insightful leader. Lt. Col. Wood is the son of a police officer, but not an officer himself. He is an honor graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, and a pilot with thousands of flight hours, including combat. He has become a student

of police practices and has applied his wit and analytical skills to look at how we are policing today.

Lt. Col. Wood does an outstanding job framing the problem with our loss of priorities in law enforcement. His article, which first appeared on PoliceOne.com, is one of the best I have read on the topic. I was so impressed that I asked him for permission to reprint it in our publication. I am convinced that you will agree with the wisdom of his insight and I am hopeful that each of you will be motivated to share his perspective.

De-escalation is a critical skill for all officers to possess. Having said that, I believe that we need a proper set of priorities to help us apply the right skills at the right time. Critical decision-making is perhaps the most important skill to have regarding officer safety. Having a priority matrix to guide decisions during a crisis is vital. We should all strive to be "exceptional" in these skills to improve our safety.

We must do better! Be a model for your peers and motivate them to follow in your footsteps. Take advantage of the myriad training opportunities available to you through the NTOA and state organizations to improve your decision-making skills and expand your tactical expertise. Faithfully read each issue of *The Tactical Edge* for the most current thinking on the critical challenges you face on a daily basis. This edition alone features invaluable information on managing critical incidents, and shifting your mind-set when responding to active shooters. Even more can be found in our archives, which are accessible to all members on our website.

Please stay safe and I wish you all a blessed and Happy New Year!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thor Eells".

Thor Eells  
Executive Director