

The Role of Labor Management in Law Enforcement

Voiceover

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

Melissa Bradley

00:08

Hello and welcome. My name is Melissa Bradley, and on behalf of the COPS Office, I'd like to introduce Chief Charles McClelland of the Houston Police Department. Chief McClelland is here to talk about decision making that involves both labor and management. Chief, Houston recently changed its body armor policy to require mandatory wear in all situations regardless of the heat. What made you decide to change your policy?

Chief Charles McClelland

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Well, when you think about it, our police officers are the most valuable asset that any organization has in law enforcement. And as a good business model, we must protect our assets and mitigate our liabilities. Not only do we have to protect police officers, not only for themselves and their families, but for the taxpayers. Labor costs are extremely high when officers miss time from work from injuries. It affects the resources of the organization, and it just makes good business sense that regardless of the heat, weather, we must afford our employees maximum protection.

I had a recent incident where a police officer was shot at point blank range just a couple of months ago. And he survived because he had his vest on. But it was a very, very hot day, and under our existing old policy, that officer had the option of not wearing his body armor. He chose not to do so and he did wear it and he's alive today for it, thank God. But after that incident, I just thought that this is the last time that I'm going to do this, or I'm going to be in the emergency room, in the hallway of a hospital praying with friends and family members—and quite honestly, the family members start to ask me why do I have an exemption in my policy. So, I just think that it is—makes good business sense.

I consulted with the union, and when I eliminated the exemption, I also allowed the option of having an outer vest that matches the uniform shirt, so I just think that's a good middle ground.

Bradley

02:34

So how did you secure support from the union regarding this new policy?

McClelland

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Well, we've had several officers that had been shot, and this particular officer that was shot just several months ago, he was a very, very popular officer. His mom and dad are Houston police officers and the

outcry from them—and it was just a no-brainer. And the only concession or middle ground that the union asked me to make, which I thought was very reasonable, then if we're going to make our body armor policy mandatory, then they should be allowed to have the option of choosing an outer body carrier, in which I thought was reasonable long as it was professional and it matched the uniform and it looked professional.

Bradley

03:25

Let's shift gears a little bit and talk about building diverse workforces. What strategies have you found to be effective for recruiting and building those types of diverse workforces?

McClelland

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Well, first of all, let me just speak about the importance of diversity in your workforce. It makes good business sense, and members of the community and residents of a city, they want to see—especially police officers who have the authority to take someone's freedom and liberty away—they do want to see diversity.

And in Houston—Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, and I'm very, very proud that we are a predominately minority department. Our department has demographics of 53 percent of minorities. African American, Hispanics, Asians, other make up about 53 percent. And Anglo is 47 percent. Now, the strategies that we have found in Houston that have been effective is going to minority communities, historically black universities, and starting with young children and teenagers trying to close that social distance with the PAL program, Explorers program. And when you do that and you gain the trust and confidence of the community, then people will see law enforcement is a noble cause and a noble calling, and that's where we have made inroads in minority communities.

Bradley

04:58

So what role does the union play in recruiting, building diverse workforces, building that trust and confidence in the police?

McClelland

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Well, I think the union has been very, very supportive. Now you know, our hiring practices, like most other cities and police agencies, doesn't mean that if you're a minority you go ahead of the list. But you do have to have minorities coming in, and it's first-come, first-served in our organization. But unions understand for a police agency to be effective, you must have a positive relationship with the community. And the only way that you're going to do that is your workforce must reflect the community's diversity. It's very important and they understand that.

Bradley

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

McClelland

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All right, well, thank you.

Voiceover: *The Beat Exit*

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

Voiceover: Disclaimer

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