

October 30, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: JOHN DOE, Chief  
Chief of Police

FROM: DIANA TRUEBA VEGA, Sergeant  
Recruiting Unit, Fresno Police Department

SUBJECT: IMPACT Model for Law Enforcement Communication-A  
Critical Application

On January 23, 2019, detectives from the Multi-Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium (MAGEC) were working a gang suppression operation in response to an increase of gang shootings within the city limits. Detectives monitored social media accounts of known criminal street gang members and found Facebook live videos that had been posted within minutes of the social media review.

Facebook live videos depicted multiple known criminal street gang members consuming narcotics and armed with firearms. Detectives also identified additional social media posts from the same known gang members summoning criminal street gang members from a particular gang to respond to the Facebook live videos' location for a gang meeting. Detectives researched the identified location and found the apartment was on the second story in an apartment complex. Detectives also found a person that lived there was a known gang member on probation and open to search and seizure.

MAGEC detectives and additional patrol officers responded to the location to conduct a probation search of the location. During the probation search, detectives found over 12 people inside the residence, mostly known criminal street gang members. While detectives were still removing people from within the apartment, one detective approached one of the detainees after the detainee had been searched. The detective perceived the detainee was walking towards the stairwell and was trying to get away. The detective grabbed the detainee, and a physical confrontation ensued between the detective and the detainee. Another officer's body worn camera recorded the physical confrontation, and the video footage of the physical confrontation went viral after it was released by the detainee's attorney.

The incident created a lot of media coverage and attention from the community. The Chief of Police was asked by the media to provide a statement on the situation once the video had been released to the public.

IMPACT Model Analysis relating to the above incident:

### **Identify and Manage Emotions**

The book identifies three tools most effective for managing strong emotions. The three tools are asking questions, reframing, and paraphrasing. In the incident I provided, The Chief of Police provided an interview to the media. The Chief viewed the video of the use of force on camera, and he answered the reporter's questions. The Chief told the reporter there would be an internal affairs investigation conducted on the situation, and he was interested in finding out the results of the investigation.

The Chief utilized the second tactic by reframing, which requires explaining the problem while eliminating emotionally charged language. In the interview, the Chief of Police provided to the media; the Chief reframed the situation by acknowledging the video showed some potentially concerning behavior from the officer. The Chief also committed to having internal affairs conduct a thorough and timely investigation on the use of force depicted on the video.

Utilizing the third tactic, the Chief paraphrased the situation to the journalist and acknowledged he understood the concern the media and the public would have by watching the video. The Chief again reiterated the department's Internal Affairs Bureau would conduct a full investigation on the incident before providing an update to the public. The Chief validated the journalist's concerns along with the possible concerns the public was having after watching the video that the incident would be investigated thoroughly and within a particular period.

### **Master the Story**

Part of mastering the story requires active listening, asking questions, and taking a genuine interest in the other person to understand their perspective. To ascertain what someone's thinking, it is important to read their verbal and nonverbal messages. When the Chief spoke to the reporter and told her he would direct an Internal Affairs Investigation due to the video showing some possible concerning behaviors by the officer, the Chief was also seen making some gestures that could be viewed as disapproval gestures. I think the message the Chief conveyed through his nonverbal communication was that the officer had done something wrong. Mastering a story requires suspending our assumptions, asking questions, and listening carefully. I think the Chief could have mastered the story better by conveying the same message while suspending his assumptions and ensuring his emotions were not portrayed.

### **Promote Positive Behavior**

In the interview, the Chief reassured the public that he would not allow any act of unreasonable force by any of the department's officers. The Chief said the officer

would be held accountable if the Internal Affairs investigation found he acted out of policy. The Chief's comments helped reduce uncertainty within the public and explain that an investigation would be conducted. The officer would be held accountable if it was determined he acted out of policy.

### **Achieve Rapport**

The Chief, who is now retired, is a master at building rapport with the community. The Chief spent all of his career as Chief building relationships with community stakeholders, city leaders, faith leaders, school leaders, and regular citizens. The Chief was considered a local celebrity. Each year, we have a "*Support Blue*" run where community members pay to run a 5K and support their law enforcement at the same time. Our Chief would routinely show up to the run, and people would wait in lines longer than an hour and a half long to take a picture with him. The Chief is very charismatic, and he always made the people he spoke to feel special. He would smile, wave, and speak to everyone, regardless of their background or what side of town they lived in.

The Chief's verbal and nonverbal communication was congruent with each other the majority of the time. In the particular situation of the interview, he provided the news reporter the use of force incident caught on video. The Chief's verbal actions and nonverbal actions were not congruent. He said an investigation would be conducted, but his nonverbal actions said he already believed the officer had done something wrong. Because his verbal and nonverbal communication was so congruent most of the time, it stood out, even more, when they were not congruent with each other.

### **Control Your Response**

Although the Chief's nonverbal actions were telling about how he was feeling regarding the officer's actions, he was able to limit his emotions. Our former Chief was the Chief of Police for 18 years. He was a great chief, and he handled different critical and high profile incidents formidably over the years. I think the Chief's experience during those 18 years helped him build the muscle he needed to ensure he did not lose his temperament during this situation or any other one that was televised. People that worked with our former Chief say that he used to have a short temper earlier in his career. It is evident the Chief worked on identifying his "*hot buttons*" and learned to separate the problems from his emotions. Being able to make that separation made him a very effective chief within our organization. The situation of the officer using force on a body-worn camera was no different. The Chief kept his cool and did not allow the situation or the reporter to get to him while providing a statement.

### **Take Perspective**

The Chief kept an open mind and showed tolerance both towards the officer and the public regarding the situation as he spoke to the news reporter. In this situation, the Chief had to take perspective from both sides. The public deserves to have a police force that will not use an unreasonable amount of force. The officer also deserves a

fair and impartial investigation before the Chief, and the department comes to a finding on the investigation.

The above example is not meant to be a critical assessment of a leader's communication competency. It merely analyzes and reflects on how a law enforcement leader can utilize all aspects of the model while communicating with community members. The above IMPACT model analysis exemplifies the importance of a law enforcement leader knowing, understanding, and ultimately mastering communication skills.

References:

B. D. Fitch, 2016, Law Enforcement Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Management: The Impact Model, Chapter 1