

With Assigning Blame Comes Great Accountability

The case of active shooter John is controversial and high profile. If a case of this caliber loses in court, there is a demand for accountability and the Chief is under considerable pressure. The conflict we are experiencing and the resistance I expect to receive from the Chief is that “One person may be trying to fix blame or humiliate the other, or have false expectations that have not been addressed.” (Cloke, 2011, p 277). In this particular case, the blame is falling back on the patrol officer, Jessica. Barring any considerations of which I am not privy too, I find the decision to fire Jessica as a result of this incident, troubling on many levels. This case has not even been adjudicated and a decision has been made to punish the officer who single handedly captured an armed mass murderer immediately following a shooting spree. She should be getting commended, not fired. What is especially concerning about this, and it happens repeatedly in different forms, is the lack of due process afforded to civil servants as it pertains to assigning blame, firing, and even prosecution. The way the Chief chooses to handle Jessica’s situation will be setting a precedent within the agency and the community in regards to the treatment of Officers.

I plan to approach the Chief utilizing three methods for conflict resolution. First, exposing and correcting false expectations. Next, by answering her objections and meeting her interests. Lastly, I will openly address conflicts and provide resolutions. (Cloke, 2011, p 279). It is important to remember that it was not so long ago that such technology did not even exist. Throughout the years, similar cases have been tried throughout the country without the consideration of body worn camera (BWC) footage. Jessica should not be getting fired because the District Attorney’s office is upset over not having an easy case. In addition, with technology comes malfunction. The issue regarding Jessica’s failure to capture John’s on-scene interview of the active shooter may not have been entirely her fault.

After Jessica’s insistence that she activated her BWC, I discovered and reviewed several previous incidents this agency has experienced regarding lack of footage despite the officers claiming to have activated their cameras. The agency has received multiple complaints from officers claiming they “push the button to activate it- but it doesn’t turn on.” I personally conducted research on the equipment. The brand of camera our agency utilizes has a documented mechanical defect with the activation button. Jessica may very well be telling the truth. She has been an exemplary officer for the past seven years. We must do our due diligence to fully investigate this problem and take it into consideration regarding Jessica’s incident.

It is incumbent upon us as leaders to do the right thing, both in the interest of the public as well as the protection of our agency and our staff. We must uphold the rights of our Officers and ensure they are equally afforded the same Constitutional Right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. My recommendation is to conduct a full

investigation regarding the functionality of the body worn cameras. Identifying and correcting an equipment failure will not only prevent further incidents such as this, it is a much better resolution than identifying the problem as an issue with personnel. Blaming the officer in this situation calls into question her integrity, our agency's ability to hire quality personnel, as well as this department's ability to properly train and manage its officers. I fear it will also further degrade public confidence in our law enforcement officers' abilities and decision making.

By fully investigating this issue as well as presenting a plan to immediately replace faulty equipment, our Chief will be showing the public, the District Attorney, and her staff, that she does not react impulsively or emotionally. The Chief will confidently be able to make fair and educated decision based on facts while remaining transparent regarding our deficiencies and proactive in correcting them. Through this approach, I believe the Chief will bolster public support and maintain the respect of her peers and subordinates despite how the court may rule on this case.

References:

Cloke, K., & Goldsmith, J. (2011). *Resolving conflicts at work: ten strategies for everyone on the job*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.