

Gary G. Smith
2002

As a police chief, I am bombarded daily with materials, academic studies, observations by “experts” and evaluations by those who have never set foot in a squad car, or worn a police uniform, but profess to be experts in police theory on how those of us in policing are woefully inadequate in an understanding of ethics and ethical behavior. I’ve also noticed that most of the observations, studies and evaluations are generally aimed at our line staff rather than those of us in the administrative ranks.

I do believe that there are issues within our profession that need immediate attention. I believe that profiling is a serious concern that the law enforcement community must recognize and take serious steps to correct the related problems. I believe that strong leadership, modeling of ethical behavior and teaching problem solving techniques is the solution...not beating up on regular beat cops who are out there trying to make a positive difference.

Beat officers put their careers on the line every single day. They know that they can encounter a life-changing situation at any time while on the job where they do everything right that still can ultimately end their career, cost them their livelihood, cost them their self-respect, family security, and even their lives. Ninety-nine percent of our officers continue to be “on the job” despite the adversity and challenges they face daily. I believe the main reason they continue to do their best is because they are honorable, decent women and men.

As administrators, I’m sad to say we often don’t measure up to the same standards. We often fail to reinforce positive behavior, we fail to praise their deeds and we fail to set clear goals for them while we demand excellence. We get bogged down with labor issues, the distractions of a few bad cops, and forget what it’s like to deal politely with a guy who is threatening to take your badge for doing your job and often has the wherewithal to do so. As administrators, it is easy to get so comfortable with our positions that we forget our time in the field, forget the feeling we experienced the first time we were falsely accused of misconduct and the experience of going through an internal investigation.

I’m proud of my staff. I can’t say it enough. I need to say it more. I also need to set an example. I need to fight for their needs. I need to be a cheerleader for them. I need to defend them when they are falsely accused, and admit mistakes when we make them, even if it comes at the risk of my own position. I owe it to my dedicated, honest, officers to protect them from those who would tarnish their reputation to further their own personal agenda. I need to demonstrate the courage in demanding high standards and removing those who besmirch our profession.

Safety Center ♦ 300 West Fifth Street ♦ Northfield, MN 55057
Voice 507-645-4477 ♦ Fax 507-645-7057 ♦ E-Mail Gary.Smith@ci.northfield.mn.us

Administrators need to demonstrate the same courage we expect from our officers as we deal with the politics and issues that have become my “beat” as a police chief.

We need to show the same ethical courage to do the honorable thing in our roles as police administrators as we expect from our officers and staff. We have to take a collective national leadership role to take control of our profession. It is our responsibility to work with our communities to make sure we provide them with quality police services. It is our responsibility to make sure that all individuals are treated equally and with respect. We also have an obligation to uphold the law. I will not compromise the values found in the Oath of Honor and The Law Enforcement Code of Ethics to protect my job at the cost of my coworkers, my community, or my own integrity.

We live in uncertain times. As police administrators, we have an obligation to provide a stable, clear definition of reasonableness and ethical behavior to our staff and our community.