

# SHAPING A POSITIVE CULTURE AFTER CRISIS ... A CASE STUDY APPROACH

**IACP** 2025  
OCTOBER 18-21 | DENVER, CO  
International Association of Chiefs of Police



1

## FACILITATORS

Terrence Gordon  
Chief of Police, Retired

James Olson  
Chief of Police

#IACP2025

2

# BIO



#IACP2025

- Terrence Gordon  
Chief of Police, Retired  
Thornton, CO, Police Department
- Inspector, Assistant Chief  
Milwaukee, WI, Police Department
- Leadership in Police Organizations (LPO)  
Instructor – IACP
- Police Training, Consulting, Organizational  
Development
- Public Policy, Legislative Strategy

3

# INTRODUCTION

*"We have mastered crisis command and crisis management, but we still struggle with crisis leadership."*

4

An event or situation that threatens the existence and significantly affects the operations of an organization.

Can be precipitated by systemic deficiencies.

Marked by:

- Intense stress and emotions
- Instability, uncertainty
- A sense of urgency in decision making



5

## PHASES OF CRISIS

(James and Wooten, 2023)



- Preparation and Prevention
- Signal Detection
- Damage Containment
- Recovery
- Learning and Reflection

#IACP2025



6

# RIGHT?

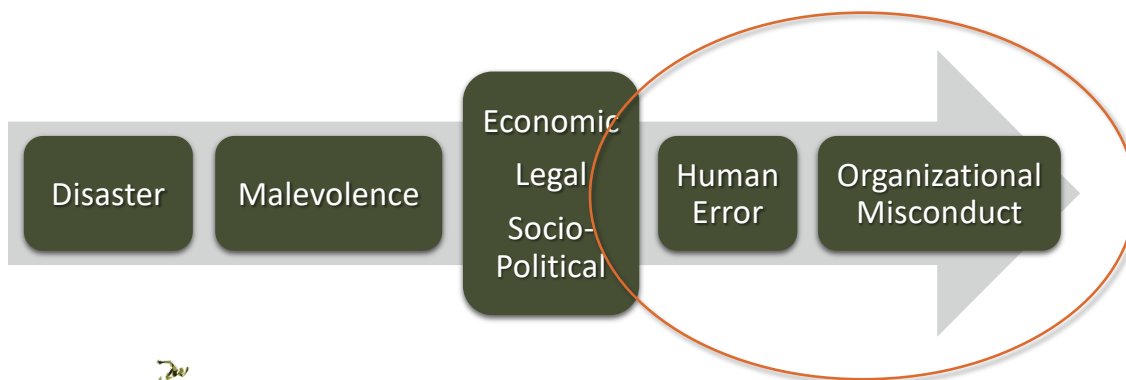
*"If we can detect and predict crime trends... we can detect and prevent culture trends."*

#IACP2025

7

## TYPES OF CRISES

### The "Blame Continuum"



#IACP2025



8

## DURING AND AFTER

### Organizational Environment

- Stress, uncertainty, emotional reactions
- Rumors and misinformation
- Schisms and factions
- Morale and motivation issues
- Effective and emerging leaders

#IACP2025

### Successful Strategies

- Manage individual and organizational stress and resilience
- Communicate effectively
- Lead with purpose through the crisis
- Look toward the future



9

## CRISIS AND CULTURE

What does a crisis do to organizational culture?

- Spotlights its true nature
  - X Amplifies division
  - X Can intensify distrust of command
- Shifts focus from purpose to preservation
- Normalizes cynicism – when this becomes “cool,” you’re in trouble
- Accelerates drift – good habits erode, bad ones spread
- Opens a window for change...

HOW?

#IACP2025

.25

10

## CRISIS BREAKS THE STATUS QUO

- Disrupts cultural inertia, AKA “Business as Usual”
- Forces transparency and accountability
- Provides leaders with the legitimacy needed to make changes
- Creates collective readiness
- Is both an end and a beginning, depending on what leaders do

#IACP2025

11

## LEADER STRATEGIES

### SYSTEMS FIRST

*“A bad system will beat a good person every time.”*

*~ Deming, 1993*

12



## PHASES OF POST CRISIS LEADERSHIP



### Phase 1: Stabilize People

*Re-establish trust, direction, and clarity.*

### Phase 2: Align Systems

*Convert lessons learned into new norms, redefine operations.*

### Phase 3: Advance New Norms

*Embed change and reinforce the new normal.*

#IACP2025

13

## PHASE 1: STABILIZE



**Purpose:** to restore a sense of psychological safety, structure, and direction after a crisis.

### Organizational Objectives

- Establish or re-establish trust
- Reduce uncertainty
- Acknowledge the human aspect
- More communication than normal

#IACP2025

14

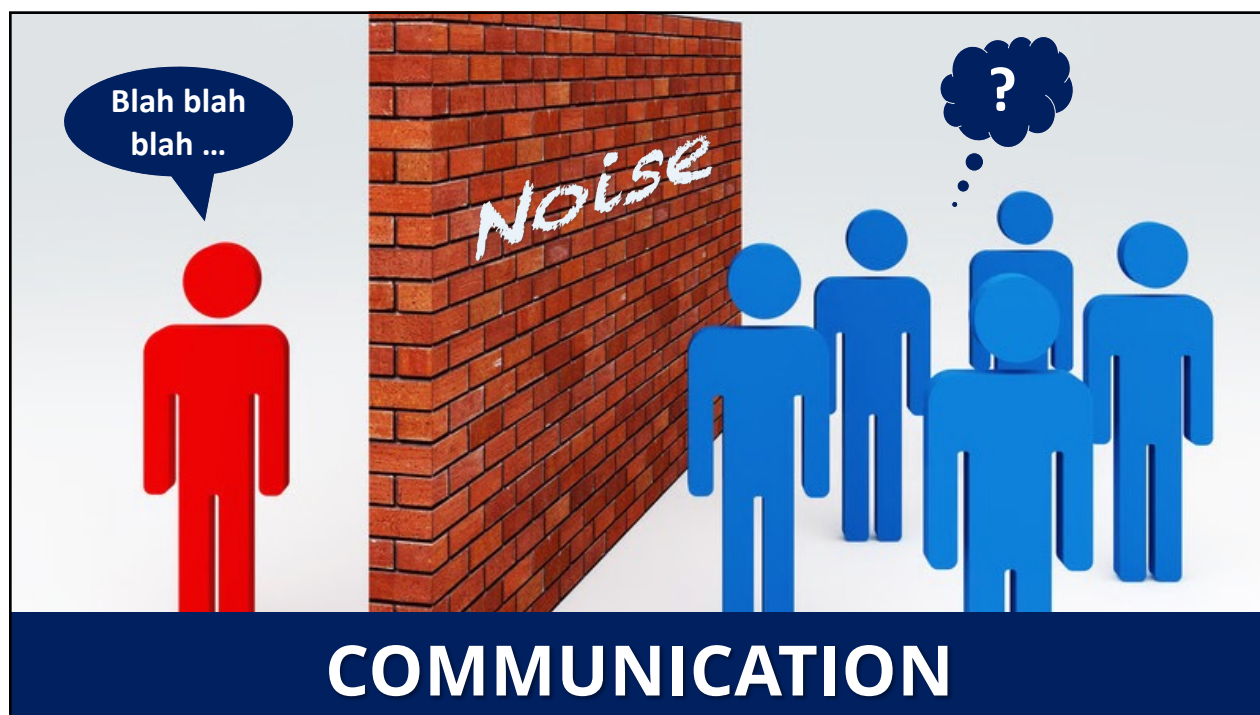
## “UNCROSS ARMS” SLIDE

| Academic Term           | Law Enforcement Translation                                             |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Psychological safety    | Trust in leadership, ability to speak up without repercussions          |
| Vulnerability           | Candor, speaking one's thoughts, saying what needs to be said           |
| Emotional climate       | Command tone, atmosphere                                                |
| Inclusive communication | Remembering everyone and accepting input in messaging and communication |

#IACP2025



15



16



# PHASE 1 LEADER STRATEGIES



## 1. Communicate clearly and frequently – remember to listen

- Regular briefings – same talking points to avoid contradictions
- Start each briefing with what's on *their* minds
- Be honest about mistakes and what you don't know – uncertainty is forgivable

## 2. Be Human

- Talk about stress, fatigue, and resilience
- Consider workload adjustments, allow decompression time and wellness check-ins
- Model and encourage others to model calm, steady, and professional behavior

#IACP2025

.50

17

# PHASE 1 LEADER STRATEGIES



## 3. Set Direction and Boundaries

- What matters? What has not changed and will not change?
- Clearly establish that the sidelines are still there and talk about new ones
- Introduce long-term change but focus on the short-term steps to get there

## 4. Identify and Support Informal Leaders

- Empower them with trust, information, and talking points
- Use their credibility to influence their peers
- Bring them into the boss' recovery talks and processes as appropriate

#IACP2025

18

## PITFALLS



- **Silence** – creates anxiety and rumors
- **Defensiveness** – creates apprehension and erodes credibility
- **Over-Reaction/Over-Correction** – too much too fast creates confusion and prolongs recovery
- **Ignoring Morale** – operating without awareness of stress, emotions, and resilience will prolong instability

#IACP2025

19

## PHASE 2: ALIGN



**Purpose:** to translate lessons learned into clear expectations, aligned systems, and collaborative efforts to transform the organization.

### Organizational Objectives

- Align systems with expected behavior – structure, policy, rewards, accountability
- Empower and trust supervisors to take you into the future
  - Frequent and varied communication
  - Training and development
  - Trust with major initiatives
- Move from ideals to actions: *“Every mission statement sounds good.”*

#IACP2025

20

## PHASE 2 LEADER STRATEGIES



- Implement systems in alignment with your objectives
- Eliminate legacy policies and processes that reinforce the old culture
- Establish consistent and fair accountability
  - Uphold your professed values
  - No symbolic discipline
  - Organizational justice drives procedural justice

#IACP2025

21

## PHASE 2 LEADER STRATEGIES



- Require cross-functional collaboration in solving problems and establishing new systems
- Continue to empower leaders and identify emerging leaders
  - Remember they are keepers and translators of culture
  - Provide coaching, not just directives

#IACP2025

22

## PITFALLS



- Talking without changing systems
- Overcomplicating things with committees and jargon – buy-in is more than a show
- Forgetting your sergeants and lieutenants – you *will* fail
- Announcing too much change before you have a critical mass of trust and support

#IACP2025

.75

23

## PHASE 3: ADVANCE



**Purpose:** to sustain the gains and successes made during the Stabilize and Advance phases, and embed trust, learning, and accountability into the new culture.

### Organizational Objectives

- Systemically reinforce new norms
- Model the way – expect this from all leaders
- Build a culture of leadership
- Measure what matters – track meaningful organizational outcomes in addition to operational outputs

#IACP2025

24

## PHASE 3 LEADER STRATEGIES



### Transactional – Structures & Processes

- Establish, model, enforce accountability and leadership expectations
- Keep communication and diverse feedback channels open
- Formalize leadership training and development
- Seek feedback and listen – it won't always be positive
- Conduct periodic checks – data, surveys, results of accountability processes, etc.

#IACP2025

25

## PHASE 3 LEADER STRATEGIES



### Transformational – Values & Principles

- Communicate confidence, mission, shared vision, and identity
- Show concern for others in the organization, model sacrifice and selfless behavior
- Do the right thing over doing things right, particularly when “right” gets in the way of the new culture
- Act with integrity – people will forgive mistakes... you will lose them with dishonesty

#IACP2025

26

## ACCOUNTABILITY & INTEGRITY



Transactional → Culture of Accountability

Transformational → Culture of Integrity

*"If your systems reward 'justifying' and self-protection, no messaging about integrity will stick."*

#IACP2025

27

## AFTER THE CRISIS - "HANDOUT"



1. Own the Narrative
2. Acknowledge the Human Aspect
3. Reaffirm the Mission, Vision, and Values
4. Rebuild Through Consistency
5. Empower Your Supervisors
6. Identify and Replace Systems That Reinforce the Old Culture
7. Acknowledge Quick Wins, Even Small Ones.
8. Measure What Matters
9. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
10. Model the Way

#IACP2025

28



## “HANDOUT”

### After the Crisis: 10 Strategies That Shape Culture



#IACP2025

29

## NO FINISH LINE

- Be careful as things settle down and return to “normal”
- This will take time, and it will be difficult
- Continuously push, reflect, and learn
- Never let up – culture is never “done”



*Every one of you will face instability again.*

*Are you ready to lead people or just manage things?*

#IACP2025

30

# **CASE STUDY**

CHIEF JAMES OLSON

31

# **CASE STUDY**

CHIEF JAMES OLSON

32

## CASE STUDY

Chief James Olson

DeForest Police Department

Milwaukee Police Department, Retired

IACP Leadership Master Instructor

#IACP2025

33

## THE CRISIS

Failure of Top Leadership

Lack of Transparency

Micromanagement or no management

Favoritism (in groups and out groups)

Not Present

Low EQ

No Empathy

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

#IACP2025

34

## WHERE TO START.....

After one-on-one SWOT meetings with all staff several themes emerged:

- Outdated Command Structure
- Lack of Organizational Control
- Lack of Opportunity
- Valuable Equipment Needs
- Needed updated vision and mission

*Transformational Leadership was Needed!*



#IACP2025

35

## START WITH MINDSET

Shift from Problems to Opportunities

Empower people effectively, and they will take care of things

Deliberately model expectations

Be empathetic and be present

Show Purpose

360 Supervisor Evals

Leadership at all levels of Department

#IACP2025



36

## PARRALEL ACTION



Help Community Repair

Connecting with Elected Officials

Use Media as a Tool to Demonstrate the Best of policing

Meet with Diverse communities to build trust

Meet Resistance Head On

#IACP2025

37

## PURPOSEFUL CHANGE



Code of Conduct based on Core Values

Integrity

Courage

Competence

Restraint

Accountability

Professionalism

#IACP2025

38

# DISCIPLINE CONSIDERATIONS

Use a Discipline Consideration model that examines:

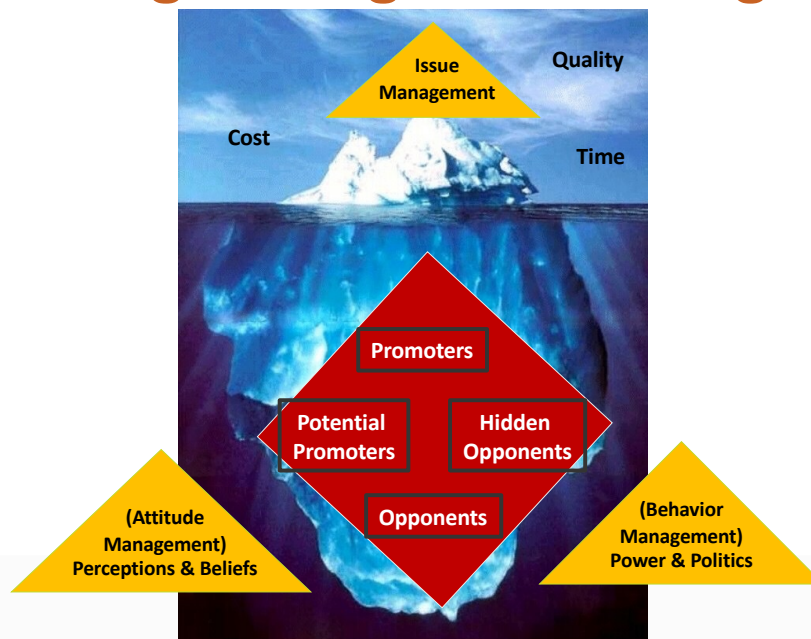
- Degree of Harm
- Employee Motivation
- Employee Experience
- Intentional vs. Unintentional Errors
- Employee Past Record
- Responsibility

#IACP2025



39

## Change Management Iceberg



40

40

# ENERGY FOR CHANGE

## Deliberate Change

### Started with Patrol

DDACTS

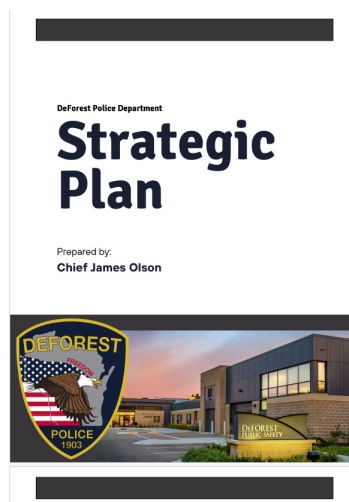
Body Worn Cameras

Search Warrant Entry Team

Drones

K-9 Program

#IACP2025



41

# ENERGY FOR CHANGE

## Moved into Investigations

Case clearances vs. closures

Tracking workload

Reporting on case progress

Integrate detectives with patrol

#IACP2025

42



# ENERGY FOR CHANGE

## Administration

Report Process

Case Tracking Process

Involving Admin Staff in Crime Strategy Support

#IACP2025

43

# COMMUNITY POLICING

## Enhanced community policing

Pop Up Events

Family Fun Night (NNO)

Bike Rodeos

Elf on a Shelf educational series

Winter Wonderland

Educational Partnering

Ceremony Broadcasts

#IACP2025



44

## PURPOSEFUL REORGANIZATION



Building a command structure for growth

- Not just about adding

- Adding layers of accountability

- Allow inexperienced Sergeants to grow into their role

#IACP2025

45

## SEEING RESULTS



Seeing the results and watching people take off:

- Analyzing department operations through data

- Budget

- Patrol

- Instituting P.O.P. Model in lieu of beat areas

- SRO Reporting

#IACP2025

46

## NEVER FINISHED ADAPTING



Let them have a say and watch them embrace the change.

Strategic Plan Update

Creating expectations and guide results

Continuous stakeholder engagement

#IACP2025

47

## BE TRANSFORMATIONAL!!



What are 3 Professional Goals you have right now...

#IACP2025

48

## STEP 2



What are 3 things you would do if there was absolutely no chance of failure??

#IACP2025

49

## BE TRANSFORMATIONAL



Skill and Will Variants

Be Cautious who you surround yourself with

Not naysayers

Don't get caught in Safety Zone

"Kolenda – 2025 – Creating Effective Culture"

#IACP2025

50

## STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS



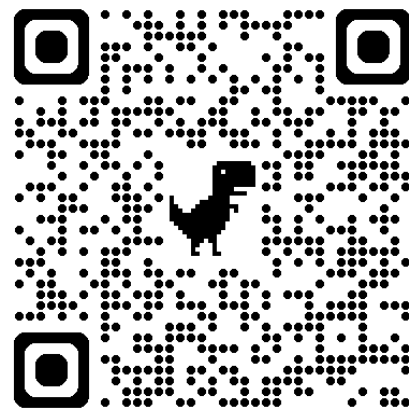
Never Ever Give Up!!!

#IACP2025

51

## Questions?

Chief Jim Olson  
olsonj@deforestwi.gov



#IACP2025

52