

## **Corruption To Increase Dramatically But A Role-Model Has Emerged**

**© By Neal Trautman, Ph.D.**

When the soaring economy of the 1990s caused the number of applications to dwindle to a tiny fraction of those received in past years, the majority of law enforcement administrators across America simply selected the best person from a small group of poor applicants. As a result, most agencies throughout the country have now appointed officers they would have never hired ten, fifteen or twenty year ago.

The consequences of hiring these officers will be devastating, and nothing is going to prevent it, for the damage is already done. The character of a person does not change because he or she is suddenly wearing the uniform of an officer or deputy. If we employ a thief, the person is likely to steal on duty when a good opportunity presents itself. The same reality applies for hiring someone who is a bully, bigot or enjoys abusing women sexually.

Making the situation even more severe is that research now reveals the average age of an officer who commits misconduct serious enough for their state certification to be revoked, is 32. The average years in law enforcement when the revocation offense occurs is 7.2 years. In other words, all those officers the profession should have never hired are now nearing the period most prone to serious corruption; the 5-10 year time span, when cynicism grows strong.

To make matters worse, because the economy has deteriorated without warning, many state and local budgets have had dramatic cuts in the last year or two. As a result, lots of agencies are not getting the additional officers they need or the increase in compensation they deserve. The importance of this from the perspective of preventing misconduct, is that research has confirmed that most officers who destroy themselves rationalize their misconduct. The more angry, bitter and frustrated officers become, the more likely they are to commit misconduct and ruin their future. Combine an increase in anger and frustration with having hired officers that should have been hired in the first place and we have the prescription for a nightmare.

The first thing that must happen to stop the continuing harm to our profession is for chiefs and sheriffs to immediately make recruitment and hiring a high priority. All of us should have recognized what was occurring, and been outspoken enough until it stopped. Then we would have had time to make state-of-the-art recruitment seminars available across the country. Lastly, we could have dedicated substantial resources into recruitment so an increase in the number of desirable applicants would be realized quickly. But we didn't.

The second major solution is for top leaders to step forward and address the issue of integrity with honesty and courage. This is something that has been lacking in the past. For instance, the vast majority of officers feel far more stress from their own organization, than from doing their job, yet most leaders act as if they don't know this. If the destruction of this looming disaster is to be limited, administrators must stop ignoring the obvious ethical problems within their department. Having had the interaction of instructing more than 500 ethics leadership seminars, I am positive that the majority of leaders merely pretend they don't know about the ethical flaws. Common examples of what I am referring to include:

- Officers being routinely treated with disrespect by an arrogant, insecure supervisor,

- Promotions and discipline being ruled by favoritism, and
- Officers who should have been fired, arrested or decertified are quietly asked to resign.

The good news is that there has been more research about police corruption in the last five years than the entire preceding century. As a result, the new knowledge has exposed powerful insights about how to prevent misconduct and maintaining integrity. If some chiefs, sheriffs and superintendents will face the challenge “head on,” by implementing the state-of-the-art to prevent corruption, others will follow their lead. Nothing is more influential than role-modeling.

The following checklist is both a list of recommendations for maintaining integrity and a tool for conducting an ethics needs assessment. It attacks what research has substantiated to be the “root causes” of serious corruption. I urge top administrators to make copies for employees to answer anonymously. After calculating the results, you will have the third and fourth key solutions; a basic integrity assessment of your department, and a good starting place. Rectifying the dozens of flaws the checklist is likely to expose, is an outstanding beginning. Those who are willing to do it should be commended.

**In relation to political interference or the lack of political support being detrimental:**

- Our hiring standards have remained high?
- Only officers who should have been hired, have been hired?
- Promotions have been fair and proper?
- Discipline has been fair and consistent?
- Officer terminations have been fair and proper?
- Anger among officers over unfair compensation has not occurred?
- Anger among officers over the lack of manpower has not occurred?

**The recruitment function during the last five years:**

- Has had substantially more funding and manpower dedicated to it?
- Hasn't had any decrease in number of applicants applying to become an officer?
- Has included sending officer(s) to be formally trained about recruitment techniques?
- Has included enhancing our recruitment brochure?
- Now includes compensating employees who recruit applicants?
- Now has recruitment as a major section on our website?
- Now includes a specific person being responsible for recruitment effectiveness?

**As part of our hiring process:**

- A written and oral psychological examination is given?
- Background investigators have received formal background investigation training?
- Background investigators are held accountable for the quality of their investigations?
- Investigators have been personally told of importance of background investigations?
- Investigators are given sufficient time to conduct investigations?
- Investigators have a standardized thorough checklist of tasks to complete?
- Those who interview applicants have received formal training in this type of interview?

**As part of our FTO Program:**

- We have a formal FTO program that lasts at least 12 weeks?
- All FTOs receive 40 hours of formal FTO training?
- Compensation includes at least 5% salary raise or bonus?
- FTOs have meeting at least once each month?
- FTO selection procedures consists of more than submitting a memo for consideration?

The FTO program is truly respected?

The FTOs would say that they are appreciated and supported by the administration?

Recruits evaluation both FTOs and the program?

**As part of internal training:**

The majority of our leaders have received formal ethics training?

Our agency has conducted at least 1 hour of agency-wide ethics training?

We have had officer(s) formally trained as an ethics instructor?

FTOs and other trainers include the ethical perspective of every topic they teach?

The academy in our area usually includes the ethical perspective of the topics they teach?

Ethical dilemma video simulation training has been conducted?

**When referring to the leadership in our department:**

Most officers feel they are supported by the administration?

Most officers feel that discipline is fair and consistent?

FTOs believe they are supported by the administration?

An FTO/Mentoring Program for new sergeants has been implemented?

Leaders always terminated recruits for continual, very low daily evaluations?

Top administrators discipline other leaders the same as non-supervisors?

The perception that the administration “plays favoritism” is totally absent?

Communication is fairly good?

All leaders treat employees with respect and dignity?

The administration has conducted an assessment of the agency’s integrity needs?

**As part of our accountability process, our agency has:**

Administrators who hold themselves accountable for addressing ethical problems?

Progressive discipline, based upon written rules and regulations?

The same individual(s) conduct IA investigations each time?

Anyone who conducts an IA investigation receives formal IA training?

Never allowed leaders to commit violations of policy without being punished?

Never allowed someone to resign who should be fired?

A policy requiring employees report another employee’s serious policy violation?

IA tracks all use of force incidents and provide written reports?

IA tracks citizen complaints?

IA tracks citizen compliments?

IA tracks internal commendations?

IA tracks resisting arrest incidents?

IA conducts drug unit audits of CI funds without notice at least twice each year?

IA conducts drug tests of drug unit officers, without notice at least twice each year?

IA conduct audit of drugs used to train K-9 dogs, without notice, at least twice?

Personnel track overtime use, per officer and provide written reports?

Conducted an assessment of evidence procedures security?

**As part of providing emotional support, our agency:**

Has an effective, confidential counseling/EAP program?

Has an effective, confidential alcohol/drug abuse program?

Provides voluntary family finances/budgeting programs at least once each year?

Has an Early Warning System which tracks more than citizen complaints?

Has a seminar for the spouse of new officers?

Neal Trautman, Ph.D. is the Director of the National Institute of Ethics, National Chairman of the National Commission on Law Enforcement Integrity and President of the International Association of Ethics Trainers. He can be reached at (407) 339-0322 or [ethicsinstitute@earthlink.net](mailto:ethicsinstitute@earthlink.net).