

### **The Reluctant Recruit**

I refer to them as reluctant recruits. They serve the public with dedication and compassion. They are good at what they do. They are police officers, deputies, dispatchers, vehicle mechanics, and other public safety support staff. They are public servants. The reluctance comes in admitting that they are also leaders.

Every public service employee is a leader. Law enforcement officers are among the most commonly recognized leaders in our communities. They are models for what to do and how to do it. They are icons of safety and protection.

When thanking an officer for doing something brave, innovative, or outstanding, as a city manager I often heard, “Gosh, ma’am, I’m just doing my job.” The reality is, however, that our law enforcement agencies overflow with extraordinary leaders from the rank of customer service officer through to the top brass.



Why is it that many of us deny ourselves the leadership mantle? Do we underestimate our importance to our community? Do we believe the role of leader is reserved only for those in command or supervisory positions? Why do we say we are not interested in being a leader? Is it too difficult? Is it thankless? Does leadership mean we cannot do what we love or is it just something that is not in our career path?

The reality is that every time you put on your uniform, clip on your badge, show up at the office, attend your kid’s soccer game, or just go home, you carry with you the mantle of leadership. You cannot separate yourself from that role because *leader* is embedded in your job description as a public employee. You accepted the title the day you took your oath of office.

Public agencies are in a leadership crisis because our employees are not aware of this unwritten job duty. As well, with the onslaught of retirements and budget reductions, employers have a glut of experienced applicants for promotional positions. We lack training funds, leaving our leadership capacity anemic and underdeveloped. Without the training and experience, good public servants often feel they are not ready for a promotion yet get pushed up the ladder because there is no one better prepared.

In a multi-volume study on Police Futures, a working group of educators, law enforcement specialists, and futurists tackled the issue of deficient leadership development in a report entitled, *Advancing Police Leadership: Considerations, Lessons Learned, and Preferable*

*Futures*. The report states, “we continue to see too many police agencies struggling to find suitable candidates for promotion and struggling under the weight of ineffective leadership.”

In order to shape a future of strength and health in our communities, we must address the leadership glut positively and specifically.

The Police Futures working group acknowledged, “Even rookie patrol officers exercise a form of leadership . . . .” The study defined leadership as:

. . . The act of moving people, organizations, and/or processes to preferred states of being; . . . leadership is the act of bringing about change to enhance the equity, efficiency, and/or efficacy of police operations. In the act of policing, leadership can also mean exercising command authority in times of crisis.



Whether you are a reluctant leadership recruit or are eager to step up, creating change for our communities is expected and necessary for safety and protection of our citizens. It takes every one of us to meet this challenge. “Healthy organizations utilize individuals with leadership and followership abilities as change agents for evolution and growth,” stated Marshall Jones in his chapter, “Leadership’s Role in Shaping Organizational Culture: The Key to the Future.”

Rhetoric abounds in the debate of whether leadership is innate or learned. There is no question, however, that leadership skill development is deliberate. What are the ways you can develop in your leadership role?