

Bill Bratton: 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 everyone, and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm your host, Jennifer Donelan. Throughout American law enforcement, there are departments and officers who are policing in a manner that has been influenced by today's guest. In sports and other disciplines, there are people whose impact is so significant that it changes the game. Those people are often referred to as a generational talent. In law enforcement circles, our guest is viewed that same way. William, Bill, Bratton has become so widely known across the field that his last name belongs to the profession as much as it does to his family. If you walk into most any precinct or station house in America and simply say, "Bratton," officers will know exactly who you're talking about, and they will be familiar with his impact on law enforcement.

Commissioner Bratton, it is such an honor and pleasure to have you join us for an episode here on *The Beat*.

Commissioner Bill Bratton

01:11

Thank you, Jennifer. I'm happy to be with you and your guests.

Donelan

01:14

As this weighs very heavily and we're so looking forward to hearing your insight. Your career has been storied and I'm wondering if you could just pause and have a drink while I go through all of your accolades and get those—

Bratton

01:25

[Laughs]

Donelan

01:25

—who may not be familiar up to speed on your history in law enforcement. You know, even just thinking about today's discussion, it's sort of hard to know where to start and where to focus, but I'm really looking forward to what I know is going to be a really important conversation. So you were first introduced to the profession in the late '60s, when you served as a military police officer during the Vietnam era. You were sworn into the Boston Police Department in 1970. In 1975, you become a

sergeant with the BPD. In '78, you become a lieutenant. Then in 1980, at the age of 32, just 10 years after you joined the BPD, you were named the youngest ever executive superintendent of the Boston Police, the department's second-highest post.

From 1983 to 1986, you served as chief of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, following which you became the superintendent of the Massachusetts Metropolitan District Commission Police, which today is essentially the Massachusetts State Police. In 1990, you took command of the New York City Transit Police. And in 1994, you became the 38th commissioner of the New York City Police Department when appointed by then mayor, Rudy Giuliani. In 2002, you became an unprecedented three-term appointment as chief of the Los Angeles Police Department.

You later returned to New York City as the police commissioner in 2013. And all those experiences represent only the presumed highlights of your career. They make you the first and only person to have led police departments in the nation's two largest cities. And when we fast-forward to today, you serve as chair of the Homeland Security Advisory Council, which is part of the Executive Office of the President of the United States. After sharing all of these experiences, maybe now everyone can understand why figuring out where to even just start talking to you isn't really a straight-forward consideration.

So let's dig in. We ask everyone the same question. So I'm going to ask you the same question too, when we begin. What was your calling to law enforcement? As we explained, you became a military police officer in 1965 during the Vietnam era. Why?

Bratton

03:29

I grew up in the 1950s. 1950s was a very interesting period of time. Television had really just come into being. And the television stations at that time were playing a lot of police-related shows. And this audience would be certainly familiar with some of them: *Dragnet*, *Badge 714*, *1-Adam-12*, *Barney Miller*, *Car 54*. From the serious, to the sublime, to the ridiculous. And I was greatly influenced by those television shows, in the sense of the way they portrayed police officers back in those days. I also benefited from the fact that I lived about three to four blocks away from the local library and police district, police District 11 of the Boston Police Department. They were both housed in the same 1890s building.

And I loved to read and was constantly at that library looking for books about policing. And at four o'clock, I'd make sure I was standing out in front of the police station when the officers would march out of the station, two by two, literally march out two by two to the back of the paddy wagons to be delivered to their walking posts on walking beats. So the inspiration to join was really that exposure, exposure to television, exposure to the police station down the street. Nobody else in the family has been or is a member of the policing profession. I'm it. I'm the one-off.

Donelan

04:46

Curious to know, did anyone else in your family follow your footsteps after?

Bratton

04:50

I have one son, David, he has worked for several related agencies, currently works in the software company that does software design for many police departments, but did not follow me into the profession. But the inspiration for coming into policing also was the idea, the way the profession was presented on these television shows, *1-Adam-12*, *Dragnet*, was that they were in a unique position to help people, to do good things. And policing back in that era, police were widely respected. So it was a sought-after profession by many young men such as myself.

I joined the U.S. Army in 1966, that by joining, rather than being drafted, I could pick my specialty. And I picked military policing. Because I had to be 21 to join the Boston Police Department. I was only 18, so I figured I could pass those three years as a military policeman. Unfortunately for me, [laughs] then I spent three years walking a sentry dog, guarding various locations in Vietnam, and then down in Florida. Military policemen at that time were assigned to those sentry dog companies.

But in any event, came back from Vietnam, okay, two years down in Florida. And then in 1970, one day after my 23rd birthday, I pinned on badge 1190, that read patrolman. There were no policewomen in the Boston Police Department until the mid-1970s, so the badges all read patrolman. And I still have that original badge.

Donelan

06:10

I want to dig right into it. You talked about, as a young man, watching these officers walk out of the station two by two. It was, society at that point in time looked up to their police officers. It was a badge of honor. And not to say that it is not a badge of honor now, but times have certainly changed. And the challenges are here. And so I would love to know your opinion on the state of things as they are now. What are your thoughts about the realities of policing in 2023 and beyond? And how do we revert back to that place of admiration, of it being a calling, of evoking passion for the career and the profession?

Bratton

06:50

Well, I think for the young men and women who are still desirous of joining the profession, it is a calling, this idea that it is still a special profession where any day, while you're working, you can accomplish so many good things. And at the end of your time, as you retire, you can look back and really feel, if you did it well, that you had a life of significance. So it is still a calling, although we refer to it as the job, rather than being on the force. It really is a calling. There's no denying, and as I look back on my 50-somewhat years associated with policing, that there's never been a time quite like these last several years.

The defund the police movement, the technology issues that we now deal with that when I began in policing, I had a whistle and a pocket full of dimes, and a call box key. That was my communication tool. Today, officers, when you look at what officers are wearing. I had a six-shot Smith & Wesson revolver, six spare rounds on loops on my belt, a ticket book, 12" baton, my badge. No radio on my walking beats, and the radios in the cars only had two channels. And you look at the average police officer today, what

they are wearing, bulletproof vests, all types of trauma kits, 9 mms, 45 mm, three, four spare clips. Oftentimes, wearing two sets of handcuffs, body cameras. The list goes on and on. Carrying smartphones.

So the technology that we get to use today is phenomenal. But the technology also breeds phenomenal new types of crime. Up until the terrorist attack of 9/11, policing was largely focused on dealing with crime and disorder. And in the '50s, '60s, '70s in most cities, police officers were still walking beats. Police officers in cars was beginning to grow in number. But one of the reasons you had respect for the police, the police were oftentimes from that neighborhood, worked in that neighborhood, had relationships in that neighborhood.

But as we moved into the '70s, we were increasingly put into cars. Well-intended effort, the idea, police car can cover larger area, can respond more rapidly. But we lost connectivity with our various communities, particularly our minority communities. And in losing that connectivity, we lost a lot of the trust that that day-to-day relationship walking a beat had created. And that trust eroded over the '70s and '80s as crime rates went up, disorder increased on the streets, racial tensions increased. And by 1990, crime in the United States reached its worst year ever, 1990. We lost a lot of trust in communities, in that we were supposed be there to prevent crime, and instead we spent most of our time responding to crime after the fact.

Fortunately, in the 1990s, we moved into the era of community policing, which is about partnership. Partnership, once again, back with the communities, was about the idea of focusing on the priorities and problems of the communities as they were related to us by the community. And thirdly, the goal was prevention. Recognizing that the role of police is to prevent crime, not to measure our success by how many arrests we make, how quickly we respond to 911 calls. That's after the fact. The goal has to be, like a doctor preventing illness, we need to prevent crime.

Throughout my career, I recognize that because I was exposed to Sir Robert Peel's Nine Principles of Policing in the 1970s. Sir Robert Peel created the British Metropolitan Police. And his nine principles are more applicable today than they were back then. The first of those principles is the basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder. And I learned, in the 1970s, that we needed to focus not only on serious crime, but on disorder of so-called broken windows that you hear so much about—the graffiti, the dope dealing, the prostitution, the gang on the corner, the abandoned cars. All the things that people saw every day that made them fearful.

Well in the '70s and '80s we didn't focus on that, and so we lost respect and trust of many people. In the '90s, we started to get it back. And I feel very pleased that I was one of the leaders of community policing in that decade, in particularly in Boston and then New York, where, by the end of the decade, overall crime in the United States was down by 40 percent. And some cities, like New York, was down by 70 or 80 percent, because we had embraced this new model of policing, we'd embraced new technologies.

But then in—excuse my long-winded response to this question, I’m running through a lot of history very quickly for you—2001, with the attack in New York, the world of policing changed as we moved into the 21st century. Through most of our history, we’d been focused on issues of crime and disorder, traditional. We were always focused on the issue and problems of race, racism, and policing has never been able to get away from being so intimately involved with those traumatic issues in our country’s history.

But starting in the 21st century, we now had to deal with terrorism, local police departments, large police departments. As you think of what has transpired in now the last 22 years of this new century, the role of police mirrors the changing society we live in. We’re into the social media revolution, internet. We’re into the world of smartphones. We’re into the world of all types of new crimes enabled by the new technologies and digital world we live in. So we now have, with fewer police officers than we had in the 1990s, and crime rates that unfortunately over the last couple of years have started going back to those 1990, 1980 levels, we now have all these additional crimes that require all types of additional expertise to deal with.

But ironically, we’re still training our officers in 20th century training methods, six-month police academies, crime and disorder-type issues. Some technology, but we’re not doing a very good job in the 21st century training our personnel for their safety and the safety of the public. And the challenge for us, particularly after the George Floyd murder situation, many of those riots around the country that formed after that, a number of other deaths during the previous years, Ferguson, Garner in my case, in New York City. We lost a lot of trust among the public, particularly in our minority communities.

And the challenge now is, how to get it back? But the frustration and the problem is, policing has been under attack from so many directions—that they’re undermining the legitimacy of the police. And they’re creating great difficulties for the police in trying to deal with day-to-day situations in our communities. And it has become so difficult to police, that many of our police officers, young and old, are deciding to leave the police profession in historic numbers.

We’ve never had a time in our history where so many officers are choosing to leave voluntarily, many before their pensions become applicable, many transferring to other departments that are encountering less problems than say some of the larger cities. The challenge for our police leadership today, they’re more significant than any of the challenges I faced in the 50 years when I was actively in the business, leading police departments. It is incredibly challenging to keep dealing with the technology, keep dealing with the attacks on police, keep dealing with the many deficiencies in the equipping and training of police officers, and to keep dealing with the constantly evolving world that we live in.

And, ironically, all I’ve described might sound like doom and gloom, not at all. I’m an optimist. A pessimist is somebody who’s given up. An optimist is somebody who still feels that there’s resolution to conflict and problems. And as a police chief, I always sought out departments that were in trouble,

departments who were in crisis. Because out of crisis, comes challenges and opportunities, that if they're met successfully, they are met in an even more successful way because they started out as a crisis in the first place.

I've had the great satisfaction of doing that in the NYPD, the LAPD, NYPD twice, Boston. So my professional career was one of great satisfaction, and I'd like to think for the policing profession, one of great significance. Along with so many colleagues, we helped to create community policing that then in the 21st century successfully dealt with these concerns around terrorism. Introduced the intelligence-led policing era. I helped to create the predictive policing era, and certainly was very involved in my last time at the NYPD, creating the precision policing era that we are now in, where with computers we can much more precisely identify who's committing the crime, where they're committing it, when they go in to commit it, so that we can take now much more limited resources and apply them more successfully than we did in the past.

Like doctors, with all the tools they have to identify illnesses. And in dealing with that illness, doctors destroy a lot of good cells while they go after the bad cells. Policing now has the ability to go after the bad guys without effectively injuring a lot of good guys in the process.

Donelan

15:35

So I want to talk about leading challenged departments. Right? Because I know that that was a whole experience with so, so many lessons learned. But I want to go back to the current state of affairs. I agree with you that it does sound like a lot of doom and gloom. And every time I talk about it, I worry that, am I creating this sort of self-fulfilling prophecy? Is it bad because I say it's bad? I mean, obviously not, right? But when do we stop talking about all the negative and start talking and focusing on the positive, so that at some point we can start to turn a corner?

In your history of leadership in law enforcement, knowing what you're seeing now, everybody's trying everything to try and right the ship, turn the ship around. Not necessarily right the ship, but change culture, come up with new innovative ways, increase trust between the public and police. What has come to your mind as you reflect on this and you look on all of this, and you speak on this? I'm sure everybody asks you, "What can we do?" What can we do?

Bratton

16:28

There's a lot that you can do, that first off you need to identify and put in place police leaders who are like a juggler, who can keep a lot of balls in the air at the same time. I've seen too many chiefs that get overwhelmed by a crisis, something that occurs in their city, their community, they focus all their attention on it, not recognizing that you have to have the skills and capability to deal with the multiplicity of issues that are always going to be there day to day. And the need to have better-trained police chiefs, police leaders, and police leaders who are optimistic that they can affect and bring about change.

Because if they're projecting a woe-is-me façade, the troops are going to pick up on that. The community's going to pick up on that. I have an old adage that I use: Never let them see you sweat. The idea is, no matter what the stresses are, no matter what the problems are, that you have to remain calm. You have to present a calmness in the face of great controversies and challenges. One of the great challenges facing the police profession at the moment is there's been a phenomenal turnover of leadership in police leaders in the last several years. I think out of the 75 major cities in the country, and in Canada, over 70 of those chiefs have turned over in the last year or so.

Donelan

17:46

Wow.

Bratton

17:47

Think of that.

Donelan

17:48

Yeah.

Bratton

17:49

The loss of that phenomenal amount of experience, going out the door. Some of them are aging out, others are leaving out of frustration. For a variety of reasons, but that type of turnover has never been experienced in American policing. The good-news aspect of it is it's creating many new opportunities for ambitious, aggressive young men and women who want to move up. I've always been somebody, throughout my career, I wanted to move up. I strategized to become Boston Police Commissioner, to become Chief of the Police in Los Angeles, to be Police Commissioner of New York. Lot of chiefs, interestingly enough, are not ambitious in the sense of in their departments looking to become chief, it just seems to happen for some of them.

And in my case, I wanted to lead because I thought I had great ideas. And one of my great desires about being a leader is I get to pick a team, I get to pick a Super Bowl team. And, God, I've had some great teams I've worked with. While I get applauded for a lot of my successes, they're not my successes, they're the successes of a lot of great men and women. I have a talent for finding good people and then basically getting out of their way. They're smarter than I am on a lot of the issues we have to face. A challenge for an American police chief today is in some respects to be like the ring master in a circus, to have lions, tigers, and bears in the same cage, in the same room, in the same ring, and get the best out of each and every one of them.

But understand that, in some respects, you're putting on a show, and so you need to coordinate their activities. But you need to let each of them, in some respects, be able to manifest the strengths that they have, the skills that they have. And that's where true leadership lies, that nobody can do it by

themselves. That the whole idea is to effectively be an inspirational leader, be a transformational leader, and first and foremost, want to be a leader. I've seen too many chiefs that kind of reluctantly take the job and they fail because they just don't have the desire. And without the desire, you're not going to succeed.

And so challenges, you're talking about what are the challenges today, they are many. But the good news is that through my exposure to... with PERF, for example, Police Executive Research Forum, I get to go up to Boston twice a year in the summer, where PERF is teaching every summer, with their three-week program, upwards of 500-600 up-and-coming police leaders. So in those exchanges, while I'm up there for several days with each of those classes, I get to see some of the best and brightest in America. And there is a lot of best-and-bright leadership emerging in the country.

And the challenge is to effectively get them in the right place at the right time. And that's how we eventually will move forward. That's how we eventually will turn the crime problem around. That's how we'll turn the race problems around. That's how we'll turn around the issue of trust, by having good leaders in the right place at the right time. But we need to develop them. We need to inspire them. We need to, as we're attempting to do with this program, expose them to people in the profession who have been successful or seem to have been successful. And how were they successful? How was it done? And it's never done without a lot of hard work.

It's never done without a lot of risk. I've taken phenomenal career risks, personal risks in my life to move around the country, take these different jobs. And I've been knocked on my rear end more than once, very publicly, which is always embarrassing. But the idea is to get up, dust yourself off, and learn from it. Learn from your mistakes as much as you learn from your successes. And learn from other people's successes and mistakes. I'm an accumulation of watching and learning constantly. Always be learning. In the police profession, you're never going to arrive at a destination. You're always going to be at a way station, where you recharge your batteries and then move onto the next way station.

And the ultimate destination is something that, unfortunately, we'll never achieve, where there is no crime. But along the way, we can reduce crime to levels that are tolerable, levels that people feel that they are living in a relatively safe community, and that they are being policed by the best and the brightest.

Donelan

21:47

That turnover rate in the law enforcement leadership, that's stunning. You know, and I heard you make a mention earlier about six-month academies, which led me to believe, do you not think that's long enough? Do you think we need to reinvest and take another look at how we're training our officers from the get?

Bratton

22:03

Six months of training to teach a young kid 26 subject areas in that period of time is not enough. I was on the streets of Boston after eight weeks of training back in 1970.

It's amazing I ever achieved what I achieved with that very minimum amount of eight weeks. So, no, I'm very much in favor of minimum training for a year. Some departments, like Los Angeles, for example, attempt to train the officers for six months and then put them with field training officers for an additional six months. So in their first year, they're never out on the street by themselves. They're always under some form of supervision. And one of the ironies at the moment is that while some departments are having trouble recruiting, the biggest challenge for policing right now is the loss of experienced police officers, who are leaving because of frustration, leaving because of many of the societal issues of our world today.

But the good news is there are still many young men and women who want to be police, who want to come in and have a life where every day you can make a difference. I have a mantra that I created with the LAPD back in 2003, and it's quite simple: cops count, police matter. And by that I mean, the individual actions of any cop count. The combined actions of police, the police profession, matter. Cops count, police matter, good and bad. Let's face it, the officer that murdered George Floyd, he set the police profession back 20 years in terms of the trust that we had been winning after the 1990s community policing, the trust we'd begun to win dealing successfully with terrorism, keeping terrorist acts to a minimum in the country, and reducing crime.

He set that back 20 years. It's going to take us another 10 years to get back to where we were on the day he murdered George Floyd. So that individual action of that cop counted, and the collective actions of the police throughout the country matter. And we need to continue to find ways to inspire our officers so that they do appreciate, despite the slings and arrows that are thrown at them, if they are doing their jobs conscientiously, they're doing them honestly, if they're doing them bravely. And, God, we see so many acts of bravery every day, don't we? One of the benefits of body cameras, and the ubiquitous cameras that are everywhere now, is watching all those officers run toward the danger. Very seldom do we see them running away from it. And so those individual actions of each of those cops counts and embellishing the police profession as a whole.

Donelan

24:26

So much of it to me just seems to boil down to human nature. When you look at... It's the community and the public and the media not understanding what it is truly to be in law enforcement, what it is to put that badge on, get in that car, respond to that 911 call, intervene in that very dangerous situation, to have a gun pointed at you. Until you have lived it, you don't understand. The flip side of that is also true in my opinion, that you have these communities, especially over-burdened, underserved communities, communities of color, who it's not that they've just suddenly said that this is bad treatment, they feel like it's finally being uncovered and that they have been the victims of poor treatment at the hands of police since the beginning of policing in America and they want to be heard.

How do you get to a place where we're treating each other as human beings, we're listening to one another, we're working to understand one another so that we can arrive at that place? Because I feel like, as you said, if people truly understood what's needed in law enforcement in America, it's not defund, it's you got to invest a ton of money in it. You got to increase the pay, increase the educa— Like, just, you've really got to make investments if you want to improve the situations. But how do we arrive at that place? How do we win back the trust of the public?

Bratton

25:39

What you are attempting to describe is finding common ground. That's the expression. The Boston Commons, the expression common ground, is where people would gather and basically find common interest, or be able to debate different interests. And you use the term investment. It's not just about investing in the police, because you can invest all the money in the world in the police and you're not going to resolve a lot of the issues of those underserved communities you just described. They have legitimate grievances.

So resolution of it is appropriate investments in all of the things that are generating so much of the concern about public safety at this time in our country. And let me identify three. And every one of these was effectively created by political leadership or lack of, and by lack of investment or lack of appropriate investment. Number one is dealing with the emotionally disturbed. Starting the 1970s, well-intended effort, let them out of these horrific prison-like mental institutions. And the idea was we were going to invest in home treatment or neighborhood treatment centers, 2,000 of them.

And with the new drugs that had been discovered to deal with helping people to deal with the many illnesses, with some supervised drug treatment in these localized centers, we would be able to deal effectively with what was a growing problem. We failed. Why? We never built those 2,000 centers. Two, we never provided the appropriate drugs for these people, who are now been hundreds of thousands let out of mental institutions, to give them the drugs that would help them to cope with the world. Was bad enough coping with living inside an institution, but now they're living on the streets of our cities.

Secondly, drugs and drug addiction are worsening problems. We're losing a 100,000-200,000 Americans every year to drug overdoses from all the crazy drugs that are out there now. You can't even keep track of all of them. In my day, it was marijuana, heroin. Cocaine came onto the scene in the '70s, crack cocaine in the '80s. Now, we have fentanyl. And that problem is not something that law enforcement can deal with on its own. It requires a lot more prevention-type of focus. It requires a lot more treatment focus. It requires investment. And we have never been able to make a significant enough investment back when the problem was tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands, if not millions now.

So the investment that would be necessary to give 30-, 40-, 50-day treatment programs, to go more effectively after the sources of the drugs, that the drug problem is another one that was politically created by our politicians with the war on drugs, with the inadequacy of treatment for the drug addicted, the inadequacy of keeping people from trying to get drug addicted. We blame a lot of the

medical profession for the over subscription of opioids. We know clearly that the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession consciously overprescribed drugs for many years that compounded the problem.

Thirdly, we're dealing with the issue of crime, the efforts to decriminalize so much and effectively excuse the increasing amounts of bad behavior. The idea that police have so few tools to work with now, that to correct bad behavior, with starting with fare evasion on the subway, starting with disorderly conduct on our public streets, dealing with all the things that make people fearful in their neighborhoods and in their subways, that we have taken away so many tools from the police. Why? Because many of them, we had abused. Why? Because in the case of minorities, we had abused minorities. There's no denying the terrible history of policing in this country, dealing with minorities.

It's no wonder there is so much mistrust of the police, despite the fact that so many police were trying to do the right thing, so many other police were not doing the right thing. Case in point, Los Angeles, the police department I was very proud to lead for seven years, was most of the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, and going into the '90s, they were literally at war with the Black community in Los Angeles, and the Black community was at war with them. It was incredible what went on in that city. We were able to turn that corner around and I'd like to think, as reflected in the successful implementation of the Consent Decree in the study that Harvard University did. By the time I left in 2009, my team and I had been able to build new bridges of relationship into the minority community, a phenomenal turnaround, just seven years.

Donelan

29:59

How did you do that?

Bratton

30:00

Largely, by recognizing, and to solve a problem you have to admit you had one. I remember walking out of headquarters. Every year there was an annual demonstration at the front door of Parker Center police headquarters. And the people would be holding up signs. In my case, as new chief of police, "Bratton, control your cops." This was a demonstration, memorializing some event some years ago, which the LAPD had brutalized a Black neighborhood. And as I walked out of the building, my security detail wanted me to go out the back door, go to city hall, do a different route.

And I said, "No, I'm going out the front door." And I went out the front door, they had all these signs, "Bratton, control your cops." And I stopped and I said to some of the leaders, and the cameras were there, "Look, I'll control my cops, but you have to control your kids, as it's your kids that are killing each other, and it's your kids that are killing my cops. And it's my cops, unfortunately, killing some of your kids, trying to prevent them from killing each other. Police can't fix this, you can't fix it alone, but together we can." Or words to that effect.

So just an example of going to churches on Sundays and community meetings, and being there, being out in the community, which today almost every police chief in America understands what I'm talking

about. When I'm leaving Los Angeles, 2009, Sweet Alice, who I'd spent a lot of time down at Watts, and she told me the first time she met me, "Chief, I'm going to have your back." And I said, "Thank you, Sweet Alice, because I'm going to have to... Somebody's going to have to protect my back." But as I'm leaving, I go down to see her for the last time, I'm moving back to New York. And we hug and she has tears in her eyes, I have a few, I think, in mine, and she steps back and she looks me right in the eye and says, "You know, Chief Bratton ..." She had this wonderful southern accent that she never lost.

It's like, you know, my Boston accent, I never lost that. She says, "Chief Bratton, you know why we like you so much?" And I said, "No, Sweet Alice, why's that?" She said, "You see us. You really see us." That's the highest compliment I've ever received, the idea that she understood that I had made an effort to see their side of why they were so mad, why they were so angry, why they felt they were so mistreated. And it wasn't just Sweet Alice, I dealt with all the various leaders of that community and interacted with them. And that's how you do it, you basically have to try to find common ground to build that trust. It's not easy. It takes a lot of time, effort, lot of failures, but it can be done.

Donelan

32:15

So the fact that she said you see her, that is the highest of compliments. But part of what strikes me about your experience there and your story, is the fact that you have not seemed afraid to say it like it is. And a lot of people are afraid to do that. You know, they want to kind of dance around and do this, and sometimes you just got to say it so people understand that you see it.

Bratton

32:37

You cannot deny the history of policing. My book, *The Profession*, let's say basically it's a look-see at the history of the profession going back 300 years, but more specifically the last 50 or 60 years of my experiences. And it's like you can't cure a drug addiction until you admit you have a problem. And policing in the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, we had a lot of problems. And a lot of those problems evolved around the issue of race and dealing with minority communities. And we had a lot of internal problems, corruption, brutality, incompetence, incredible incompetence among many of our leaders.

And this is where the defunding argument drives me crazy. Because what's the old expression? You get what you pay for. If you want to underpay police, if you want to under-educate police, if you want to under-equip police, what are you going to get? You're going to get police who are not very good at what they're doing. And in America, for so many generations in so many cities, that's effectively what happened.

Donelan

33:29

Yeah. It's a fine line. You know, the further sort of down you go, you know, I've looked at departments, and then you look at like a large-scale department, and then you look at a smaller municipal departments that's really [laughs] sort of... You got the lower pay, really hard to attract new blood. And then you see who they hire, and it becomes a very fine line between, should you really be wearing a

badge? But there's no one else. So that's always alerting to me. The work that you did in Los Angeles and the work that you did in New York, and you talked about you prefer to go into a department that has challenges. You know, because doing that work and pulling something out from the depths and into the light is extremely rewarding.

And I'm sure so many lessons learned are the moments and experiences that shaped your life as a leader, and that desire to the new leaders who are coming in, or those who need to step up. I mean, there are, I know, officers out there who are not sort of on that track to become police chief, but they've got that passion. Right? They should be on that path. What do you say to them, to say, "You know what? If you feel like you could make a difference, go do it."

Bratton

34:35

The expression I use with them, when I do the PERF classes at SMIP, I love quotes, I love the idea of quotes. And one that I paraphrased quite frequently is Nehru, a great Indian civil rights leader, the non-violence leader, the equivalent Indian of Martin Luther King in our country. And he had an expression, I paraphrased it, "To create change, you must become the change that you wish to see." And that rings so true, that very early on in my career, because of the incompetence of leadership, the brutality of the profession, the racism in the profession, the corruption, and the neglect of those who wanted to do the job the right way, I was motivated to get up that promotion ladder as fast as I could, to get as many of these bad people under me, and when possible, to push them off the job.

And there was a major motivation for me. Very early on, I wanted to change the profession because I had grown to love the profession outside of it, as a child in the '50s and '60s. But very quickly, when I came into the actual profession in the '70s, learned it was not what I had admired and respected. The real world was very different than the fantasy world. But I'd like to think in 2023, that the arc of policing is always... We're always evolving, and that arc is always bending. And the bending has been in a good way. We are so much better now, as a profession, than we were in the '70s. And I can speak to it because I've seen it and very grateful to and privileged to help lead a lot of it.

And I'd like to think I have a legacy that I've left behind, whether it's CompStat, whether it's the idea or helping the LAPD to get through the Consent Decree. Several of my police departments, I got accredited the idea of helping to create the precision policing model that is so much in vogue now. I've had great opportunities and I'd like to think that I seized those opportunities when they were presented. I never want to go into a police department that's being well run, I want to go into one that's troubled because that's when you can create more change more quickly, and you can inspire people more quickly. Because guaranteed, when you go into that department, the majority of those cops are frustrated, they want to be seen as better than they are, you know, so a lot of it is about morale. It is really about morale. Morale of the organization, the morale of the individual officer. And there are so many ways to identify what's on the mind of cops, what do they want to see in the way of change, what are they willing to support, what are they not willing to support? It's like being a doctor in many respects, that a

doctor looks at a patient. And we have to also understand, we think of the police profession as this monolithic thing. It's not. No two cities are alike. I've led a number of cities. I've consulted in over a hundred. I've worked in countries all over the world, no two cities are exactly alike.

We oftentimes compare the crime stats, but Los Angeles was so different than New York. New York, I had 38,000 cops. To have an equivalent number of cops in Los Angeles, I would've had to have 15,000-16,000. I had 9,000. So, some respects, in Los Angeles, I was like Ginger Rogers dancing backward with Fred Astaire.

Donelan

37:39

[Laughs]

Bratton

37:39

I had many fewer cops, but thank God, I had a great department, great professional men and women who wanted to do a better job, who were capable of doing a better job. And my role was to provide that environment, that they could do a better job.

The doctor, till he does an X-ray and a CAT scan, really doesn't know what's going on with that patient, what are the illnesses that have to be treated. One of the things I think I've been very good at going into a department, I'm like a doctor, I do that CAT scan and that X-ray. I listen to the patient, "What ails you? What are you feeling good about? What are you feeling bad about?"

And then with that, you're able to diagnose, "Okay, how am I going to make you better? How are we going to get better?" And it's not easy. It takes a lot of hard work, but it's very satisfying work, very gratifying work. At least, it has been for me.

Donelan

38:24

Well, let me ask you this. Do you think we need some sort of level of national standards? You have been referred to as America's version of Robert Peel.

Bratton

38:32

Yeah. Let me give you an example of that. One of the strengths of the British police services... And I spent a lot of time over there. I actually got a reward from Queen Elizabeth. I am a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, a CBE. It's one step below knighthood. You know, it's for my coordination of efforts with the British police services, to learn from them and them to learn from us. And I was always very admiring of them because they only had 43 police departments, but they had national standards. And they had a national training academy, Bramshill, for their police leaders. Every police leader there that wanted to go up through the promotion ladder, had to go through that police college.

And in the midst of a budget crisis, back in 2012 or '13, they cut the budgets. They defunded the British police services by 25 percent. They reduced the number of Bobbies by 25 percent. They closed Bramshill. They had a national model that—shame on their politicians—basically dismantling it. I believe, there were so many national standards that would be appropriate, even though we're a democracy, a republic where we have states' rights. But much the same as we have constitutional laws that apply throughout the profession, Miranda, Escobedo, exclusionary rule, et cetera, I think there is opportunity to have national standards in terms of hiring, for example, mandating certain levels of training.

One of the things I changed in the NYPD was I raised the hiring age to 22, and you had to have two years of college to become a New York City police officer. So I'm all in favor of national standards. But, boy, it'd be very difficult in a country with 18,000 different police departments, 50 different states, 360 county sheriffs. [Laughs] It's not going to happen anytime soon.

Donelan

40:09

Let me ask you something. I'm going to go a little more personal here. We peel away the titles, we peel away the accolades, and we get down to Bill Bratton himself, what would you say? Because I think a lot of people would love to know, and I think they would love to, like, take a page out of your book. What makes you tick? Like, how do you do it? You sound to me like you're a voracious reader. You're an author, obviously. How many books have you written?

Bratton

40:30

Three, all with coauthors. I do a lot of talking; they do a lot of writing.

Donelan

40:33

I can barely keep myself together in a day, let alone add writing a book on top of that. Like, what is it about you and your life and how you maintain yourself that you've been able to do all of this, to keep this sense of passion that you have? Is it the education, that you're always educating yourself? Is it open mind? Is it you make your bed every day? Like, what is it?

Bratton

40:53

Actually, it's all those things. I do make my bed every day, as soon as I get up.

Donelan

40:56

I knew it.

Bratton

40:57

I drive my wife crazy. She says that I always get up on the sunny side of the bed, and I do. I'm blessed with an optimistic personality. I'm blessed with a sense of adventure, a sense of always to be learning. And particularly in policing, you always have to be learning. And I love gratification. And for me, gratification is in fact professional and career success. I've worked very hard to be as successful as I've been. Nothing's been given to me in life, other than starting off with great parents, incredible parents. But in my professional police career, I studied my butt off to make sergeant in the Boston Police Department. I was the youngest sergeant ever in the history of that department.

I was the youngest superintendent. I was one of the youngest police commissioners in the history of the NYPD. None of those were given to me. Nobody was thinking of Bill Bratton as police commissioner initially. I had to basically stick my neck out. I had to work hard to raise my visibility. It's like a kid in school, where you raise your hand to be noticed. I made every effort to get noticed. Why? Because I really did believe that I had what it took to create change. I love creating change. At the same time, I've had many failures in my life, personal failures, marriages, et cetera.

In terms of professional failures, the failure to work better with Rudy Giuliani was a phenomenal failure in my professional life. That he and I, and our respective teams, particularly my team, the police department, we saved that city. And in saving that city, we helped to save America in the 1990s. And my great regret was I didn't learn to work with him. We spent too much time working against each other. I learned from that. So the next group of mayors I worked with, I had phenomenal relationships with the rest of the mayors I worked with in government. Why? Because I learned from that experience.

I'm not morose. If I get depressed, it's for an hour. It's not for a day. It's not for a week. I enjoy life. Life is good. Beats the alternative.

Donelan

42:57

It sure does. How much of a role has it played for you, as you've gone through to sort of have a set way of thinking about something... Because the Giuliani situation sort of got me thinking about this. You think about handling a situation a certain way, it's proven for you in the past. And then you have to change your mind about something, you got to kind of flip in order to keep growing and moving, and improving things. Is that something, like, viable?

Bratton

43:12

Definitely. In terms of can't be so set in your ways you're unwilling to change, because the world's going to change around you. If you don't change with it, you're going to get swamped. So thinking of myself as a change agent is very helpful. But one of my great inspirations is getting into a position of leadership where I can bring so many others along who have great ideas, who have not had the chance to be noticed, to be recognized, to be put into positions of trust. And there's nothing I love better than

watching people I work with get ahead. I read a lot of management books and a lot of them have a little idea here or there, but one of the best is Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*.

And he was exposed to the police profession by Chuck Wexler after he wrote that book and ended up writing a handbook very specifically about public safety work, public sector work. And he had one expression about the bus: Get the right people on the bus, get the wrong people off the bus, and get the right people in the right seats. So on that bus, I'm the driver. I'm the one that pulls up, opens the door and encourages some people to get off the bus that just don't want to go on the journey with me. And say to those standing at the bus stop, "Those of you that want to come with me, get on." And they get on. And then sometimes they get in the wrong seat to start with. And as we continue the journey, we swap them around.

But I want every one of them behind me on that bus to think about, "Geez, I want to sit in that driver seat someday." And I'm not going to watch my back that... I want them to want my job. I want them to think of being successful enough to, when my time comes to get off the bus, that they can step up. And, for example, in the LAPD, I had the ability to be very instrumental in the selection of Charlie Beck as my successor. Had some influence in supporting the nomination of Mike Moore as his successor. In the NYPD, I was very instrumental in recommending my successor, Jimmy O'Neill. And then his successor, Dermot Shea.

They had got on the bus and I had moved them around in different seats, and they had done wonderful jobs in those seats. And they were ready, when I got off the bus, to step up. And it's a great joy and satisfaction in watching that. It's just like when your children grow and they grow successfully, and they're successful in their lives, it doesn't get better than that. Doesn't get any better than that. And that's a major part of my motivation, to have a legacy. And what's my legacy? People who support and embrace many of my ideas, but also have many of their own ideas that they can get others to support and embrace.

It's the evolution. And it's been a great ride so far and hopefully it continues for a little while longer.

Donelan

45:45

I love that because I really, truly do believe that it's a fatal mistake certain leaders make, when they put themselves as the sole driver and the sole person on that bus. Right? And they don't listen to those around them and they don't trust the people they place in those seats that you mentioned.

Bratton

45:58

But you have to be careful about those, to keep the windows on the bus open, because you want to hear people outside the bus, what they have to say. [Laughs] I joke about, in the 1970s, when we had a lot of walking officers, that we got put into cars, but the cars were not air-conditioned. So we were still

in connectivity to the neighborhood because we still hear what they're saying. But then in the late '70s when they air-conditioned the cars, we rolled up the windows and we lost that connectivity. So you always want to keep the windows open.

Donelan

46:23

Commissioner, we cannot thank you enough for joining us here on *The Beat* and for sharing all of your insight. And we wish you the very best in your continued success. We will be watching and learning from you, as you continue on. If anyone wishes to reach you about anything that you've discussed here, is there a way that they can reach you and, if so, how?

Bratton

46:41

Yes. My email address is bill.bratton@brattonmail.com. That's B-I-L-L-dot-B-R-A-T-T-O-N-at-B-R-A-T-T-O-N-M-A-I-L-dot-com.

Donelan

46:55

Thank you so much for joining us on *The Beat*, Commissioner, and thank you, everyone, for listening.

Bratton

46:58

Thank you, to you and your audience. Wonderful. Thank you.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

47:02

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

48:00

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