

# Procedural Justice: Institutionalizing Procedural Justice

## 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.

## Kimberly Brummett

00:08

Hello and welcome. My name is Kimberly Brummett, and on behalf of the COPS Office, I'd like to introduce you to Chief Will Johnson of the Arlington (Texas) Police Department. Chief Johnson is here today to discuss procedural justice. Welcome, Chief.

## Chief Will Johnson

00:20

Hello.

## Brummett

00:21

Chief, why did you make the decision to institutionalize procedural justice in your department?

## Johnson

00:28

It was about five or six years ago—whenever I was attending a seminar where Tom Tyler, one of the principal founders of this research, gave a lecture. And during this time, he described the historic improvements to policing that as a profession we have been able to generate over the last three decades. Correspondingly, over that same time period, community satisfaction with the delivery of police services was relatively unchanged. And for me, that was a watershed moment that—perhaps we as a profession had been using the wrong measurements in terms of measuring our success within the community and that we can do a much better job embracing the things that the community is telling us that they hold dear. And I think procedural justice does just that.

## Brummett

01:21

What organizational transformation did you have to undergo in order to institutionalize procedural justice?

## Johnson

01:28

Well, procedural justice, I think like many implementations of core values, starts with the chief's office. It starts with a clear articulation about what the core values of the organization are. And in the context of the framework of procedural justice, those are core values of fairness, of transparency, of

impartiality, and of providing the community an opportunity to have voice as decisions are made, where information is shared with the community. And from that point in time, once those core values are expressed, internalized, and modeled, both in and outside the organization, then the organizational transformation that has to take place has to take place at every level in which the organization learns from itself, whether it's through policy implementation, training, communications, and the discipline process. All four of those are areas in which organizations are constantly learning from themselves. And then lastly, the fifth category would be [that] you have to select the right people to bring into the organization. You have to select the right people to promote within the organization that readily embrace the concepts of procedural justice.

## **Brummett**

*02:49*

What impact does this transformation have for the community?

## **Johnson**

*02:53*

I think what it does to the community is that it makes an organization—or it allows an organization—to be more relational with the community that it serves. People will accept a rising or falling crime rate, but they will not accept a police department that doesn't care, a police department that isn't fair, that doesn't listen to the concerns of its constituents, that doesn't act with impartiality. So to the degree that the community understands how police departments are trying to operationalize procedural justice as a set of core values is key to them sticking with you whenever something goes wrong, because no community is immune from some crisis that could happen. And procedural justice offers a social contract, if you will, on whether or not the community wants to stick with you through those difficult times.

## **Brummett**

*03:55*

How do you, as a police chief, take the pulse of the community?

## **Johnson**

*03:59*

Well, I think as a police chief, taking the pulse of the community is something you have to do often and at different levels. And so it's everything from attending community events, service clubs like Rotary International, engaging with other systems within the community, the school district, state and local government, county government, community groups, businesses, the chamber of commerce. All these things offer opportunities to understand what the community is thinking about a given topic. And all of them are important, but it's especially important to take the temperature and to have a relationship, a deep relationship with the segments of the community that have been historically underserved. Because those are the areas of the community with a potential for miscommunication or for [whom] the perception of not having a full voice at the table can be the greatest.

## **Brummett**

05:00

How important is transparency with the community?

## **Johnson**

05:04

I think transparency really speaks to motive. And if you're transparent in your actions and in your decision-making process, it can reduce the opportunity for people to believe that there is a motive, or an alternative motive, at play rather than the genuine motive of why the decision was made. So to the degree that you can increase transparency, you can increase trust, because people understand your motives.

## **Brummett**

05:33

Do you have any suggestions for other chiefs who are interested in implementing procedural justice as core principles of their departments?

## **Johnson**

05:40

I would offer as a suggestion that if there's an interest in implementing procedural justice as a set of your core values, you have to spend time with people. You have to share with them why this is important and why it's relevant to them within their job. From an officer's perspective, procedural justice can improve officer safety because if an organization is providing procedural justice to the community, then the voluntary compliance with the law is going to increase. And so having those real intangible examples that you can share through conversations, both internally and externally, are going to be key for an agency to be successful to implement procedural justice. The other thing that I would say is you got to stick with it. This is not an easy process to execute. It requires the energy and effort of everybody in the organization embracing this change and then sticking through with it on a multiyear plan.

## **Brummett**

06:43

Well, Chief, thank you again for your time, expertise, and insights today on procedural justice.

## **Voiceover: *The Beat Exit***

06:50

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## **Voiceover: Disclaimer**

*07:06*

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