

The Code Of Silence Antidote

If Successful, Systemic Corruption Will Seldom Occur

© Neal E. Trautman, Ph.D.

The vision is that the phenomenon of loyalty that causes the detrimental consequences of the code of silence will become our most powerful tool for preventing serious police corruption. The mission statement is that officers will come to place loyalty to integrity above loyalty to other officers. I am convinced both the vision and mission of the Code of Silence Antidote will be a reality within hundreds of law enforcements agencies within the next decade.

Virtually all law enforcement agencies have the code of silence. The only circumstance in which a department would not have it is if all their officers actually hated each other. The development of loyalty and the code of silence among officers is a totally natural phenomenon among people who spend significant time together. Just as a powerful bond of loyalty grows among family members, close friendships, military buddies and sports teammates, and the loyalty of officers toward each other is a expected and predictable occurrence.

The hold that peer pressure and displaced loyalty has on officers is overwhelming and undeniable. The study of thousands of scandals has now confirmed that it is the inherent nature of workplace corruption to begin with one employee and continues to spread, both in severity and the number of officers involved. Acting as a cancer, it will grow to whatever level the employees within the agency allow it to. If officers don't have the courage to report it or lie for the corrupt officers, it will eventually destroy many people and their families.

Concealed within the same forces that cause officers to cover up misconduct, is the potential to use the identical phenomenon to prevent corruption. With only rare exceptions, the pattern and practice of corruption cannot exist within a culture where loyalty to principles such as honor and integrity are truly embraced as a higher priority than loyalty to another employee. How could it? If the culture of an agency causes officers to feel that their honor is more important than being loyal to another officer committing misconduct, then they will come forward to tell authorities, not look the other way.

Frank Serpico said thirty years ago that “We must create an atmosphere in which the dishonest officer fears the honest ones.” He was right. The challenge has always been how to mold and sustain police cultures so that the vast majority of officers, those who are good, decent people, will not be paralyzed by the fear of being ostracized. In other words, accomplish exactly what Serpico stated during the Knapp Commission.

The *Code of Silence Antidote (COSA)* is intended to literally mold cultures to the point that officers reporting the significant transgressions of fellow workers will be the norm, rather than the exception. When achieved, scandals involving multiple officers can be practically eliminated. This is not only possible; it is probable that officers would be ostracized for not telling about others who are corrupt.

Although the task of changing a culture is never simple or quick, the effort is worth the work, for the potential is invaluable and the price of failure is small. The worst that can happen by implementing COSA is that if the desired culture is not accomplished, numerous procedures that enhance integrity have still been employed.

COSA has been formatted and condensed from research findings of over 10,000 words, into a clear, concise checklist. There are thirty-two standards, grouped within four categories that must be achieved for the certification to be awarded:

- **Chief Administrator Actions,**
- **Recruitment and Hiring,**
- **Training, and**
- **Accountability.**

When administrators can confirm through documentation that they have complied with every COSA standard, the nonprofit, *National Institute of Ethics* will present the department with a Code of Silence Antidote Certification of Compliance, without charge. This checklist and supportive materials can be downloaded from the Institute's website at www.ethicsinstitute.com. The only requirement is that certified departments establish and track a series of statistical indicators so that the profession can actually determine how effective COSA is.

Chief Administrator Actions Checklist

___ Standard One **Totally committed role-modeling of integrity from the chief administrator is seen witnessed by employees.**

Currently, deeply committed role-modeling from a chief or sheriff is not common.

___ Standard Two **The chief administrator personally instructs the first Loyal to Integrity class, to other leaders.**

Currently, sheriffs, superintendents and chiefs seldom teach anything.

___ Standard Three **A Integrity needs assessment is conducted.**

Currently, most agencies have never determined their integrity needs.

___ Standard Four **A plan to concentrate on integrity needs is developed and substantial needs are addressed until resolved.**

Currently, the integrity related needs of many departments are ignored.

___ Standard Five **“Loyal to Integrity” pins/nameplates are acquired for all employees. A policy that mandates they be worn by all except undercover officers is established.**

Currently, no visible display of integrity is worn by employees.

___ Standard Six **All formal leaders are required to speak with those who directly report to them about integrity, loyalty and the code of silence.**

Currently, most employees have never had anyone speak with them regarding integrity and the code of silence.

___ Standard Seven **The chief administrator becomes directly involved in the quality of background investigations by meeting with those who conduct backgrounds to ensure that they have completed a background investigation seminar, are being given sufficient resources, understand how serious these investigations are, and the fact that they will be held accountable for the quality of their investigations.**

Currently, background investigations are not of high quality because they are not a high priority of the chief or sheriff.

___ Standard Eight **The chief or sheriff attends FTO meetings to demonstrate the importance of the program.**

Currently, most FTO programs are not supported by their administration and not respected throughout the organization. As a result, FTOs feel unappreciated and disgruntled, causing them to mold a culture that breeds the frustration used by officers to rationalize misconduct.

___ Standard Nine The chief administrator conducts annual confidential surveys to ascertain the level and source of anger or frustration that employees feel within their agency. Once determined, corrective actions are immediately taken and continued until future surveys confirm that frustration and anger among employees is no longer a need.
Currently, virtually all employees feel substantially more stress from their own employer, than from simply doing their job.

___ Standard Ten Chief administrator demands ethical, respectful role-modeling of all leaders.
Currently, leaders treating others with disrespect and a lack of dignity is a major source of anger and the subsequent rationalization of misconduct.

___ Standard Eleven Chief administrator conducts a need assessment to identify integrity-related needs. Once determined, needs are addressed until corrected, as confirmed through perpetual tracking of statistical integrity indicators.
Currently, the majority of law enforcement agencies have never conducted a integrity needs assessment, and are uneducated and indifferent to the “root causes” of serious corruption.

Recruitment Checklist

___ Standard Twelve Chief administrator conducts a confidential survey with officers having more than ten years of seniority to determine if they believe the department is hiring people the agency would never have hired ten or more years ago. If majority of officers believe so, a recruitment oversight committee is established to develop and implement ways to enhance it.
Currently, nearly all departments have lowered their hiring standards throughout the last decade because they receive fewer applicants. Consequently, those who would have never been hired and are more likely to commit misconduct have become officers.

___ Standard Thirteen The chief administrator openly demonstrates the importance of recruitment by attending recruitment oversight committee meetings and becoming directly involved with the issue of the integrity of those being recruited.
Currently, recruitment is seldom a high priority within most departments.

___ Standard Fourteen Initiated by the chief administrator, all leaders speak with those they directly lead, to discuss the importance of and acquire the commitment for them to personally attempt to recruit high quality people to become officers. Furthermore, the department shall establish some form of compensation for officers who recruit a citizen who is ultimately hired.
Currently, few employees are committed to assisting the recruitment effort.

Academy Training Checklist

___ Standard Fifteen Academy instructors add the code of silence to their mandatory lesson plan and become well versed in code of silence research conducted by the Institute.
Currently, few academies teach students to how the code of silence develops and why they must have the courage to report officers who commit misconduct.

___ **Standard Sixteen Every instructor addresses the ethical perspectives of the specific training topic he or she is teaching.**

Currently, few academies have trainers talk about the ethical perspectives of every topic.

___ **Standard Seventeen A written examination regarding the code of silence is given to academy students.**

Currently, virtually no academies do this. A written examination and answer sheet can be downloaded from the Institute's website, under the Code of Silence Antidote section.

___ **Standard Eighteen Visible signs of integrity reinforcement, such as posters, pictures and quotes, are placed in many locations throughout classrooms and hallways.**

Currently, some academy directors have placed such signs throughout their building.

___ **Standard Nineteen All students literally sign their name to an Oath of Honor, which is framed and placed within their primary classroom. The oath states "Honor, integrity and respect shall never be betrayed. I will always hold myself and others accountable for having the courage to do the right thing."**

Currently, few academies require any version of an oath be taken.

___ **Standard Twenty Video or audio ethical dilemma simulation training that forces students to**

use an ethical decision-making process to decide what they will do when faced with unexpected ethical dilemmas is conducted for all students.

Currently, only a few academies use this form of training. Dilemma scripts may be obtained from the International Association of Ethics Trainers website, at (www.ethicstrainers.com).

FTO Program Checklist

___ **Standard Twenty-One All new officers literally sign their name to an Oath of Honor. The oath states "Honor, integrity and respect shall never be betrayed. I will always hold myself and others accountable for having the courage to do the right thing."**

Currently, few FTO programs require any version of an oath be taken.

___ **Standard Twenty-Two Video or audio ethical dilemma simulation training that forces students to use an ethical decision-making process to decide what they will do when faced with unexpected ethical dilemmas is conducted for all new officers.**

Currently, only a few FTO programs use this form of training. Dilemma scripts may be obtained from the Institute's website (www.ethicsinstitute.com).

___ **Standard Twenty-Three The topics of integrity, honesty and loyalty to integrity are added to the Daily Observation Report form.**

Currently, these evaluation areas are rarely on the DOR form.

___ **Standard Twenty-Four The topics of peer pressure and the code of silence are added to the master training topic list.**

Currently, these topics are seldom the focus of instruction.

___ **Standard Twenty-Five FTOs receive training about the code of silence and the phenomenon of loyalty.**

Currently, FTOs are never trained in these subjects.

___ Standard Twenty-Six FTOs always review written policies and consequences related to honesty, lying and not reporting misconduct.

Currently, these policies are usually not emphasized.

___ Standard Twenty-Seven FTOs always give a written exam on integrity.

Currently, new officers never receive a test about integrity. Objective facts for test questions can be downloaded from the research section of the Institute's website at www.ethicsinstitute.com.

Internal Accountability Checklist

___ Standard Twenty-Eight Use of force, citizen compliments and complaint letters, internal commendations and confirmed violations of policies, along with overtime use records are tracked as a means to intervene. Intervention should occur when the statistics indicate an officer is either in need of positive recognition or assistance to overcome a problem.

Currently, the majority of agencies do not track such records.

___ Standard Twenty-Nine The reality and perception of consistent, progressive discipline is confirmed through a confidential survey. If the perception of officers is that discipline is not fair, corrective measures are taken.

Currently, the perception of unfair discipline is common among officers.

___ Standard Thirty Officers who conduct internal affairs investigations must complete a internal affairs seminar.

Currently, some who conduct IA investigations have never been trained in how to do so.

___ Standard Thirty-One The organization must have written policies that protect whistleblowers.

In addition, policies should mandate termination for anyone who does not report misconduct to a supervisor and IA, and for anyone who lies to IA. Additionally, supervisors must review the policies with subordinates.

Currently, many departments do not have such policies.

___ Standard Thirty-two Quarterly meetings are held during which time mid level supervisors report to administrators on "integrity indicators" within their division. Topics reviewed include citizen compliments and complaint letters, internal commendations and confirmed violations of policies, along with overtime use records. Meetings are referred to as "Integrity Meetings."

Currently, virtually no agencies do this.

If an organization seeks to actually prevent the code of silence from placing loyalty to people ahead of loyalty toward principle, the most important requirement is that its leaders must both have and openly demonstrate a sincere commitment to integrity. It is not enough for leaders to be honorable, for the true issue is whether or not workers within the organization perceive them to be fair and honest is more important. The perception about integrity becomes the reality that leaders must deal with.

Neal Trautman, Ph.D., is the author of ten books, past chairman of the IACP Ethics Training Cmt., past co-chairman of the IACP Police Image and Ethics Cmt., President of the International Association of Ethics Trainers, Commission Chairman of the National Commission on Law Enforcement Integrity, has instructed over 600 leadership seminars and is the Director of the National Institute of Ethics. He can be reached at (800) 273-2559. www.ethicsinstitute.com