

Procedural Justice: Training

Voiceover

00:00

This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Jacqueline Bolden

00:08

Hello and welcome. My name is Jacqueline Bolden and on behalf of the COPS Office, I would like to introduce to you, Sue Rahr, who is the Executive Director of the Criminal Justice Training Commission in Washington State. Sue is here to discuss procedural justice in the context of training. Sue, thank you for participating in *The Beat*.

Executive Director Sue Rahr

00:24

Thanks for having me.

Bolden

00:26

Can you tell us what is being done and what should be done to incorporate procedural justice into recruitment and the training academy?

Rahr

00:33

Well starting with recruitment, I think our recruiting messages need to have an appropriate balance of service orientation not just the typical, standard recruitment which appeals to the sense of adventure by displaying weapons and equipment. I think in current recruiting, we need to focus more on the service orientation. Good targets for recruiting are still going to be colleges, the military, and job fairs. But we also need to work harder at reaching out to a more diverse pool of candidates. If we want to reach members of communities that don't traditionally have a strong relationship with police, we really have to consider starting recruiting efforts when kids are in middle school and high school. PAL, school resource officers, other programs that involve cops mentoring kids from high risk backgrounds are a good place to start. In my opinion, you really have to take kind of a one kid at a time approach in those communities. It may seem slow and cumbersome, but you would be surprised how much one kid can influence a larger circle of friends. And as time goes on, that word begins to spread and mushroom.

One example of this approach is our relationship here at the academy with the Year Up Program, that's Y-E-A-R, like a single year, Up Program. This is a job training program for kids with a lot of potential who come from very challenging backgrounds. We brought in a young man for a six-month internship to our IT Department here at the academy. He came in after he had received six months of intense IT training at the Year Up Program. So since he's been at the academy, he's been able to observe our training

program up close; he got to know a lot of cops. We recently offered a full time job to him when he finishes his internship. So he'll be working in our IT Department until he turns 21, and then he can start testing for the police department. By then, he'll have two years of interacting with hundreds of cops, participating in our training scenarios, and most importantly, he's telling all of his friends at this job training program and all of his friends in his neighborhood what a great profession law enforcement is. So more importantly, he's able to share positive stories about cops and how they encouraged him and helped him to be successful. He can also tell them that he's watched the training; where we encourage our officers to respect people's civil rights, to treat them with dignity and respect. He's going to be a more formal, a more effective and informal leader than any cop can hope to be going into a community where they don't live. So we're set up to bring in two interns each year for the foreseeable future. So I'm hoping over the course of a couple years, the word of mouth stories will get around in a lot more diverse communities.

In terms of incorporating procedural justice principles into the academy, I think you need to start with the training strategy. We moved away, Washington State, we moved away from the boot camp, drill sergeant kind of model. That was designed for 18 year old military recruits who were full of vinegar and needed to be controlled. Instead, we decided to use a model based on fairness and respect, which is designed to develop critical thinking leaders. Our program strives to build trust and comradery, to encourage recruits to be confident and push the limits of their learning. The old boot camp model was intended to create soldiers who were obedient followers and wouldn't question authority. Those recruits were humiliated and they operated under an ever-present fear of getting in trouble for making a mistake. And I've watched this approach bring fear and distrust and it absolutely doesn't encourage confidence. It causes recruits to begin their career by banding together against their common enemy which is the training officer. And it sets the stage I think, for in the future, for not trusting their supervisors and leaders. Even worse, I've watched in the old days, training officers became a role model for abusing power. That is demonstrating that those who have power get to take and humiliate and punish those that don't have power. So getting away from that model, today we've adopted a leadership training strategy that uses adult learning. The stress and rigor remain high, but training officers operate like coaches encouraging recruits to push their limits. I like to describe it as the right combination of Pete Carroll, the beloved coach of the Seahawks, and Jessie Puller, the legendary General of the Marine Corps. They represent the best of positive encouragement and yet instilling a deep sense of pride, honor, and toughness. It doesn't have to be one or the other. It really needs to be both in my opinion when we train.

Bolden

05:39

Thank you! What are the tools officers should have and how does the topic of training on procedural justice relate to the supervision of officers and with interactions in the community?

Rahr

05:50

In the academy, the principles of procedural justice are woven through the curriculum rather than taught as a single block. And the concept of police legitimacy is a frequent topic of discussion. We use the metaphor of guardian, to describe the ideal life of a police officer whose goal it is to both protect and serve. We contrast this with the mindset of a warrior, whose goal it is to conquer an enemy that's been de-humanized. We're careful to highlight that it's a process of protecting communities; guardians will sometimes have to function as warriors to protect citizens. It's not an either or situation. We vigorously train our guardians to master all the skills of a warrior. But we emphasize that those fighting skills have a specific purpose and should not define their role as a police officer.

We also use what I call the LEED model to help our recruits learn to function better as a guardian. The LEED model helps us make procedural justice principles operational. The acronym LEED, L-E-E-D stands for Listen and Explain with Equity and Dignity. This is a sure hand way for officers to easily think about the key behaviors associated with procedural justice. Listening is the first key behavior. Research on behavioral justice demonstrates how important it is for humans to have a voice and to be heard especially when they are in situations involving conflict. Listening is also the most fundamental way to demonstrate respect and to de-escalate hot tempers.

Explaining is our second key behavior that we teach. When an officer takes the time to explain first, why he is taking the particular action, that explanation provides transparency in his decision making and it allows the citizen to assess the fairness of that decision. The citizen is then able to see and hear that the officer is considering the information that he was told. The research tells us that the perceived fairness of the decision is more important than the decision itself when you consider building trust. It's also important to explain what's going to happen next in the process. Giving the citizen the opportunity to understand the process will increase the likelihood of that person cooperating. Both of these behaviors, listening and explaining, need to be carried out with equity and dignity. I use the term equity to represent fairness. The officer must not treat people differently because of their race, economic background, neighborhood, dress, etc. The true dignity emphasizes the importance of not humiliating people it's that simple, not matter what action is taken. Even when making an arrest, the officer needs to leave the person with their dignity. Conversely, it's very damaging to humiliate and embarrass the citizen even if you're not arresting them or writing them a ticket. Most people will accept a negative consequence if it's delivered fairly and respectfully. We talk to our recruits about building public trust, one interaction at a time. I use the metaphor of little Lego blocks and each interaction represents a block and you build a strong foundation over time but you build it one interaction at a time.

The concept of protecting your partner is a frequent topic of discussion at the academy. We stress that creating public trust with each interaction; you're setting up the next officer to have a more positive interaction with the person. Conversely, if you treat a suspect badly, he's more likely to take his anger out on the next cop he interacts with which may be your partner rather than you. In the academy, the training officer functions as the recruit's supervisor. I've found it fascinating to watch the supervisor/subordinate relationship play out. The dynamic repeats itself throughout a person's police career. In a boot camp training model, we established the supervisor/subordinate relationship as one of

humiliation and fear. When a recruit goes out into field training, some agencies continue to treat their recruits with humiliation and fear. The problem is this sets the dynamic for the future and signals a low value that the organization puts on positive personal interaction. It's no wonder when you ask the vast majority of cops what their greatest source of stress is, they almost universally respond the administration. They give stories about how they were disrespected, how they weren't asked for input and on and on. It's the same kinds of things you hear from the community that feels like they've been disrespected by their police officers. When officers go out into the community, and they finally have that power and authority over the people they encounter, they are likely to display the behavior they've personally experienced inside the organization and they're going to act in accordance with the value that has been displayed and re-enforced internally.

Bolden

10:50

Should training be an aspect of performance management and part of a first line supervisor's oversight role?

Rahr

10:56

Absolutely. I think a supervisor should first and foremost function as a coach no matter what stage of the officer's career. Effective agencies should have on-going training requirement throughout an officer's career not only to ensure they're staying current in their skills and knowledge, but to improve their job satisfaction. Employees, who are striving to better themselves, are generally going to be much more satisfied employees. Continuous training and improvement I think sets the tone for an expectation of highly professional performance.

Bolden

11:31

How does having a procedural justice engaged agency help build trust with the community?

Rahr

11:37

When officers are treated fairly and respectfully inside of their organizations, they're much more likely to treat people they interact with in a similar fashion. When treating people with dignity and respect as an organizational value, that kind of thinking permeates those behavioral expectations and operational decisions. The way people are treated inside an agency signals what the leaders expect them to treat people like out on the street. When an agency routinely gets input from their employees and takes their input into consideration when making decisions, it's likely that the employees will do the same when they interact with the community. That's the value that's been demonstrated. An agency that listens to their own employees is more likely to listen to the community and give the community the courtesy of an explanation when making decisions about public safety. Because communities are made up of human beings, they have the same basic needs that they listen to; having their input considered, being told what action is taken and why, and being treated with dignity and respect. We know from the research

that this will build trust. The converse is also true. A lack of input and participation and transparency leads people feeling disrespected and distrustful. I think in the current environment today, that's what we're seeing being played out on the streets. And I think if more agencies put more focus on employee procedural justice principles, I think we will see a lot more public trust and a lot more collaboration.

Bolden

13:09

Sue, thank you so much for your time and expertise.

Rahr

13:12

No problem!

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

13:14

The Beat was brought to you by the United States Department of Justice, COPS Office. The COPS Office helps to keep our nation's communities safe by giving grants to law enforcement agencies, developing community policing publications, developing partnerships, and solving problems.

Voiceover: Disclaimer

13:31

The opinions contained herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the authors or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.