

## **Promoting A Leadership Ethos In Modern Policing**

In my article, "Chivalry, Bushido, and The Jedi Code, Police Leadership, What Is Old Should Be New Again", that was published in Blue Line Magazine (2006), I wrote that leaders need to have a strong moral compass that should be based upon the ethical standards found in Chivalry, Bushido, and the Jedi Code; so that decisions and actions taken in our roles as police leaders are ethical, moral, and honorable. A strong moral compass however, without a strong "Leadership Ethos", will only create a pseudo leader in the eyes of subordinates, due to one's inability to turn a decision into action, especially during a crisis situation, when there is no play book to follow, and the ability to seize the moment is a must. It is my belief that modern police leadership academia, to a degree, has ignored the cultivation of a leadership ethos, and has instead created moral compartmentalization, behaviours that focus on self preservation and careerism, which inevitably erodes the important foundation of trust between would-be leaders and their rank and file. In my opinion, this does nothing to encourage the "follow me" leadership attitude needed to move ahead in today's challenging times.

Much like my first article on leadership, this article does not review or examine the merits of current trends in organizational leadership systems or leadership techniques that can impact a department's transformation, instead this article will address the leadership ethos, specific to a foundational basis, that we need to cultivate as a police profession. Aristotle described "ethos" as a type of leadership in which a leader influences others to change their values, and thus their performance. A leadership ethos is not about what a person says or promises, it is about one's presence, comportment, and core leadership principles that affects how others will follow. A leadership ethos creates a personal internal rallying point that others will turn to in time of need.

As a police leader, we need to be the most ready, when society is least ready, especially during times of crisis. Police leaders should be idealists to the core, who want to make our community a better and safer place to live in. Central to projecting this leadership ethos are a police department's NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) rank and file, due to the fact that they are the central figures, and principal influencers of subordinates within a police organization. It is for this reason that police NCOs can either inspire, or at worse, sabotage those they lead. It is my belief that NCOs should be leadership icons that embody the very best of a department, and should lead with a passion while teaching, mentoring, and training those they lead, thus promoting both professionalism and a department's vision, goals, and objectives.

Unfortunately, some believe that we can teach leadership didactically through an educational process in isolation. It is my belief that teaching leadership, through academia alone, like any other type of learning process, is better absorbed and applied by some, than by others. How many times have we heard of peers being promoted or transferred into a leadership position, who are thought to have the "appearance" of a "leader", primarily based upon an educational pedigree, only to see them fail time and time again. Why? , because although possessing the academic background and operational experience, they lacked the leadership ethos needed to become a successful leader. Like it or not, appearance over substance encourages individualistic rather than principle based ethics in the leadership decision making process. It is for this reason, that those who rely on appearance alone, that is, the appearance of competence created by education or rank, will not be able to hide their lack of substance forever.

As NCOs, we often face ill-defined, chaotic situations that transcend benign, and antiseptic academic leadership methods and protocols. Those however, who possess a strong moral compass, a principled based Leadership Ethos, and an academic leadership background, when combined with operational experience, will more often than not make

the correct decisions, regardless of the situation, that others will want to follow especially during times of friction or chaos.

It is an unfortunate reality that we set good people up for failure, because we promote them into leadership roles without the ethical, moral, and emotional leadership ethos needed to succeed. What happens next is that those who fail become labelled as "weak", and to strengthen these weaknesses, they are sent on academic leadership courses. These courses however, usually have nothing to do with promoting a leadership ethos, but instead teach rote leadership attributes that are not the root cause of their failure in the first place. This process then becomes a negative feedback loop which only promotes further leadership failure. Because of this fact, again the "weak" label becomes even more entrenched because hey, we sent them on a leadership course to strengthen their weaknesses, and they could not meet the challenge. These NCOs now become even more marginalized by the department at all levels, which then has a very negative psychological and emotional effect on the member at a personal level. From a leadership standpoint, these NCOs are seen to be impotent, and are then usually shuffled off to some other area within their organization where, as a good person, they can maintain or even prosper, but from a leadership standpoint, will have a very limited ability to supervise and command others.

So what is a leadership ethos? A leadership ethos is based upon principles rather than values. Principles are foundational and timeless, whereas values are usually derived from accepted norms whose underlying bases rely on contemporary wisdom of ideas of the day. Values tend to fluctuate with trends and conventional wisdom. Principles however, transcend time, feelings, and individual desires, and involve fundamental truths as the basis for reasoning or action.

The principles of truth, honor, and duty are keystones to the leadership ethos, and should be uncompromisingly adhered to by police leaders, as they have sustained leaders faced with uncertainty throughout history to ensure that they acted ethically, morally and professionally. These principles however, are seen by many as nothing more than words, and modern leadership gurus, and even some high level police managers, will become very cynical to the point that they mock or ridicule those who promote such a leadership ethos in today's modern police environment as outdated, outmoded, and without utility. As General McArthur stated in his 1962 farewell speech at West Point:

*“ Duty, Honor, Country those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn. The unbelievers will say they are words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule. But these are some of the things they build. They build your basic character. They mold you for future roles as the custodians of the nation's defence. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid.”*

Rather than encouraging a strong leadership ethos, some police organizations and managers are instead focusing more on organizational structures and systems, and do very little in the area of fostering strong ethical principles to front line officers, NCOs, and even other police managers. A result of too much focus on organizational structures and systems, at the expense of fostering strong ethical principles, can be found in a 1978 report called “Crisis in Command” written for the United States War College:

*“ The disparity between ideal standards of principled behaviour and manifested behaviour was the result of selfish, promotion-oriented behaviour; inadequate communication between junior and senior; distorted or dishonest reporting of status, statistics, or officer efficiency; technical or managerial incompetence; disregard for principles but total respect for accomplishing even the most trivial mission with zero defects; disloyalty to subordinates; senior officers setting poor standards of ethical/professional behaviour”*

A leadership ethos based upon the principles of truth, honor, and duty allows the police leader to make the right decision, for the right reason, even when no one else is watching. Choosing the "harder" right over the "easier" wrong is a must for the modern police leader. Some call this integrity, and a police leader who sacrifices their integrity for self-survival or self-gain, will lose the respect and trust of those they seek to lead. In his article entitled, "What Do Ethical Leaders Follow? The Way of Truth", Donald Eckhart stated:

*"Maintaining trust in leadership is a critical component in a healthy organization. If an atmosphere of misinformation and distrust exists, work activities may continue even though the workplace is hampered by rumors and suspicion. However, motivation and efficiency will be hindered"*

In his book, "Leadership Secrets Of The Rogue Warrior", Richard Marcinko (founder of SEAL Team Six) created his own leadership ethos which contained seven basic principles that include:

- 1. I will test my theories on myself first. I will be my own guinea pig*
- 2. I will be totally committed to what I believe, and I will risk all that I have for these beliefs*
- 3. I will back my subordinates all the way when they take reasonable risks to help me achieve my goals*
- 4. I will not punish my people for making mistakes. I will only punish them for not learning from their mistakes.*

5. *I will not be afraid to take action, because I know that almost any action is better than inaction. And I know that sometimes not acting is the boldest action of all*
6. *I will always make it crystal clear where I stand and what I believe*
7. *I will always be easy to find: I will be at the center of the battle*

These seven basic principles, when combined with truth, honor, and duty creates a strong leadership ethos, that if internalized and truly believed at the very core of one-self, will project to subordinates, and others, that in time of friction or chaos, they can turn to you for strength, stability, calmness, reassurance, clarity, decisiveness and action.

It is my belief that those who have a strong leadership ethos, also have at their core strong leadership traits such as:

- Drive
- Bias for action
- Creative/asymmetrical thinking
- The ability to adapt, overcome, and improvise
- Desire to lead
- Honesty and integrity
- Self-confidence
- Cognitive ability
- Driven by the need to produce sustainable results, and
- Sets up successors for effectiveness

As a profession, we need to identify those who possess these leadership traits early in their career, and then foster their leadership ethos and skill growth as they mature into their career. As a profession, we need to push down leadership to the lowest level, thus allowing others to make decisions when needed. A strong principal based leadership ethos, inculcated early and reinforced throughout an officer's career, will allow departments to place the right people, in the right positions, for the right reasons especially when it comes to promotion and placement into leadership roles.

If I could capture the essence of a leadership ethos in written words, it would be the following quote:

*“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”*

*Theodore Roosevelt*

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