

# ETHICS ROLL CALL

L I S T E N I N G T O T H E I N N E R V O I C E



## Corporate Sponsorship of Policing: Ethical Challenges in the New Millennium

by John Middleton-Hope

### Introduction

Every police executive is concerned about resources. Municipal councils, provincial/state, territorial and federal governments are being asked to contribute substantial public funds to safeguard our communities and so it may be perceived as a natural adjunct to look for strategies to offset the high cost of public policing.

For more than 20 years police agencies have been actively involved in community policing where the police and the community work in partnership to resolve safety issues, and have enhanced the effectiveness of the police in serving the public.

This has translated into everything from citizens volunteering their time in crisis support functions, Crime Stoppers programs, citizens on patrol and committee involvement to working alongside our men and women as auxiliary police officers. Fund raising designed to supplement police budgets has greatly enhanced the services delivered by local authorities in some communities and there are generally no expectations from those who volunteer their time.

Few would argue with the need for collaborative stewardship of this precious resource we call public safety. It is not up to the police department alone to find solutions that will effectively and efficiently resource public security initiatives. With

increased input into the activities of the police the public and government share a degree of responsibility for the outcomes of public safety.

### Sponsorship

Sponsorship on the other hand is transactional. Companies and individuals provide funding, expertise, equipment or technology in exchange for representation or endorsement of their businesses or products. Irrespective of the dialogue between the parties about intent, rarely is this relationship based on purely altruistic motives. This is the primary distinction between sponsorship and partnership and must be carefully weighed when looking for ways to improve the services delivered to the public.

In July 2006, the Vancouver, BC (Canada) media raised the issue of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) soliciting funds for the Annual Conference to be held in St. John's, NFLD (Canada). Headlines stated:

“For a mere \$25,000 it will be possible to schmooze with some of the most senior police officers in the country...” (Globe and Mail, one of Canada’s National newspapers).

Articles about police solicitation of sponsorship of the Annual Conference have dogged the police community for nearly a decade. The purchase of tickets by convention organizers for a Celine Dion concert in Montreal in 2008 at a cost of \$150,000 shared between corporate sponsorship and public funds received in the form of conference tuition is the latest in a string of public relations gaffs by the policing community in which some influential police leaders fail to grasp the impact these decisions have on the public’s perception of the police.

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## CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OF POLICING

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Substantial criticism occurred by the media and was echoed by several Chiefs of Police in attendance. The desire to make the Annual Conference a "social event to remember" in order to attract more police executives seems to have eclipsed the fundamental reason behind holding this professional development opportunity. The issue of sponsorship of events, workshops and seminars hosted by police agencies has become big business in Canada and the US.

Public-Private partnerships have also become a catalyst that provides substantial financial benefits to policing but also precariously brings us closer to inappropriate influence by companies that are able to provide funds to the police. This sets up a challenging construct in which communities and businesses incapable of paying the extra freight may not access the same level of police response (Bhanu, C. and Stone, C., 2004).

Fleury-Steiner and Wiles (2003) speculate that a financial relationship with the corporate sector creates potential conflicts of interest and may distort public policy and community agendas for the police by influencing the direction the police take and what areas of emphasis the police will focus on.

By actively soliciting funds from the corporate sector police agencies run the very real risk of allowing governments to withdraw funding support from many areas and activities that were previously regarded as core policing functions (Ayling, Grabosky, Shearing, 2007).

### Some Solutions?

In the UK partnership is a principal component in police reform and is encouraged through policy, initiatives and legislation. The "Crime and Disorder Act" (1998) requires UK police to collaborate with public agencies to promote community safety. Police agencies are able to raise up to 1% of their budgets through donations. However, the Chair of the Chief Constables Association (David French) recently attacked this process of "logo cops" stating "our badge is not for sale."

In the United States the GA Program (Government Acquisitions Program [www.gavpd.com/home.asp](http://www.gavpd.com/home.asp)) is designed to support agencies in the acquisition of equipment and training that may otherwise not

be available through the conventional budgeting process. Some police cars in North Carolina for example are sponsored by private companies. Advertising appears on vehicle hoods, trunks and bumpers for 3-years and while the police control graphics, design and content, companies control messaging. This is very popular with cash strapped municipalities and although city fathers smile at financial windfalls, the practice generates lots of public criticism as the police are seen as "4-sale."

The NYPD Foundation is a solid example on the other hand of a measured response to managing sponsorship by striking a balance between endorsements and serving the public's interests. Similar programs are administered by the RCMP and Edmonton Police Service and the helicopter programs in Calgary and Edmonton likely could not have been under written with public funds alone and are great successes because of the relationship developed between the corporate sector, public and the police.

For decades the policing community has distinguished itself as a profession not easily manipulated by those who seek to influence public policy. Yet many police agencies continue to accept corporate funding while not fully embracing the need for strong ethical stewardship and the implementation of strict controls on how companies contribute funds. This practice runs the risk of damaging the collective reputation of the police community.

The challenge is for police executives, police governance and city managers to take careful stock of soliciting and accepting funding from the corporate sector. The reputation that a generation of police officers have fought hard to create and protect runs the real risk of rapidly eroding.

### What might we all consider as best practices?

The absence of an all out withdrawal from the sponsorship wars is highly unlikely. Therefore, changes to the way police agencies solicit and accept corporate funding must occur. The use of a Foundation seems to strike a balance that would enable corporate sponsors to contribute to the police while maintaining a distance between the agency and the sponsor. They are designed to protect the reputation and integrity of the police while providing the sponsor high profile marketing opportunities. The experiences of some jurisdictions indicates that where there is a Foundation there is no direct connection between the benefactor and the beneficiary.

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**SCIENTISTS  
ANNOUNCED  
TODAY THAT THEY  
HAVE DISCOVERED  
A CURE FOR  
APATHY.  
HOWEVER, THEY  
CLAIM NO ONE  
HAS SHOWN THE  
SLIGHTEST  
INTEREST IN IT.**

**GEORGE  
CARLIN**

**CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OF POLICING**  
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For example, Company 'X' may wish to donate \$100,000 per year to the "police." The host agency of the Annual Conference could apply for a portion of the funds needed to stage the Conference while Committee 'Y' could also apply for funded research. Company 'X' would benefit by having their logo appear at the Conference and on any subsequent reports produced by Committee 'Y'.

A proposed "Sponsorship Foundation Board" comprised of citizens at large with a senior police advisor that would have control over how the funds applied would need to consult with the sponsor regarding the application of the funds to ensure there is no conflict between the company's values and the use of the funds. As an example Company 'X's' corporate values may conflict with use of force research but would support technology to combat child pornography.

As a registered society the Sponsorship Foundation Board would be able to issue tax receipts for the donations they receive from corporations. The Foundation would also be required to publically disclose sponsors and the allocation of funds to specific projects annually.

**Conclusion**

This is a complex issue and discussion like any ethical challenge encourages participants to contribute to the dialogue. Sponsorship is an issue that has the very real potential to impugn the integrity of policing. If it is not managed with a desire to do "the right thing" not the "expedient thing," policing runs the risk of alienating the public whose trust and respect remains essential ingredients in the relationship between the police and those they serve.

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**THIS IS HOW  
HUMANS ARE: WE  
QUESTION ALL  
OUR BELIEFS,  
EXCEPT FOR THE  
ONES WE REALLY  
BELIEVE, AND  
THOSE WE NEVER  
THINK TO  
QUESTION.  
ORSON SCOTT  
CARD**

**NON SEQUITUR**



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## Another Obligation of Leaders and Teachers

by Dan Primozić

Many police officers in leadership training rooms across the country have said it, chanted it, and stamped out the same coin for re-release manifold times in my teaching experience with ILEA: they have said that “ethics begins at the top,” and that “ethical leadership is taught by example.” I do not think now that these phrases are mere platitudes offered in a classroom setting. I think they mean it when they say it. I think that they should.

In a book that we used as a centerpiece for our Leadership Symposium, Elizabeth D. Samet begins to circumscribe what might be called the obligations of leaders and those of the teachers of leaders. She recounts a summer seminar one of her colleagues, Scott, offered at West Point wherein he “made it a priority to impart a complex understanding of the profession to cadets in English 102 and in the seminar he conducted as part of West Point’s summer program for promising high school students.”<sup>i</sup> That complex understanding included debunking some of the overly simple mythological and romantic notions that have sometimes decorated and deflected the hard and often horribly ugly work of a soldier and the leaders of soldiers. This is to be avoided, perhaps especially in recruiting efforts which usually point only to the nobility of serving and dying for one’s country.

These recruiting efforts surely must and should point to that aspect of military service. However, the whole truth of the story should be given to fully inform the recruit of what faces them in this career choice. And this obligation to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth falls squarely upon the shoulders of teachers in the academies and the leaders of the agencies who act as *de facto* recruiters of future leaders of the profession. Scott took this obligation seriously in his seminars and tells us why we all should do likewise:

Such an impression [that teachers in military academies only present the overly simple, romantic, noble aspects of military service] betrays common misperceptions about all the military

academies and about military service in general. For soldiers and for the officers who lead them, the thought of sacrifice, of potentially losing what we hold most dear, is a constant fact of life . . .

Officers in particular must be keenly aware of the sacrifices they may someday ask their soldiers to make – the price that might have to be paid. It is therefore vitally important that a cadet’s education make him or her fully aware of all perspectives. To do otherwise would be to act dishonorably.<sup>ii</sup>

Often times throughout my career as a teacher of applied and professional ethics, especially in the fields of biomedicine, business, leadership and law enforcement, I have been compelled to ask my students to diligently consider *all* the aspects of their career choice. In nursing, for example, I asked my students if they had really come to terms with the some of the more gruesome facts of the job: death, suffering, blood, guts, and emotional stress (of their patients, the patient’s families, and their own as well). I asked them to perform that critical thinking at an early stage of their education so that they would take into account more than just job security, the good salary, and the nobility of the profession. Had they considered what might be called the “downside” of the job? Had they considered what the costs to themselves might be: the costs of their own emotions, health and well-being from simply performing the day-to-day duties of the job which often contain seeing people at their worst, at their weakest, in their pain and suffering? Can they take the prolonged exposure to the awful and complex moral decisions that come with the job of being a good and noble nurse? All of this amounts to more than just job security and good pay. The same kinds of questions would be directed to business students too. Are they really suited to the ruff and tumble, sometimes rather heartless world of doing business, especially in today’s highly competitive world?

And now I wonder if we should not put out some “warning flares” for those who would be police officers and leaders of police officers? We teach them many things that they will defi-

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ANYONE CAN  
HOLD THE HELM  
WHEN THE SEA IS  
CALM.

PUBLILIUS  
SYRUS

## ANOTHER OBLIGATION OF LEADERS AND TEACHERS continued from page 4

nately need to know and do. Do we warn them enough about the personal costs of giving that full measure of devotion to the profession, to leadership, to their people? Are our policing curricula and recruitment efforts candid enough to be fair? Is saying that people must be “willing to serve” enough? Are the recruitment targets aware of the terrible suicide statistics for police officers and corrections officers? And certainly, given that there is a well known shortage of people in all professions willing to step up and into top leadership posts, we don’t want to add reasons for their reluctance to do so by being less than candid about what these jobs actually entail.

Are officers that would be promoted fully aware of what their daily life will be should they succeed in gaining that promotion to Chief? Is there a formal mentoring program that would put the would-be leader at the elbow of the seasoned leader-in-place so that a fully informed decision as to accepting lifestyle that is intrinsic to the position can obtain? For example, such programs are in

place for interns in business programs at colleges and universities. Why should this kind of formal “internship” program not also be available for those agencies and departments with the foresight to include succession planning for their leadership posts? It would be a good thing for the organization because it would provide a preview of the candidate as they would operate on-the-job and it would assure a fair recruitment and decision making process for the candidate as well.

We must be able rest easy about the existence of this kind of “full disclosure” concerning the profession and the life of the leaders within it. Much more than a police and leadership shortage is at stake. We do not want to risk acting “dishonorably.”

<sup>i</sup> Elizabeth Samet, *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.

## Is Parking a Problem? Bulls Eye!

by Dan Carlson

**I**t was a hot day ... too hot to be standing in the sun writing parking tickets. But the calls from irate merchants in the downtown business district had been relentless, and the word from the chief’s office had been clear: take care of the problem! As always, dictates of this sort tend to roll downhill in a police department, and the young officer - who lived in the valley - looked down the street at the seemingly endless line of cars parked at expired meters, sighed, and began writing citations.

With the exception of a couple of unhappy motorists who, upon seeing the officer writing a ticket, ran out of nearby stores pleading for a break, the process went smoothly. But then without warning, this routine chore became complicated ... after placing a parking ticket on one of the illegally parked cars he



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turned to the next vehicle in line and saw (Oh, no!) a car belonging to a sergeant from his department (the uniform shirt hanging in the rear window and the PBA sticker on the windshield confirmed it).

Immediately, the officer knew that he had a problem on his hands, and that his options were limited to (1) writing the citation and facing the certain wrath of the sergeant and his peers or (2) ignoring the violation and enduring the outrage of the citizens who had just been ticketed. Shaking his head in frustration, the officer wished that there were some unobtrusive way to extricate himself from this mess.

He thought to himself, if only there were some sort of system whereby fellow police officers and other “VIPs” could install a recognizable marker - a “bulls eye” decal issued by a police

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THE BITTEREST  
TEARS SHED OVER  
GRAVES ARE FOR  
WORDS LEFT  
UNSAID AND  
DEEDS LEFT  
UNDONE.

HARRIET BEECHER  
STOWE

## IS PARKING A PROBLEM? BULLS EYE!

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union or association, perhaps - on their cars. If so, he could put a "ghost" ticket under the windshield and, since it would show no fine amount or violation code, the ticket could then simply be discarded. In addition to eliminating the "how do I avoid writing another cop a ticket" problem, his plan would have the added benefit of making watchful citizens naively believe that every parking violator had been treated equally.

Here's a bit of advice for our "caught in the middle" officer: hang the citation on the sergeant's car and move on to the next violator. The "bulls eye" sticker system for identifying illegally parked but immune-from-ticketing cars has been tried already and found wanting ... at least in Albany, NY. In that city, this arrangement had been in existence for some fifteen years before coming to an inglorious, embarrassing and highly publicized end in late 2008.

According to a series of articles in the *Albany Times Union*, the "bulls eye" sticker issued by the Albany Police Officers Union (see picture nearby) was originally intended to identify personal cars of police officers who often found it difficult to park in downtown Albany when called to appear in court. Over the years, though, the community of those displaying this emblem grew to include family members, acquaintances, non-sworn employees and retired officers, as well as a number of public officials and other high-profile dignitaries. According to the *Times Union*, the police department kept a computerized list of 300 VIP license plates, and electronic handheld ticketing devices were programmed to recognize those plates that should receive "no-fine" citations.

Among those who found themselves in the embarrassing position of having to explain their receipt of "no fine" parking citations were the head of Parking Violations Bureau, whose wife's car had received more than 70 in recent years, and the \$110,000-a-year executive director of a private civic organization dedicated to developing Albany's downtown business district (reported recipient of 196 "ghost" tickets since 2003). Likely adding to the discomfort for this civic leader were her remarks in a December, 2007, interview about the lack of adequate downtown parking: "If anybody goes to any real city, they don't even think about going there and parking for free. They would expect to pay for parking. They expect to have to walk a couple of blocks." (*Albany Times Union*, February 6, 2009)

In the police department itself, the uncovering and reporting of this disgraceful enterprise led to widespread consternation, finger-pointing, and an ongoing series of eruptions about who knew what ... and when they knew it. For example, when the police chief (who was president of the Police Officers Union when the "bulls eye" sticker was first distributed) denied knowing that those decals were used to avoid parking tickets, the current Union president went so far as to characterize his remarks as "less than truthful." (*Albany Times Union*, May 8, 2009)

When an organization is wracked by turmoil and scandal, it can be instructive to track the path it chooses to follow toward recovery. Are leaders open and forthright in responding to questions? How candid are they about events rocking the agency? Do they demean or do they support those who bring issues to light? However they decide to respond, leaders must remain mindful that others - both inside and outside the organization - will closely monitor their actions and, thereupon, determine how willing they might be to cooperate, support or even forgive.

As our quandary-stricken officer struggles to decide whether to write the parking ticket or not, he might want to take note of a "Letter to the Editor" (*Albany Times Union*, April 19, 2009), excerpted here, commenting on a series of recent reports of police misbehavior in both Albany and nearby Schenectady, New York:

*It is ironic but thoroughly fitting that the Albany police chief could be brought down by something as mundane as a parking ticket scandal. As the story unfolds, however, it reveals a degree of arrogance and sense of entitlement that demeans other members of our community.*

*Unlike the blatantly criminal activity displayed by some members of the Schenectady police force, Albany's parking scandal would appear to be trivial and inconsequential. ... ongoing scrutiny, however, reveals it to be systemic, endemic, unapologetic and pernicious - a festering cancer.*

*Here's the bottom line:*

*Both the Schenectady and Albany cops display a level of disdain for the law that is anathema to good police work. How can we expect people to respect and obey the law when their cops don't?*

THE MONEY YOU  
HAVE GIVES YOU  
FREEDOM; THE  
MONEY YOU  
PURSUE ENSLAVES  
YOU.

JEAN JACQUES  
ROUSSEAU

## Ethics of Confidentiality: Presumed Innocence and Double Jeopardy

By Dan Primozić

During some of our training sessions on ethics and leadership, the question arises concerning the tension of being “transparent” and telling your reports what is happening in a situation where there has been police misconduct of some sort, and keeping that information “confidential,” because it involves a personnel issue. Some of our participants maintain that it is more destructive to morale to say nothing about the situation and let the rumors and gossip abound, than it is to break the code of confidentiality in such cases and settle the issue there and then, once and for all, with the truth of the matter.

Aside from the legalities that surround giving out sensitive information concerning a personnel issue, an unfinished one that is pending or under investigation, or one that has been settled but can still be of potential financial harm to the police officer that is dismissed or disciplined for misconduct, there are ethical concerns here that must be addressed. And, as usual, they are not easy ones.

Perhaps we can take some cues and also some comfort from an article written by Gary Olsen, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs of Idaho State University. He has some tips about the issue and we can take a “quantum of solace” from the fact that this issue is not confined to professional police work.

Over the years, I've observed countless department heads struggle with faculty members over administrative decisions that appeared, at first glance, to be arbitrary or self-serving. But often, those decisions arose out of personnel actions that compelled the department heads to observe strict confidentiality. The chairs were powerless in defending against criticism because to do so would reveal that a personnel action was at the root of the decision. That very revelation would likely signal who was involved, thereby violating confidentiality even without divulging details. That scenario presents a conundrum for any administrator, but especially

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## ETHICS

## CORNER

A recent article in the *New York Times* tried to take on the current fight between the two Cambridge's: the proverbial “town and gown,” but this time with racial overtones and accusations. Maureen Dowd, herself a daughter of a police detective, admits to her tendency to side with the police. But, as she also admits, “this time, I'm struggling.”<sup>i</sup>

After going through a fairly reasonable analysis of the known facts surrounding the case – facts that indicate that both Crowley and Gates gave way to emotions that escalated the investigation into a confrontation and then an arrest, she comes to the conclusion that “No matter how odd or confrontational Henry Louis Gates Jr. was that afternoon, he should not have been arrested once Sergeant Crowley ascertained that the Harvard professor was in his own home.”<sup>ii</sup>

Regardless of whether we agree with that assessment or not, the most interesting thing that she notes from the perspective of ethical decision-making issues is where she quotes John Timoney, police chief of Miami: “There is a fine line between disorderly conduct and freedom of speech. It can get tough out there.”

From our perspective, Timoney makes an indisputable observation: i.e., that the everyday, real ethical decisions that police professionals must make on the street, in seconds, in the heat of emotional moments, loaded with potential controversy and aftereffects for their suspects, themselves and their departments are tough and anything but easy. That is why training in ethics is indispensable, critical, and cannot be overdone any more than any other critical training that police receive. It seems clear that ethics training that aims at the real and the concrete is really and concretely necessary.

<sup>i</sup> Maureen Dowd, “Bite Your Tongue,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

INTEGRITY IS  
NOT SOMETHING  
THAT YOU  
SHOULD HAVE  
TO THINK  
ABOUT... NOR  
CONSIDER  
DOING... BUT  
SOMETHING IN  
THE HEART THAT  
IS ALREADY  
DONE.

DOUG  
FIREBAUGH

## ETHICS OF CONFIDENTIALITY

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one committed to transparency and openness: How do you justify your silence or lack of a detailed explanation about a decision, especially when you have been espousing respect for “process’ and shared governance?<sup>i</sup>

There is the dilemma, nicely stated, but not resolved. This is precisely the question raised by our ILEA participants in our ethics and leadership courses. So, what are the answers to this issue, if any?

Again, the legal possibilities associated with leaking confidential personnel information are manifold and potentially severely expose one’s organization to expensive lawsuit, due mainly to what amounts to besmirching and damaging one’s professional reputation and, therefore, the capacity to gain a livelihood. This “exposure” shall be looked down upon by those legal heads tasked with protecting the reputation and the treasury of the organization, and thus, they will advise against an open, “transparent” sharing of the truth surrounding these kinds of matters in favor of remaining wedded to the concept of confidentiality and standing silent.

But that speaks nothing to the realm of ethics. It is well-known that one can be sued for good reason, bad reason, or no reason whatsoever in this fine country of ours. That is our legal strength and also can become a legal weakness as well. Nevertheless, ethics goes well beyond the confines of legality into a world even less clear but more stricken with the lives human beings live among each other, how they regard one another, and how they function (or not) as a team.

Ethically speaking there has been, at least in the halls of academia, a tradition of upholding the principle of confidentiality and privacy. This tradition seems still to be at play in the workplace of the colleges and universities of our country. As we look to what Olsen, again, has to say concerning this:

Confidentiality over personnel issues is a burden that most administrators must bear every day. Academic culture is one of fair play and ethical treatment of personnel. Were that not so, administrators could willy-nilly reveal information that could potentially damage the reputations

of those faculty and staff members involved in personnel conflicts.

Thankfully, however, higher education in the United States enjoys a well-developed system of protection for those accused of ethical and legal violations, even after they have been found to be culpable.<sup>ii</sup>

Now, I wonder how this might transfer over to the profession of law enforcement as a possible resolution to our dilemma? Is the profession of policing like academia enough to have the same “culture of fair play and ethical treatment of personnel?” I think it is and can be linked to that “culture” by two other principles embedded in our laws: that of being innocent until proven guilty, and that of not being tried and convicted for the same offense twice.

I doubt that I could find anyone in law enforcement who would wish to see the principle of one being innocent until proven guilty abandoned. In the case of a pending case of police misconduct that is still under investigation, given this principle, we should not speak freely, openly, and widely of it because the officer accused has not been proven guilty of it as yet, and could suffer irreparable career and personal damage from a broadcasting of the investigation and accusation they are undergoing.

I also doubt that I could find anyone in law enforcement who would wish to see the principle of “double jeopardy” abandoned. In the case of the officer that was found culpable of the misconduct and was disciplined or dismissed as a result, they have been convicted and punished adequately for their offense, and now would seem to deserve the chance to be redeemed and “live clean,” henceforth. To speak freely, openly, and widely about the details of their offense instead of going quietly about the business of the requisite discipline or dismissal without unnecessary and pernicious fanfare, would amount, I think, to an unjust form of “double jeopardy.” This holds, it seems to me, for internal inquiries about the case.

Hence, I think it clear that a general area for a resolution of our dilemma is that, for this kind of ethical culture that values fair play, ethical treatment, and buys into the principles mentioned just above, the contest between transparency and confidentiality must be settled in favor of confidentiality. It must also be added that it is also

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INDIVIDUAL  
COMMITMENT TO  
A GROUP EFFORT  
— THAT IS WHAT  
MAKES A TEAM  
WORK, A  
COMPANY WORK,  
A SOCIETY WORK,  
A CIVILIZATION  
WORK.

VINCE  
LOMBARDI

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Editor.....Daniel T. Primozić  
Staff Asst.....Tracy B. Harris

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inquiring minds ask, that you simply are not at liberty to talk about the case because you are ethically bound not to do so. This might not be sufficient for the gossip train or the rumor mill, but it does meet a high ethical standard that I think is at work in professionalism and policing.

However, this "resolution" begs the question of what one agency owes another when a culpable and dismissed officer applies for another job in policing elsewhere in our country. Does the chief who dismissed the officer remain silent and give the officer a shot at redemption at another department? Does it depend upon the offense for which the offer was dismissed?

When it comes to external inquiries about the disciplines or dismissals from agencies who potential will hire the disciplined or dismissed employee, the answer concerning the conflict between transparency (candor) and confidentiality might look different from an ethical viewpoint. The question is beset from a legal point of view, but it seems that one is legally bound to give very little out in the way of information about former employees that have given trouble to the organization.

But, from an ethical viewpoint, is it correct to withhold important information

about officer misconduct from another, sister agency that might, again, let this person buckle on a gun, have the power to temporarily take away someone's liberty, have the power to pull citizens over on a city street in the middle of the night, etc.? That presents another quandary of quite another sort. Is it a sort analogous to the kind that the Catholic Church has struggled with when they reassigned priests that had acted sometimes criminally? Is it a sort analogous to letting a child abuser move out of one neighborhood and into another without alerting the citizens of the new neighborhood? If so, when it comes to public safety and security and also when it comes to the safety, security and liability of the police department to which the dismissed police officer applies, there may be a higher moral obligation that trumps the legalities involved.

That is what I meant when I said that the ethical concerns in all of this are not easy ones. Nor are the answers that can be offered entirely satisfactory ones. Sometimes all that can be done in a space as small as this is to expose the difficulty of the ethical problems. I hope to have done at least that much.

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<sup>i</sup> Gary Olsen, "The Burden of Confidentiality: When is Secrecy Acceptable in Academic Decision Making?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*



Colonel Jack Poe, Chaplain (left), Oklahoma City Police Department speaking on the topic "Managing Stress and the Police Family."



Master Sergeant Greg Giltner, Chaplain (right), Oklahoma City Police Department, assisting Chaplain Poe with his presentation.

## Police and Family Conference

ILEA's popular Police and Family Conference entitled Backing Up a Cop—Building Better Law Enforcement Relationships, took place on July 11-12, 2009. This program was offered free to police officers and their families because of the generous financial support of Halliburton, Sam's Club and the City of Rockwall.

The two-day program centered on strengthening all personal relationships in the law enforcement community through enlightenment, education and the opportunity for personal and professional growth. The Conference provided insights, experiences and strategies that would assist law enforcement practitioners and their significant others—whether dating, married or partnered—in making good relationships even stronger.

More than 60 law enforcement personnel from all over Texas along with their spouses, domestic partners and significant others attended the event.