

Daniel Hahn—A Profile in Law Enforcement Leadership

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello, and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm your host, Jennifer Donelan. Our guest today is Daniel Hahn who retired from the Sacramento Police Department in California following a 34-year career in law enforcement. Chief Hahn is a native of Sacramento who began his career in 1987, rose to the rank of captain in the Sacramento PD, and then moved on to become the chief in Roseville, California. Now that's about 15 minutes outside Sacramento as you're making your way to Reno, Nevada; that was a city of about a hundred thousand. And he was actually the first African American chief—not only the first African American chief in that city, he was the first African American police officer.

He was there for six years before coming back to his hometown of Sacramento where he served as chief of police for four years. And he led his department and his city through a high-profile, police-involved shooting that spurred protests and some unrest. We're going to be covering a lot of ground today so buckle up. We are so pleased have Chief Hahn as our guest. Chief Hahn, welcome to *The Beat*.

Chief Daniel Hahn

01:20

Thank you. Thank you for having me, Jennifer.

Donelan

01:22

So we always ask one question, the same first question of everybody because I think it's so interesting to see all the different paths, but what attracted you in the first place [to] the profession of law enforcement?

Hahn

01:34

That's always an interesting question when I answer that because nothing attracted me to law enforcement. I had absolutely no desire nor did I ever even think about being a police officer growing up. I witnessed my first murder when I was nine. I was arrested by the Sacramento Police Department for assault on an officer when I was 16. In my neighborhood, police officers weren't well thought of. I never hated police officers, but I didn't ever even consider being a police officer. We didn't know any police officers; nobody had an uncle or a family member that was in law enforcement.

So it just was something that none of my friends nor I ever even thought of. But I got into it when I was in junior college and sort of by accident I was taking a criminal justice class, because my degree is in business administration, and recruiters came by. And the sole reason—I wish I could tell you I joined because I wanted to change the world and all those sort of things—but the sole reason I applied to the police department when I was 18 years old was because it made \$5 an hour more to go to the academy than I was making at the local mall.

And so, my intention was to go to the academy, become a community service officer because I wasn't old enough to be a police officer, and quit the force once I graduated with my bachelor's degree. But about eight years in, I decided because I was doing some community assignments, I was a neighborhood police officer and actually taught in a high school for three years full-time, that I decided I could do what I love to do in the community as a police officer. So I kind of had a little bumpy road, disjointed road, but that led to 34 years as a police officer.

Donelan

03:04

Wow. And you know a lot of people start off in any sort of job with one intention, and then you get in, life happens, it starts to suck you in. And especially with you doing the community policing, your boots on the ground at that point, did that community policing... Did that inspire you? Did that whole "I want to change the world" start to kick in at that point?

Hahn

03:27

Yeah. You'd have to understand my mom. So I was adopted at three months old and my mom raised me in one of the inner city neighborhoods in Sacramento called Oak Park that at the time was one of the more high-crime areas. The original street gang in Sacramento originated in my neighborhood. But my mom was like a community activist before her time and very, very engaged in the community in the church and she was the one marching down Broadway against the johns that were picking up the women being trafficked.

And she dragged me to all sorts of community meetings that I hated as a kid. But obviously something sunk in that really my passion is working in the community. And I really blame or credit—whatever you want to call it—my mom for that. And so, yeah, when I was growing up as a kid, all I thought police officers did was drive around in a black and white squad car and write tickets and arrest people. That wasn't attractive to me. But once I got into the police department several years in after my several years in patrol, I started doing these assignments that were really tied into the community and I really loved that.

Well, I never knew officers did those sort of things when I was growing up, because I never saw that sort of thing. So, yeah, I would say what ultimately made me decide to stay in the police department instead of go after what my degree is in, in business, was the ability to work in the community and make a positive impact in the community. It just took me eight years to figure that out.

Donelan

04:49

When you were nine years old you witnessed a murder, and I know you described the environment in which you were growing up, but do you remember that?

Hahn

04:58

Yeah. I don't think it affected me like a lot of my friends in the community that witnessed violence on a regular basis. I mean we lived right on the prostitution stroll. So pretty much 24 hours a day there was drug dealing and women being trafficked in front of our house. And so, at nine, I had come home from church, my mom was the choir director, and so I had come home from church, the only people home was my older brother and I and we hear gunshots so we look out the window and we watch a guy get shot multiple times and collapse in the doorway of the liquor store across the street.

So about two years later my mom told me to wear my church clothes to middle school, and she picked me up about halfway through the day and took me down to the courthouse that still exists there today that I've testified in numerous times as an officer. But at about 11 or 12 years old that room looked huge. And so, I testified in a jury murder trial at 12 years old. So, yeah, I still remember the guy laying on the ground. I ran out the front of my house and stood over and watched him die. So I remember it. But because of who my mom is and the home that she built, I think it allowed me not to let that kind of experience have more impact on me, or negative impact, I should say, on me than it should. So, yeah, I remember it vividly.

Donelan

06:10

Those types of experiences, you know, having to grow up fast and early and seeing things that, you know, we try and shield young people from so that they don't have to sort of deal with that and they can grow up in a sort of utopian-type atmosphere. You know those can cause a person to reach a crossroads and go left instead of right. I would love to meet your mom. She sounds like a phenomenal human being. Very strong.

Hahn

06:37

Yes. She was. To think about her background, and then she adopted a young, three-month-old Black boy and raised him in Oak Park. And she's from Minnesota. She grew up on a farm in Minnesota. So it's just an amazing story, and she is absolutely amazing person.

And the violence that you talk about like when I was nine or really every day, at a certain point it just becomes normal to people that live there. And to me as a law enforcement or society, in general, that's pretty bad when it just becomes normal and it doesn't really seem to impact people that live in those communities because they see it every day. But the reality is it is impacting people. It just feels like it's not because it just feels normal because you see it every day.

Donelan

07:21

Making connections with people, it's, you know, I can't imagine that the life that you grew up that how much that must have helped you connect with people. It doesn't even matter what they've gone through, where they're from, but just that ability to be able to sort of place yourself in someone else's shoes. So growing up amid the environment, growing up having had the experiences that you had, I've got to imagine that impacted you in your police work, in your leadership, just in terms of empathy and being able to connect to people.

Hahn

07:52

Oh, absolutely. I think that who I grew up with, my family, my mom, the community that helped raise me. I think that is at the core of my whole career. And especially as chief, I think that is what enabled me to carry our community, our police department, or help carry through some of the things that we've been through. I absolutely think it helps connect with other communities. If you think about a lot of times officers grow up in other neighborhoods, and no fault of their own, right? None of us grow up in any neighborhood we want to grow up. We grow up where our parents live.

And so, if you're fortunate enough to grow up in a middle class, upper-middle class, wealthy neighborhood, great. But those are the same people that we put through a six-month academy, and then they typically go to swing shift or graveyard in the impoverished communities in our cities and a lot of times have absolutely no experience, personal experience that is, in these communities. But they do have experience in the communities through the news. And typically it's only negative things.

And so, I didn't have that, right? I grew up in this community. I knew the vast majority, 99.9 percent of the people that live in communities like this were great people because I grew up with them. I was friends with them. I mowed their lawns. I washed their cars. I spent my childhood terrorizing their neighborhoods. [Laughs] So I think it's our responsibility as organizations, as cities, as counties, to help provide the members of law enforcement the best possible experiences we can in communities that we might not be from, because we're going to have to patrol and serve all of these communities. And I don't know how we can do it to the best of our ability unless we have some sort of personal experience to understand the wants, the desires, the culture, how things operate in a community that we're not familiar with.

Donelan

09:43

That's a question that so many departments are facing. And it's one that you hear all the time. You hear, and it's such a balancing act. I'd love for you to comment on this. But you know you have a department, let's look at Sacramento. Sacramento, a city of approximately 525,000 people. 70 percent of the officers identify as White and roughly 40 percent of the city's population either Latino or Black. And what you were just talking about, how do you arrive at that? Because you can threaten to build resentment among those or like, "Okay. So I didn't grow up here but I want to be a police officer and just because I'm White or just because I grew up in a wealthier suburb doesn't mean I can't do the job."

How do you convince—just like you talked about, as you were growing up the last thing you wanted to be was a police officer—how do you convince people from the community to want to sign up and be police officers? How do we arrive at all of that?

Hahn

10:37

Yeah. Great question. The first thing I think we have to realize is our current environment that is pretty prevalent now of this division is not going to work. It's happened numerous times throughout our history and it's never worked. The only way we're going to get better is going forward together. And that includes understanding each other. So the reality is in Sacramento and every major city across this country, our communities that are impoverished and are largely minority are not because it was inevitable to become like that. It's because history shows through housing discrimination, redlining, things like that, these communities were created.

The neighborhood I grew up, although I didn't know this when I was growing up there, was the first suburb of Sacramento and was an upper-middle class predominantly White neighborhood long before I lived there. But because of decisions leaders made and redlining and urban renewal and all those sort of things, it transformed to remove all the economic vitality, bring in poverty, and eventually all the White families left and Black and Hispanic families moved in.

So I think the first thing we have to do is understand that. The second thing we have to figure out is how do we change what we've all been taught in school, which isn't the whole story, and give officers experiences in communities that they're inevitably going to work in that they did not grow up in, don't have experience in, but also give community experience on what officers go through. Because it's a two-way street. We need to understand each other.

And so, it's easier to have community get the law enforcement experience and that we can do ride-alongs. We've created programs for teens, called the VIP Teen Experience, where we spend the day with them out at our academy and put them through scenarios, have them do traffic stops, all those sort of things. It's harder to get real experience for officers in the community because the real experience comes from living there.

And so, one of the things we've created is Walk in My Shoes where the officer, maybe six months after they graduate from the academy, spends the day with a community member. And so, might be a barber, inner city neighborhood. Well, they'll hang out with the barber all day. You know, imagine being 26 years old and the first time you've ever experienced a Black barbershop. So those are the experiences that our officers get.

But then the following month the community member goes on a ride-along with that same officer and experiences through the officer's eyes, and then the third connection they have is they come together and they discuss what they learned and what they experienced and how they grew. So I think it's through programs like that as much as we can get people to completely understand communities that they work in, as opposed to just coming in for 10 hours, and then leaving. Because when I was growing up that's what we felt.

We felt the officers were almost like an occupying army. They just came in here. They don't care about us. If somebody slips up and makes a mistake, they're going to get arrested. So I mean it's part of the reason why the first time I ever ran from a police officer, I was in the third grade. I jaywalked across the street and the last thing I was going to do is have a police officer bring me home to my mom. Those are the kind of experiences that you have in the communities when we don't really know the police officers. We don't know them as people. We only know them as that black and white squad car driving down the street.

Donelan

13:43

Well, and I think the key thing that you brought up is the fact that it's both ways. The onus doesn't fall on one group to learn the other. It's both sides have to participate in that understanding and growth. What's the name of that program again?

Hahn

13:56

Walk in My Shoes.

Donelan

13:57

What were the results that you witnessed whether it was anecdotal, just observations, or actual numbers?

Hahn

14:04

Give you a story because we haven't had like a professor or somebody study the results of the program, although that would be great. I can just give you one of the stories and the reason why I mentioned Black barbershop is we have a very prominent barber in the south part of town, high-crime area, that one of our young officers, you know, shadowed him for the day. And for a good portion of the day he was cutting hair. He owns the barbershop.

And so, it was the first time the officer had ever been in a Black barbershop. And so, the barber kept saying, you know, they were growing frustrated when they would call about nuisance-type crimes in their parking lot and the police department would take so long. So the next month he rides with the police officer and they respond to a call where a woman was being assaulted by her husband or boyfriend in the house. And so, they went code three, over to the call. He had a few comments about that. Like it was kind of exciting and scary at the same time. But when they pulled up, there was three young, I think a couple boys and a girl, Black, standing on the sidewalk, and the officer told him to stay by the car and he ran into the house to deal with the call.

And the barber said he heard these kids talking about, like derogatory things, about the officer they just saw run in the house about how he was harassing people and called him, you know, negative names and all sorts of things. So the barber knew at least one of these kids from the barbershop and he walked over and he said to the kids, "Well, do you know why the officer is here?" And they obviously said no.

And so, he kind of explained what the call was that somebody might be being assaulted and that's why the officer ran in the house to help a woman that might be in danger. And so, he said they had this, like, "Oh." Like this aha moment. And I always use that story because had the officer walked over to these kids, they probably wouldn't have listened as much as they did to the barber because they knew the barber and they respected the barber and he's from the community and all that.

And so, this kind of connections are what will help our community move forward. It's not that the police department doesn't do anything wrong, it's not that we don't have officers at times that should have never put that patch on in the first place because they don't have the ethical makeup or the character to bear the responsibility of that patch. Those things are all true. We see it on TV all too often. But the reality is there's a lot of good people that work in law enforcement. There's a lot of good people in the communities that have high crime and the only way we're going to know that is if we get to know each other.

The reason why I know that is I grew up in that very community. And so, I know my friends and I know the elders in the community were all awesome people and it was the work of a few people that committed the crime and the disorder and the exploitation of other people.

Donelan

16:48

I couldn't agree with you more. Are there moments... Actually, let me ask you this: How long have you been retired?

Hahn

16:53

One year.

Donelan

16:54

Oh, you are fresh out the gate.

Hahn

16:58

December of 2021. December 31st, 2021.

Donelan

17:01

Congratulations! You sound like a man who keeps himself busy.

Hahn

17:05

It's not slowed down.

Donelan

17:06

I bet it hasn't. But when you watch situations play out in other jurisdictions, in other parts of the country, at home, wherever, and you're not in that position where you can actually do something about it, right? You're not the chief anymore. You can't pick up the phone and say, "All right. Get so and so and so on for me. Let's do this. We got to go there. Call this person in the community. Get them there."

Where do you find yourself most frustrated, if you do, with sort of the way things are right now? Because earlier on you talked about history and the fact that this has happened before, you know, this conflict. And maybe it's because I'm living it now and witnessing it now but it does feel like to me, and I want to get your opinion on this that what's happened in recent years is more of a tipping point. It's a point of we are going to change law enforcement, law enforcement is changing dramatically across the board and it won't go back to what it once was.

As you sit back and you watch all these things play out, are there lessons that you've learned throughout your career where you're just like screaming at the TV like, "Do this," or if you could sit down all the police chiefs and sheriffs and say, "Listen..." What would be those words of wisdom that you would share?

Hahn

18:11

Yeah. Interesting question because I just spoke at a conference in Tulsa and I closed with I guess your last question of what would I share. And I think the most important thing is all too often, I mentioned this earlier, we live in this divisive environment. So we attack each other if we don't agree immediately. We divide, divide, divide, and all that does is send us all back to our own trenches where we're lobbing grenades at each other.

The reality is the times we live in that we've lived in before of this anger towards law enforcement, the answer isn't just law enforcement. This is a societal issue. Law enforcement doesn't operate in a vacuum. We are part of government. We are part of society at large. And I'm always convinced that we get the law enforcement that we want. We get the law enforcement that at least the dominant group, the decision makers, the lawmakers, the people that call the shots want.

And so, to me one of the keys is that we understand how we got here, we understand that history that oftentimes we weren't taught. And you ask what my frustrations are, my frustrations are we keep doing the same thing. And I don't mean just law enforcement. We keep doing the same thing to solve the old problems. And so, we'll be here again. So, you know, over the last couple of years I'm sure you've heard as much as I have people say, "We're an unprecedented time. This has never happened before."

I think that's our way of letting ourselves off the hook, because we're not in unprecedented times. These protests over the exact same reasons have happened hundreds of times throughout the last two or three hundred years. And it's not hard to find now that we have Google to see those things, the Watts riots, Atlanta riots in the late 1800s, early 1900s, over these same exact things, right? People are pissed off about their circumstances, the poverty, the lack of jobs, the lack of access, and then a police action happens. That's like the last straw and boom. We have cities burning. We've had cities burning throughout history worse than what we've had over the last couple years, yet we continue to solve it with the same things.

And so, my frustration comes because I know history. When I see the current solutions coming up, I'm like, "Yeah. We did that before. We did that before. We did that before and we're still here." And so, many years ago when I was the chief in Roseville, long before George Floyd or our own officer-involved shooting that we had in Sacramento, I decided there's got to be more to this divide between law enforcement and community than what I know.

And so, I decided to do some history research. And I'll tell you I was the kid that didn't have any use for history in high school. I thought it was a waste of time. But as an adult when I started researching history, I became fascinated because it started to explain so many things. And, you know, I've researched my own community and found things that I never had heard before. And I went to school my whole life in my community. And I was never taught these things.

And so, my goal was to teach what I learned back to the management team of the Roseville Police Department so they'd have a little bit better understanding how we got here. Well, I'll be doing research for the rest of my life now because I'm addicted. And that turned into program I created that I call A Way Forward. So I teach it to every officer as they graduate from the academy. And now, I've taught it in many places all across the country. And I think it's critical for us to understand how we got here because I don't know how you move forward in a positive way unless you understand how we got to the place that we're at today.

Donelan

21:40

I think the community would be surprised about how much brain actually goes into being a police officer versus brawn. That the people assume that, you know, like you said earlier, it's just about locking people up. It's about pushing their weight around and intimidating people. And, in fact, it's very much... Law enforcement very much has become a cerebral experience. If you don't know that history, you don't know where you're going. Another thing that is commonly said all the time but no one really takes that time to do that research and do that history.

Did you find that doing this eliminates a lot of having to, what's essentially insanity, trying the same things over and over again?

Hahn

22:19

Well, yeah. I think it does on a very small scale, because, you know, it's a limited number of people that learn this and it's more recent. The other thing is all too often we want that immediate fix, right? A lot of people think we're screwed up, right? Law enforcement, community can't get along. They're killing us. And on the law enforcement side, you don't understand us because you didn't go to the academy.

And so, this has been built up over centuries. And there's not going to be, we can flip the switch tomorrow and everything's better the next day. So it takes time. So as you mentioned earlier, you got to kind of just see that we're moving in the right direction and moving forward. And sometimes when I watch the news or obviously in Sacramento know what's going on, I'm thinking, "Yep. We've done that before and that didn't work."

And so, you know, it's not just law enforcement. It's the politicians. It's the media. It's the communities themselves. It's the business. So one of the things during the several years of protests that you would hear from the groups that would say abolish law enforcement... And by the way, I've lived here my entire life, I've never, in any of our impoverished communities, I've never heard a community member in those neighborhoods say that they want to get rid of the police department. They all usually say, "We want the police department to be better. We're tired of being abused, or we're tired of this, we're tired of that. We want these officers to improve. We want them to get to know us better. We want them to understand us better."

But never once have I heard somebody say, "Get rid of them." And matter of fact I've heard people like, "No. We need them." So these communities need law enforcement. So I think it's imperative that we make those improvements and part of the way we make those improvements is by understanding how we got here. You know, I mentioned earlier the things that I've heard over the last couple years in the protests from the abolish law enforcement group. And they always typically go back to the law enforcement's history is rooted in racism and proof of that is slave patrols.

Well, first of all, slave patrols weren't all over the country. Second of all, the slave patrollers, you know, I did my research on that too and their badge does look eerily similar to the badge I wore my whole life. But at the same time the slave patrollers were not the ones that made the rules that a certain group of people didn't have rights and could be treated a certain way. They were not the ones that advertised when a slave ran away. They were just enforcing what those other people wanted.

And so, if we're only going to concentrate on law enforcement, we're missing the bigger picture. We need to do this together. And we need to figure out or understand how we got here. And then, with that knowledge, start making decisions and taking actions that will make tomorrow better for everybody and improve the relationship between law enforcement and community. Because the community needs law enforcement. We are the most visible arm of government. And so, we have to get this right because our communities need us.

Donelan

25:14

So when you're talking about, and you mentioned this a couple of times, when you're talking about the fact that, basically—and this is why I want to make sure I got this right—that essentially the police are doing what they've been told to do.

Hahn

25:25

If you look at throughout history, yes. At least told to do by the people that are in charge, if you will.

Donelan

25:31

And those are the elected?

Hahn

25:33

Well, they could be the elected. They could be the city managers. They could be the most powerful group in the community. It could be all sorts of different people depending on the circumstance.

Donelan

25:44

And it's not that I disagree with you. I just want to make sure that we're relaying this thought process across. So in terms of power, right? That people have, because what that says to me is that people actually do have power. Tell your lawmakers, "This is what we want."

Hahn

25:59

Right.

Donelan

25:59

"We don't want that anymore." Or the way police used to behave more generally was a result of the lawmakers were demanding it, but if people start demanding something else, then the lawmakers—because that's who elects them and puts them in their seats—that they would then have to pivot. And I think it's empowering, right? Because that means people actually have the ability too.

I also agree with you. I don't think anyone wants to get rid of the police, right? To me, it's more about the quality of life, right? It's: I want to walk out and my car hasn't been riffled through. I want to be able to walk down the street and not fear for my life. I want to live in a safe community and when I call 911 and I need a police officer, I need that police officer there. I don't want there to not be any police officers, because I don't think anyone would feel safe with that.

It's that in between and getting community and police together, which is why what I think you're discussing in terms of creating that commonality and opening eyes and having people experience other experiences that we start to better understand one another and understand why things work the way they work. I know that there used to be very popular citizen police academies. And I know they're still popular to this day. But the experience of getting in a car, the experience of going to a barber shop, all that's taking that to a whole another level. It sounds like it's much more effective.

Hahn

27:19

Yeah, I would say so because if you think about in your own personal life, who do you trust the most in your whole life? I guarantee you, it's somebody that you've known for a while, you've gone through various experiences, maybe some negative, maybe some positive, and that person's always been there or, you know, you've gone through these things together, and therefore you trust them.

Now you compare that to "Do you trust the police?" If all you ever see them do is come into the neighborhood and you don't have really a personal experience with them but they arrest somebody or cite somebody or just drive down the street, but you don't know them—well, how are you supposed to trust that person? It goes opposite of the way you trust everybody else in your life.

So we have to, as organizations, we have to understand that and we have to create opportunities, preferably outside of a call for service for officers in the community to come together and share meaningful experiences. So Cops and Coffee and things like that are great, but first of all, the community I grew up in don't go to the Cops and Coffee. It's usually the people that already support the law enforcement that goes to Cops and Coffee, have their kids take pictures, their grandkids take pictures. So those are okay, but they're not going to get to the root of the problem.

And so, instead of those things what we have is many cities now are creating rules within their specific city that police officers cannot stop vehicles for low-level offenses such as expired registration, broken tail light, those sort of things. And the reason they're giving for instituting those ordinances in these cities is to prevent the racism or bias on behalf of the officers that lead to the disproportionate stops in these cities.

Well, first of all, I'll tell you that won't work. And to me those are the things that I yell at the TV and pull my hair out, because first of all, if I'm a racist police officer and you tell me I can't pull somebody that my racism is directed at, you tell me I can't pull that person over for expired registration, if I'm truly a racist, I'll just find something else. I mean the vehicle code is huge. Like, there is not a car on this planet that can drive for two blocks that I can't figure out something to pull them over for. So you're not really addressing bias or racism. You might be, you know, preventing a couple traffic stops but if I'm truly out to get you, I'll find another way.

The other thing that baffles me about this is if we don't want officers pulling people over for expired registration or broken tail lights, why is it a law? Like change the law. You can deal with expired registration through DMV or some other way, you can do it through fines not done through the police department. So we have these laws on the book that say, "I want this police officer to do that." And

then, we have smaller entities saying, “Don’t do that.” And lawmakers going, “Well, we shouldn’t be having people pull people over for expired registration.” Well, then change the law. Change the law to where you’re not directing officers to pull people over.

Donelan

30:17

One of the things that I really think I probably should have started off with earlier is that Chief Hahn, you have been through this. You’ve been through a very delicate situation, to say the least. That national spotlight was shone upon, and that is March of 2018. Stephon Clark, 22-year-old African American male, shot and killed when two Sacramento police officers responded to a call for service regarding cars being broken into. And during that call, Mr. Clark was shot and killed.

The district attorney—those who of you who aren’t familiar with this case—did not charge the officers involved and found that they had probable cause to stop Clark and were legally justified in their use of deadly force. This one got a lot of attention because he was, I believe, in his grandmother’s driveway, was holding a phone, not a gun, that sort of thing. Without getting into your opinion on the outcome of that case, but more the journey that you had to take to get your police department, and to get your community to navigate through that, because there’s two different needs there, right? It’s officer morale, which I’m sure took a huge hit. And then, there’s got to have been distrust within the community as evidenced by the unrest that we saw. Can you take us back through that and what that was like?

Hahn

31:30

Yeah. There was distrust in the community. There was distrust in the police department. There’s distrust amongst the officers and the professional staff. But to put it in proper perspective, I have to go a little bit prior to that tragic day where one of our members of our community lost their lives, essentially at the hands of our officers, which is always a really, really tough situation for everybody involved, especially the family.

But leading up to that, I had just come back a few months before that situation, my mom had just passed away like two weeks before that. But we had just implemented body cameras. And so, all of our officers had body cameras at the time. We had never released any body camera prior to this. So officers are getting used to now wearing a body camera. The policy was new, you know, a lot of people were against it. Anybody would often be leery of, “Okay, everything I’m going to do is now filmed.” No matter what profession you are. It’s a huge change and change is hard for a lot of people.

So when that shooting happened, I released the video within three days. At the time, it was probably the quickest video had ever been released in the country. So imagine inside the department how that goes over. Not only did they now have body cameras that are filming everything they do, but now we’re releasing video. And we had never really done either one before. We hadn’t had body cameras before. We had cameras in the cars but not on, you know, their chest or their belt, and we had never released video like that before.

And so, it was a lot of communication and process in the police department. And I also asked the State Department of Justice to investigate the case too. So that caused a lot of challenges within the police department. But it wasn't because I didn't trust the detectives to be able to properly investigate it, it was more so I wanted to build legitimacy in the community to have this third party also look at it and the chips would fall where they may. But I'll just use one story from that.

I actually still talk to the grandmother whose yard he was shot and killed in to this day. So when the incident happened the law hadn't changed, but by the time we were done with the investigation and completed the report, the law in California had changed that in an officer-involved shooting, you must now release all your information. So if you have video, if you have a crime report, the Internal Affairs report—all of that must get released.

And so, I called the mom and I asked her if she wanted a copy of the report. And she said, "Yes." And so, I said, "I'll meet you wherever you want." And so, she mentioned a parking lot of a strip mall in town. And so, I drove over there to give her the report. What I didn't know is there was a media station waiting to film the whole interaction. And so, when I pulled in and I saw the media van, I thought, "Oh here we go." But I'm like, "She deserves the report. Her son was lost." And so, I gave her the report.

I was probably there for maybe two minutes at the most. And so, it ran on the news that night. And so, there was a lot of challenges in the department after that. "Why are you doing that? Whose side are you on?" Because it was new. It was a change. We had never given out a crime report before on officer-involved shooting. I would have never thought about that five years earlier. But my response was, "Look, do we want her to have to get an attorney and do a public records act request and do all these things knowing that she's going to get it because the law changed or do we want to just give it to her and try to be partners as much as we can with a woman who just lost her son at the hands of police department?"

So it's things like that that, you know, are huge challenges when you try to do something new that hasn't been done in the police department or the community. But good leaders, people that actually want to see change, do it. So were they comfortable times? No. And right after that year of protest, George Floyd came. And the way we handled protests was put under a lot of scrutiny by other law enforcement officials and media and other people. But you do it because you think it's the right thing and at the end of the day we had no buildings burned down. We had nobody killed, not in law enforcement, not in the community, so I would say it actually worked out. But at the time, I didn't know for sure if it would work out. I just thought it was the right thing to do.

Donelan

35:45

This is where I'm going to really oversimplify things perhaps, but those are the moments that, you know, through this process of being here on *The Beat* and talking with you and talking with others who are leaders in the law enforcement community, it's the moments where, A) you're doing something that no one's done before, but only within the context of police. What you did with that mother and the openness that you had with that family is not new to humankind, right? That's people being people, but it's new to police.

I think it comes down to, and tell me I'm right or wrong here. It comes down to trust. Can I trust you to let me do the right thing without taking advantage of it, right? And we don't have those levels of trust quite yet to where we feel like we can say "I'm sorry," because the prevailing thought has been, "Well, you can't say you're sorry. You'll get sued." Well, in fact, are you sorry? Yeah. Should you be sorry? Maybe. Yeah. You know what I mean? Like nobody goes to work expecting to kill someone, regardless if they were right, wrong, or indifferent, right? It's just that fear of doing what people should do, right? I don't know. Your thought?

Hahn

36:51

Well, going against the norm is hard. I mean it is. It's not easy. It makes you sweat. Keeps you up at night and all those sort of things. But you mentioned, you know, a lot of these things happen in everyday world outside of law enforcement, but seem like that's not the norm for law enforcement. So that's where the challenge comes in. But that is really at the root of our challenge; it's trust, that is at the root.

I mean you think about why do people protest after a shooting. Well, at the root of that is because they don't think it's going to be a fair investigation. They don't think whatever law enforcement agency is investigating is going to do a fair investigation. They don't think people that should be held accountable are going to be held accountable, so therefore their frustration turns into a protest, turns into burning buildings, turns into assaults, or whatever occurs. So that is at the root.

So you know, also during all these times, it's important to learn from your mistakes. And so, if you think first time having body cameras, first time releasing that footage, now seems a lot more normal now than it did in 2018, because it wasn't normal in 2018. And so, we learned from our mistakes. And so, now what happens and what happened a lot with that case is we never release any video before the family sees it. If you think about Memphis, just the other day, they showed the family the video and they still haven't released the video publicly. They're going to do it next week. But what do they do first? They showed the family the video.

Well, before that became the norm that's what we did in Sacramento. Anytime we released video, we gave the video to the family. We showed the video to the family. I sat with the family and watched the videos. Those are the most horrific meetings I've ever been a part of. And I describe them to people as thinking if you have kids, think about the police department just shot and killed your child. And now, they're inviting you to the police station or to your church or wherever you're comfortable at to watch the video of your child being killed with the police department. That's those meetings. But you do it because it's the right thing to do because of what you just said. How do we build trust, right?

I have to help ensure, one, that the investigation is fair and that it's accurate and the truth will come out and we will hold people accountable if that's what it calls for. But the second half of that is you have to believe that, as the family, as the community. And if I'm showing you the video, if I'm sitting down with you and answering all of your questions, if any time I put something out to the public, you get it first so you don't have to see it for the first time on the news. Well, that helps. It doesn't completely solve it. But it helps you trust in the process.

Donelan

39:24

It really does. I can imagine the pushback and being among the first to do things that are now more commonplace, not everywhere, you're out on the skinny branch by yourself. But my hat's off to you for that and for that work, because there's no award you get after 34 years where the rest of the law enforcement community says, "Hey, thanks for doing that and showing us the light on that one." Because it had to have been pretty terrifying.

Hahn

39:51

Well, I think the award that we get and the only reward that we should be striving for is like, I guess, for lack of a better word, is progress. So to me, I used to, as a captain in charge of one of our stations, I used to say that officers at roll call "trust me." Because I knew once they saw the results, they would be believers, right? And so, we did all these new things whether in some of the officer-involved shootings we've had in town, and there was a lot of mistrust because it's changed and change is hard for everybody. But when the end results if you go back in time to when... By the way, the FBI investigated that shooting also.

So State Department of Justice, federal government, and the District Attorney's Office and the police department all investigated this. When all of those investigations were done, there was not one protest. So when that sort of result happens, the officers and the people within the police department become believers, because now they don't have to go stand on a skirmish line at a protest getting frozen water bottles thrown at them, or cussed out, or all those things. And now, everything comes together for them. "Okay. Now I understand why you asked the Department of Justice to investigate. Now I understand why you have that relationship with the family. Now I understand these things." Because the results speak for themselves.

So sometimes it takes a while to get to the results, but to me, the results or success, if you will, is the best avenue for getting people to believe in doing things the new way or change from the old, because they see the success. No officer wants to drive around in their community and get cussed out and flipped off every day, nobody wants that. So once you put things in place and change some things where that starts changing, they see that, and then they become believers.

Donelan

41:38

One of the items that usually comes up, the topic that usually comes up as you mentioned early on in the beginning is that, yes, there are bad actors within the law enforcement community. Absolutely there are bad actors in every industry, in every business there are bad actors, and identifying them and creating systems so that you lessen your likelihood of bad actor making it to your department is something that I know a lot of law enforcement struggles with, right?

So you hear talks about background checks and improving that process. But now you couple that with the difficulty in getting people to sign up to be police officers. What's been your take on the challenge to recruit and to retain officers and within that to bring in good people so you're not dealing with that bad actor, who can, with the wrong actions, can literally destroy a department and threaten the trust between a community and that department just by their singular actions.

Hahn

42:43

What I've always believed is that patch means something and that patch is kind of sacred. And it holds a sacred trust our community has or should have in the police department. And anything a person does to take away from the legitimacy of that patch is a threat to not just the police department but our entire society, our form of government, all that sort of thing. And so, you know, I think that's the way we have to look at it. This is not an individual thing, you know, this institution has to stand for something and if you take away from that, there's going to be problem and we need to handle that.

So there's absolutely people, as we see all too often on the news, that when you think about what they did, they should have never been wearing a patch. They did not have the proper makeup to have that kind of responsibility.

Donelan

43:31

It's that question you're watching it unfold and you say, "How did that person become a police officer?"

Hahn

43:35

Yeah. And so, we have to continue to do backgrounds and modify our backgrounds for things that we're seeing. We have to change the way we recruit. All too often I still see like recruiting videos and recruiting strategies that were for when I came on. Well, generations change and, you know, our grandfather who had work for the same company even if he hated it, because it was a job and they were going to support their family, the newer generations want more worth out of their job. They want to get something out of their job in terms of feeling of like you're making a difference and things like that.

So we need to brag about that and show that on our recruiting videos. But the bottom line is part of the reason why we've never been able to recruit certain groups, African American, in some places Hispanic, women, in some cases, you know, why would you want to be the only woman in a police department and, you know, a male dominated profession? But like for example in the Black community, there's less trust in the Black community of law enforcement.

So until we start chipping away at that and building trust in certain communities, they're not going to apply for policemen. They'll be like me. I never even considered being a police officer. I've talked to young African American officers shortly after the academy that will approach me and say, "How do you deal with your family?"

And I know exactly what they're talking about. They have a family or a family member that, you know, I've had officers tell me that a close family member is disowning them because they're a police officer. And it's because in the Black community there's not a lot of trust for law enforcement. So there's not pride in being a police officer. Not every family, but a lot more frequent than in other communities. And so, you know recruiting is just like everything else. It's much larger than just a video or a billboard. It's we have to build better trust in certain communities.

We take a survey in Sacramento every year and I can tell you which communities every single year have less trust in the police department than other communities. Same police department, same city, one group will be at 90 percent and the other group will be at 20 percent. Until that changes, we're going to continue to have problems recruiting, specifically in segments of our society. But also, in general, right now we're having problems recruiting in any community, because law enforcement right now is looked at far too often in a negative light.

And so, until we start taking action to change that, until we start turning that around, we're going to continue to struggle in recruiting. And quite frankly, we're going to continue to struggle in retention, because people are leaving our profession. I don't know if it's never in the history of our country been this high, but it's probably the highest now that it's been in my entire career of people just leaving for something else.

Donelan

46:11

And to the point and call me dramatic, but I think it's a crisis.

Hahn

46:14

It is definitely at a crisis level. There's departments now that are not responding to certain calls or talking about not responding to certain calls solely because they don't have enough officers. And so, we often talk about these separate alternative responses, but what I think we should be talking about is who is the best person to respond? And a lot of times it's going to be both, right? The officer responds, makes sure the potential for violence is done, and then, say a social worker, somebody else takes over the call. But the division is killing us. We've got to be able to understand each other, come together, and start taking appropriate steps to move forward because staffing is at a crisis level, I can guarantee you that.

Donelan

46:50

And the real challenge too here is, as you said, something can pop off in North Carolina and it will be felt in California.

Hahn

46:59

Absolutely.

Donelan

46:59

Because while we don't have a national police force, which is the real challenge, you can't bring in programs, policies, but the fact that we're talking to one another, right? The fact that you went to that conference and spoke, the fact that *The Beat* exists, the fact that there are mechanisms by which ideas can be exchanged and shared, wins can be duplicated and hopefully that progress happens, because as you said, you know, finding recruits who are from their communities, from the communities in which they're going to serve, is going to be difficult until that happens and that's a big challenge.

Hahn

47:32

I think you hit it on the head, you know, when I said earlier at the beginning of this that this has happened before. These things have all happened before. This mistrust for law enforcement has been around forever. The biggest difference I see is when I was growing up if something happened in Baltimore, I wouldn't even know about it. The only people that would know about it are the people related to the incident and the neighborhood it happened at, most likely.

Now if something happens in Baltimore, I know about it 20 seconds later. And it's as if it happened in my own community. So if I already feel a certain way, I already feel that, you know, things aren't right in my neighborhood, that cops are out to get me, or government in general isn't supporting me, or just all sorts of challenges. And then, this happens in Baltimore, it's as if it happened in my neighborhood so now I'm even more emotionally invested, because it's like it happened here. And I think that's from social media in the way we get information, which in a lot of ways is good. So I don't think there's more of what we see today than there used to be, it's just we know about it. And we know about it immediately.

Donelan

48:33

Absolutely. It's just such a catch-22, social media, quite arguably, could be the bane of our existence. But at the end of the day, it's also allowed police departments to reach the community. It's not just the same meeting with the same 12 faces you see, right? You're able through social media to reach your entire community, which is something you couldn't do in the past. It's just making sure you're using those tools and making sure you're doing the work, so when the bad thing does happen, at least, you know—

Hahn

49:01

You can see the difference in law enforcement the ones that use social media to get information out, to get whole information out, and all that. When I was a PIO, you know, we sent out faxes to the news station and we pretty much solely relied on mainstream news to get information out. Now the departments that have evolved, in a good way, still use the news, of course, because that's still a major

avenue to disseminate information, but they also use the other tools, social media, and other things to get information out in an immediate way to keep their community informed, and quite frankly, to help continue to build trust.

Donelan

49:37

And that's the key. You know, listening to you talk, it seems so big that sometimes, you know, a task seems almost impossible and it renders people frozen. They don't do anything because it's too much. But it is going to take every single law enforcement agency in America to do the work in order for us to arrive at a better place. Before we go, I did want to talk with you about two situations that you faced, and that is the murders of officers Tara O'Sullivan and Natalie Corona.

You once told a Sacramento TV news affiliate that the lowest points in your tenure as chief were the murders, the separate murders of those two officers. O'Sullivan was killed while responding to a domestic call, and Officer Corona was shot without warning while investigating a vehicle collision. Other than the obvious, right, why did you say those two incidents were the lowest points of your tenure?

Hahn

50:31

Yeah, I would say there's three, the first being, my younger brother was murdered in our city and I responded to the call. So that coupled with Natalie and Tara were probably the most challenging days. And so, one, you just had to know who Tara and Natalie were. They were two young women, just graduated from the academy, but—you know, I know we say this a lot of times when people pass away but it's really true with both Natalie and Tara—they had infectious personalities. They got along with everybody.

They were, if you wanted to put up a poster of what a police officer should be, they were it. I don't know anybody that ever disliked either one of them. They were the nicest, most committed people you'll ever meet. And they were just months out of the academy. And they were actually supposed to be in the same academy, but Tara broke her wrist. And so, she went to the next academy. And they were just senselessly murdered in our community by two different people who just in cold blood shot and killed them. But I will tell you that one of the reasons why I believe they were two amazing women were their families.

Both their families helped the department and the other officers more than we ever helped them. I mean I just saw Tara's mom and dad just last week when we named a conference room after her. They come up here every single week. They don't even live in Sacramento and they come up and visit the stations, bring food. They're just amazing people. And Natalie's dad was a police officer. He's retired now. But his mom and dad and sisters are amazing and they've helped officers in the departments get through these tragedies more than we've ever helped them.

And so, it's just when you think about who they were and the promise that they held as women, as people, as police officers, and you think of how senselessly, at least, their life on this Earth was taken, it's hard to explain. And then, you just got to go back to everything happens for a reason. But I'm convinced both of them still have their impact on our entire region, because they're still talked about all the time. There's monuments and rooms named after them. There's "be like Tara" or "be like Natalie" hashtags.

So I just think partly because of who they were, their personalities, and the promise that they held, their impact will last forever. And I know oftentimes we say that kind of cliché but it's really true in both of them. And it's just senseless. It's just completely senseless that they're not with us today.

Donelan

52:53

And it depends on us too, we have to commit to never forgetting. Time passes and we cannot forget them, right?

Hahn

53:00

I think any of these tragedies, whether it's an officer killed in the line of duty or somebody killed in our community, third-party homicide or somebody, you know, killed by one of our officers, they're all tragedies. Anytime somebody loses their life, obviously, the circumstances are different but if we don't learn anything from these tragedies, if there's no way forward from these tragedies, then they just stay tragedies.

And I for one and everybody in the Sacramento Police Department, and for sure, Tara's family and Natalie's family, they're not allowing their daughters losing their life to just solely be a tragedy. They're making progress through their daughters' actions and their words and who they were. So I think that's another reason why we can never forget these brave folks that give everything, including their family giving everything, for our communities because then it just stays a tragedy as opposed to something good coming out of what horrible circumstance happen.

Donelan

53:56

And you're absolutely right. That was so beautifully said. I have a feeling there are going to be people that want to talk to you more about A Way Forward. So let me not rob them of that experience, despite you having been retired and I'm actually not worried about that, because you haven't apparently learned how to retire properly.

Hahn

54:14

I'm struggling with that. [Laughs]

Donelan

54:15

[Laughs] I can tell. I know there are going to be listeners who are going to want to find out more. Is there some way that they can reach you?

Hahn

54:22

Yeah, let me give you a couple. They can find me at LinkedIn @DanielHahn, D-A-N-I-E-L-H-A-H-N. On Twitter @Chief_Hahn, C-H-I-E-F-underscore-H-A-H-N. Or Instagram @Chief_Daniel_Hahn, C-H-I-E-F-underscore-D-A-N-I-E-L-underscore-H-A-H-N. Or they can email me at awayforward2022, A-W-A-Y-F-O-R-W-A-R-D-2-0-2-2-at-gmail-dot-com [awayforward2022@gmail.com].

Donelan

55:01

Wonderful. So listen, I can't thank you enough for sharing all of your insight and being so open about your life and about your journeys through these very, very difficult, and I hate to reduce them to cases, through these moments, life-changing, altering moments. So thank you so much for that. And I know everyone listening has thoroughly enjoyed, I'm going to speak for them. And I really do hope you take some time to chill.

Hahn

55:26

Thank you. It was honor to be here. I appreciate your time.

Donelan

55:30

Thanks, Chief Hahn. And thanks, everyone, for joining us here on *The Beat*.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

55:35

The Beat is brought to you by the United States Department of Justice's COPS Office. The COPS Office helps to keep our nation's community safe by giving grants to law enforcement agencies, developing community policing publications, developing partnerships, and solving problems. If you have comments or suggestions, please email our Response Center at askcopsrc@usdoj.gov or check out our social media on Facebook (www.facebook.com/dojcops), on YouTube (www.youtube.com/c/dojcopsoffice), or on Twitter @COPSOoffice. Our website is www.cops.usdoj.gov.

Voiceover: Disclaimer

56:32

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.