

The Thin Blue Line Must Rise With Honour and Distinction

Remarks made to the Canadian Centre for Ethics &
Corporate Policy
In Toronto on June 2003
Chief Julian Fantino, Chief of Police, Toronto Police Service

“Discretion is not authorized for police when it is based on personal values, loyalty, convenience or friendship; it is meant to be used to achieve just results in applying the law. No more. No less.”

Gary W. Sykes, The Ethics Roll Call, Ethics Centre, Texas

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon. I am honoured and pleased to have been invited to speak to you regarding my role as Chief of Police and the significance of ethics within the policing profession.

It was a very proud and exhilarating day for me over 3 years ago when I returned to the Toronto Police Service as Chief of Police. I felt as if I had come home after a long journey that exposed me to varied and profound experiences that I truly believe have assisted me in making a positive contribution to the Toronto Police Service and to the citizens of Toronto.

Upon my return as Chief of Police of the 5th largest municipal police Service in North America, with over 5,200 police officers and 2,200 civilians the importance of strong and ethical leadership was foremost on my mind.

From the outset I pledged that my tenure as Chief of Police would be characterized by integrity, dignity, diligence and tolerance, a pledge from which I have never wavered.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that these past three years have been impacted by various controversies, however, I submit to you that leadership roles of any kind, especially in policing, have their fair share of inevitable controversy and conflict. I have no doubt about the reality of the saying "It's lonely at the top" and I can well attest to this reality from personal experience.

As Chief of Police I am often the target of criticism from the public, the media, and at times from within the Police Service itself. However, being the Chief of Police is not about winning a popularity contest nor is it about making everyone happy. My priority has always been the safety of police officers and the public, and simply doing what is right.

I have been a police officer for more than half my life. From the very beginning of my career, I made a commitment to seize all opportunities, to learn and to grow both as a person and as a police officer.

And as I moved through the ranks from police constable to the Chief of Police I have always maintained a perspective on the importance of who I am, rather than what I am.

While I have reached my long-term goal as Chief of Police of the Toronto Police Service, my willingness to learn and to grow has not stopped. I continue to embrace new opportunities and face challenges head on.

I have never been intimidated by controversy, nor will I remain silent when I see flaws in the judicial system, and the need for more stringent laws to address deviant behaviour. Nor will I passively allow the moral fibre and reputation of the Toronto Police Service and its membership to be unfairly attacked or otherwise exploited by those intent on causing mischief.

A Chief's job requires stamina, commitment, vision, and an abundance of leadership and communication skills. I firmly believe that effective communication skills are the key to the successful leadership of any organization. In many respects the ability to communicate effectively is a critical survival skill for a Police Chief.

Knowing the expectations of the public - and ensuring that police officers and civilians – share the vision and support the mission of the police Service is paramount to providing the most effective and efficient police services possible, the public deserves no less.

The size of the Toronto Police Service, the diversity of the community and the large geographical area for which the Toronto Police Service is responsible, poses many challenges to effective internal and external communication.

It is imperative that as Chief of Police my message is received unfiltered and unedited right down through the rank and file and into our neighbourhoods, in a timely, open, and honest manner.

Loyalty and support from senior management and supervisors is also critical to ensuring that the front line officers embrace the Service's goals and mandates and that they execute their duties accordingly.

As Chief, I must ensure that all those under my leadership receive clear and concise direction and are provided with appropriate rules, guidelines and standards to follow as well at accountability for those who don't.

There is no place for deceit, breach of trust or corrupt practices within the policing profession, therefore, it is equally important that disciplinary actions are also clearly stated and consistently applied by supervisors and managers whose primary job is not to catch subordinates doing wrong but rather, helping them do the job right.

The Law Enforcement Oath of Honour, developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police states “...I will never betray my badge, my integrity, my character or the public trust. I will always have the courage to hold myself and others accountable for our actions.” These values I believe, are an intrinsic part of the very foundation of the policing profession.

I believe that as Chief of Police, it is my duty to work with the many facets of humanity that make up our society. When I was sworn in as Chief of Police, I also made the commitment to lead the men and women of the Toronto Police Service in a renewed, vigorous and pro-active campaign to enhance public safety, security and quality of life, as well as improved relations amongst the various stakeholders within the profession.

My tenure began with a 90-day Internal Review of the Police Service, a snapshot review of the organizational structure, and the services and programs we provided. Over 500 recommendations stemmed from this review, most of which have now been implemented.

At the outset I held 22 townhall style community meetings across the city as well as meetings with other community groups. These meetings provided an opportunity for citizens to share their concerns, as well as build relationships that would enable a collaborative partnership in developing solutions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

Within the first few days of my tenure as Chief, I also met with the senior management group and outlined my values, my goals for the Service and my expectations of all members of the Toronto Police Service, both sworn and civilians!

By providing to the members an outline of specific standards and expectations of conduct and performance that I have as their Chief, no room was left for misinterpretation or ambiguity. In essence I expect nothing more from my people than what I expect from myself and I have never, nor will I ever, ask anyone to do anything that I have not done or am not prepared to do myself.

As Chief of Police, I have a moral and ethical duty as well as a mandate to ensure that the performance of the Police Service as a whole, and by consequence all of its people, is of the highest standards of honesty and integrity demanded of the profession.

While I firmly believe every officer, from the newest recruit to the Chief of Police, must be held accountable for their actions, I believe that supervisors and managers must also undertake the burden of added responsibility for all those under their leadership.

It has been proven that poor and ineffective supervision and the lack of accountability represent the common thread woven through corruption and other forms of unacceptable police conduct. Regrettably, every organization has the scars to prove this reality.

I believe that leadership is all about leading by example. Honest, ethical and professional behaviour at the top will, for the most part, be repeated by those below - Corrupt or inappropriate conduct at the top will also undoubtedly be repeated by their subordinates.

The Toronto Police Service has established a set of core values that every member, no matter what position or rank, are required to live by: honour, honesty, integrity, fairness, respect, reliability, teamwork and positive attitude.

It is these organizational values that a police officers must embrace as part of their own personal values and draw on them when faced with difficult decisions.

The recruitment of young men and women with the right balance of potential, attitude and personal integrity is critical to the health of the policing profession. They must exemplify integrity and ethical behaviour in every aspect of their personal and private lives.

Ethics and integrity are the very foundation upon which the Toronto Police Service's vision and mission statements are built. To have integrity is to have the ability and the inner desire and conviction to do what is right, morally and ethically, without being told, and do so even when no one is watching. Basically, doing the right thing – in the right way – for the right reasons.

I believe that integrity is taught by example and is one of the most important qualities a police officer can possess respecting our role and authority in a democratic society.

At each recruit graduation it is my duty to speak to the newest members of our organization and impress upon them the importance of the public's trust, who we are, what we are here to do and who we are here to Serve and Protect.

Traditionally, within the hierarchy of society, police officers hold positions of high trust and high responsibility. The significance of the public's trust is not trivial and certainly, its importance is not negotiable. If we lose the public's trust – all is lost.

In essence there can be no ethical shortcuts to personal, professional and organizational integrity, for police officers especially.

I have said, society expects a greater standard of conduct, professionalism and accountability from police officers than applies to ordinary citizens. The inevitable loss of public confidence, trust and respect are the obvious ultimate painful sanctions imposed by citizens on police when we do wrong.

While I believe that the majority of the officers and civilian members of the Toronto Police Service are honestly motivated, hard working and dedicated individuals, I also believe that inappropriate or corrupt behaviour of just one member can tarnish and do serious harm to the reputation and trustworthiness of the entire Service.

I do not believe that one bad apple will lead to a barrel full, however, when an officer acts in an unprofessional or deviant manner, the inappropriate behaviour reflects on the entire Service. Public perception may result that all police officers are the same and our credibility will surely be seriously impacted.

While policing is a career, it is also a way of life. It is not just a job nor is it a position that can be taken for granted or otherwise exploited.

Abraham Lincoln stated “What truly motivates people is values”. I believe that a great significance must be placed on values, character and a sense of pride, which provides important meaning to our personal and professional lives.

Police officers must have pride. Pride in themselves, pride in their Oath of Office, pride in their profession, pride in their Service and pride in their community and country. An officer must always reflect on his or her Oath of Office and their personal commitment to serve the common good in all that we do – all of the time.

The Oxford Dictionary describes pride as “A sense of what befits one’s position, preventing one from doing unworthy things”.

Every police officer has sworn to serve and protect and sadly, too many have made the ultimate sacrifice while honouring their oath of office. That sacrifice is the profound testimonial of a truly honourable profession.

The memory of these brave officers and their honourable legacy represents a legacy that can never be disgraced or diminished. Policing is a profession that is steeped in history, culture and traditions that police officers individually and collectively, must never blemish or disgrace.

Regardless of the trials, tribulations and challenges we face, the thin blue line must rise, with honour and distinction, to the extent necessary, to ensure that an unwavering and uncompromised ethical service is provided to the citizens we have the duty to serve and protect.

Without credibility, the police cannot do their job!

Without the public's trust all will be lost!

Terence Mangan, the former Chief of Police, Spokane, Washington, said:

“Ultimately, our ability to build and maintain community credibility is dependent upon our basic values. Values differ from priorities, objectives, or mission statements, although such instruments must be value-related if they are to be valid. Priorities can change, plans can be modified, mission statements can evolve. But values themselves – whether they are personal, organizational, or professional – are essentially non-negotiable.”

Thank you.