CDE #31815

INTEGRITY

THE LEADER'S ROLE IN COMM CENTER ETHICS

BY JOHN R. BROPHY

Leadership in action: You are a front-line supervisor in the comm center, and your manager comes to you with concerns raised by several of the field staff you dispatch. The concerns allege that one of your dispatchers is incompetent, as evidenced by field personnel repeatedly being dispatched to calls where the nature of the emergency on arrival does not match the nature at dispatch.

We all know that this will happen sometimes when a caller doesn't grasp the true nature of the emergency and incorrectly describes what is happening. But contributing to the concerns expressed is the fact that the employee in question is an average performer and not part of the "in" crowd.

You call upon the employee in question to discuss the concerns, and they say that their partner in the comm center isn't very helpful. They call attention to things that they would help others with but won't help the employee in question.

Upon review of CAD records you notice some anomalies and pull tapes to learn more. After a lengthy review, you conclude that the mistakes were actually those of another dispatcher who is well liked by peers and field staff alike and not of the unpopular average performer.

1. What would your next steps be?
2. How would you clear the name of the average performer in the eyes of their peers and the field personnel?
3. How would you address the fact that the mistakes were made by someone else?
4. What if, upon further review, you found that the mistakes weren't mistakes at all, but rather an attempt to make the average performer look bad in order to facilitate their termination?
5. How do you think supporting the unpopular employee who did not make any mistakes while addressing the more popular employee's actions will play with those around you in the short and long term? Why?

The above questions don't have "right" answers. They're intended to prompt thought and discussion about the nature of integrity.

Leadership in the comm center is about character and trust. Everything a leader does sets the tone and will be viewed by others as an example of what the leader expects. If the leader is always on time, dresses professionally and treats people with respect, that will set the tone for the staff to echo. But if the leader comes in late and leaves early while wearing a less-than-professional-looking uniform and criticizes others in public or behind their backs, all the policies in the world outlining expected workplace behavior will not have as great an impact on behavior and performance as the example the leader is setting with their own actions.

In short, personal integrity has a significant impact on leadership effectiveness.

INTEGRITY

Influencing staff behavior, attitudes and commitment is a key function of leadership, with the comm center at the heart of all operations regardless of the type or size of the agency(s). It's vital that those who play a leadership role have a strong ethical compass to ensure their moral and earned authority with the people around them is strong and that their actions are above reproach.

When we talk about personal integrity, "the most basic definition emphasizes honesty and consistency between a person's values and behavior."[1] When people have confidence in the integrity of their leader, they will respect both the decisions they agree with and the ones they don't. If the leader's integrity is in question, their ability to sustain a relationship of trust with their people will be difficult, if not impossible.

It's always better to employ disciplined people than to have people who need to be disciplined. Followers often mirror their leaders. Therefore, leaders must hold themselves to a higher standard, especially when it comes to integrity, than they do their staff. Anything less is irresponsible and will result in mixed messages and inconsistent performance.

HOW TO LOSE RESPECT

There are many things that a leader can do besides holding themselves to

Leadership Lessons in Honesty & Integrity

- People won't follow leaders they think of as dishonest.
- You can't expect honest followers if you model dishonesty.
- The higher you go the more visible your integrity or lack of it becomes.
- "Insignificant" dishonest acts usually beget larger acts of dishonesty.
- In times of crisis, adversity and temptation, a leader's integrity becomes most evident.
- Integrity is exhibited in actions, not pronouncements of intentions.
- Honesty and integrity pay off long term, although they may involve losses and sacrifices in the short term.
- An organization with an ethical code and system of safeguards can create more consistently honest leaders.
- Act as if someone else with more power than you is watching.

Source: Leadership Secrets from the Bible by Lorin Woolfe.[3]

Actions speak louder than words, and supervisors and managers need to lead by example.

PHOTO RICK MCCLURE

a higher standard that will have a positive impact on their ability to lead, but there are a few key acts of irresponsibility that will almost certainly scuttle a leader's authority with their staff. These include failure to take reasonable efforts to prevent followers' misdeeds; ignoring or denying ethical problems; not taking responsibility for their actions or directives; and denying or shirking their responsibilities to followers.

There are many ways to both build and shatter trust, but it takes far longer to build it than to shatter it. A leader can spend weeks, months, even years building their moral and earned authority, but one misstep can have a profound negative impact. Such negative impact may or may not be recoverable, but even if it is it will take a long time to rebuild what was taken away. Staff may forgive the misstep by the leader, but it can never be undone; it is a part of that leader's history now.

How a leader applies their ethics based on the situation at hand will have an impact on the events at hand and will also follow them on the mental scorecard all around them keep, either consciously or unconsciously. People in leadership, while guided by policies and procedures, have various levels of authority and discretion with respect to how to handle the situations they face. Handling matters consistently and fairly will achieve the best results in both the short and long term. However, when a leader allows an end to justify their means or allows a personal agenda to skew their ethical compass the impact can be significant

and reach far beyond the situation at hand. It's important for a leader to remember that "even when no one is looking you always are."[2]

In my view, when a leader deviates from fairness for a less than honorable reason they have created a self-inflicted hardship. They will pay the consequences with whatever fallout results, and because of their role as a leader, so too will the organization and its people.

HELP WANTED

One litmus test of both a leader's effectiveness and the trust their people have in them comes when a leader asks one of their people about their progress, and they never need any help. Either the leader failed to provide challenging work that will serve to grow the individual personally and professionally or the follower does not have enough trust in the leader to share their shortcomings or ask for help. If it is the former, the leader needs to work on their personnel development skills, if the latter the leader has far more work to do for the absence of trust is more of an abyss than the relative pothole that is their need to challenge their staff more.

Creating an ethical climate within the comm center, or any organization for that matter requires more than just the adopting and posting of a code of ethics or values statement. But using such tools as part of a comprehensive approach to achieve such a result can help chart the course and serve as a reminder of the key expectations. The most impactful thing a leader can do to create and sustain a culture centered on ethics and values is to model the behaviors expected and quickly act upon behaviors that are inconsistent.

Comm center supervisors and managers will lead by example, whether they intend to or not. Leaders who arrive on time in a clean and pressed uniform demonstrate what is expected. But they need to take it one step further. When they see staff whose appearance is not up to par and say nothing, they send a message to everyone that they accept that level of appearance as "within standards." Something seemingly trivial like unshined shoes or a wrinkled or dirty shirt that goes unchecked by the supervisor will send a message that they didn't notice or have accepted it.

Another example: When a supervisor or manager overhears, or worse yet participates in, an inappropriate conversation. Whether the topic or the language used to discuss the topic is inappropriate, by allowing it to go unchecked the comm center supervisor is putting their stamp of approval on it.

If the actions of the leader are not in keeping with the words on the ethics code or values statement, they will drown out those words, and the behavior modeled by the leader will be replicated. If the leader's actions are in keeping with the established standards and they model the way toward an ethical and just culture, one will be achieved.

In his book *The Nature of Leadership*, B. Joseph White shares a fear that echoes observations I have made.[4] He writes, "I am concerned that a generation of young

Americans has come to equate leadership with nothing more than the opportunity to get power, get rich, get whatever you want."

If it wasn't hard enough for a leader to establish a positive relationship of trust in their comm center based on their own actions and reputation, they potentially start out a few steps further back, having to overcome a stigma and mistrust of leaders in general that is fostered by the actions of past and present leaders in our country and throughout the world.

The lesson aspiring, new and experienced leaders alike must take from this is that they must think, speak and act above reproach both on and off the job. By doing so, they will establish their own moral standing with the people around them. Trust will be earned on the merits of their actions. As this earned authority builds over time, the leader will take control of their own leadership legacy while distancing themselves from the negative impressions of leaders in general that was shaped by those high-profile leaders who betrayed the trust placed in them. Over time their efforts will serve to establish them as a leader of character and integrity.

A PRIVILEGE & A RESPONSIBILITY

Serving as a leader in an emergency comm center requires that the individual entrusted with this responsibility understand that it is both a privilege and a responsibility. A significant trust is placed on those entrusted to provide leadership to those who protect and serve others in their times of need. ||PSC||

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CDE EXAM #31815: INTEGRITY

1. Leadership in the communication center is about character and _____.
   a. Knowing the right people
   b. Knowing everything
   c. Trust
   d. Bias

2. Personal integrity has little importance on leadership effectiveness.
   a. True
   b. False

3. People who have confidence in a leader will accept their decisions regardless if they agree with the decision or not.
   a. True
   b. False

4. It takes longer to shatter trust than to build trust.
   a. True
   b. False

5. Integrity is exhibited in actions, not pronouncements of intentions.
   a. True
   b. False

6. What best describes the statement "even when no one is looking, you always are"?
   a. Everyone is blind around you.
   b. You always know what you are doing.
   c. People don't care what you are doing.
   d. You are always looking at other people.

7. Dressing professional is good practice, but truly has no bearing or effect on leadership.
   a. True
   b. False

8. Trust is earned on the merits of _____.
   a. How many hours a person works
   b. How much money a person earns
   c. A person's actions
   d. Who a person knows

9. Serving as a leader in a comm center is a privilege.
   a. True
   b. False

10. A supervisor or manager who participates in an inappropriate conversation is giving the conversation their stamp of approval.
    a. True
    b. False

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