



# the law enforcement trainer

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# 2000

## Managing the Training Function

1998

1999

Frank A. Hackett  
becomes ASLET's new  
Executive Director

1997

1996

The Law Enforcement  
Trainer changes to  
magazine format

1994

1995

1993

1992

ASLET Headquarters  
moves to  
Lewes, Delaware

ASLET formed in  
OPOTA cafeteria

ASLET's first  
International Training  
Seminar held in New  
Orleans, Louisiana

1991

1987

1988

1989

1990

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# The Tribe That Wouldn't Fish

A Parable by Steve Ramirez

The oppressive heat of the equatorial rainforest had not yet taken hold of the village as it laid sleeping in the early morning half-light.

The sounds of birds coming from the forest canopy were accompanied by splashing of fish in the river that ran through the village on its way to the sea. The village was quite like many others that dotted this forest. The walls of the huts were made of sticks and dried red clay. The roofs were made of palm thatch. The cooking fires smoldered just outside each hut. Yet there was something very different about this village. This village had no food for the fires. The chickens and bush pigs had all been eaten. The cassava fields were barren. The forest was nearly empty of game. And this was the tribe that wouldn't fish.

This would be an important day for the tribe. Government officials had arrived the night prior. They had brought with them enough chicken and cassava for the village to eat well at last night's feast. Today, they would meet the tribal elders, over empty cooking fires to discuss the solution to the problem. As the village began to stir the elders and the officials began to assemble in the dusty open space that was the traditional meeting place. The head of the government officials, who's name was Kwame Toowise began to address the elders.

"To the Great Chief and the elders of the village of Kwikphix, I give greetings from the capital city." "Greeting to you," replied Chief Outaluk. "We have heard news of your famine and have come to help you." "How can you help us when you have brought only enough food for one day?" asked the Chief. "We have brought you something better than food," replied Toowise. A murmur of confusion rolled through the gathered tribal members. Kwame Toowise raised his hand. The crowd grew silent. "To bring you food would not solve your problem," said Toowise. "To solve your problem we have brought you these!" The official pointed dramatically toward his assistants who stood beside two large boxes.

The two young men dug deeply into the large boxes and pulled out two equally large nets.

"What! What are we to do with these?" demanded the Chief.

"You are to fish with them," replied Mr. Toowise.

A gasp of revolution came from the crowd and the Chief stood with his mouth open in disbelief.

"What do you mean by this?" asked the Chief.

"We are the Myophic tribe and everyone knows that we have never eaten fish."

"We will teach you," said Mr. Toowise.

"We will teach you to fish and to cook the fish."

Another gasp of disbelief rose from the hungry crowd.

The assistants pulled the nets to the river. They spent hours showing each adult tribal member how to cast the nets. Each cast of the nets yielded more and more fish. The assistants then spent hours teaching them how to cook the fish. And when all the fish was cooked, Mr. Toowish brought the first plate to the Chief. Mr. Toowish offered a piece of fish to the Chief who made a face indicating his disgust. Finally, in order to appease the official, the Chief ate a small piece of fish, but everyone in the tribe saw that it was forced upon him.

Weeks later, after the government officials had left, the forest began to reclaim the village. The Myophic tribe was gone forever. The power to save themselves still ran toward the sea, through the empty village. The other tribes of the forest spoke of their doomed neighbors, but none were surprised of their fate. After all, this was the tribe that would not fish... Everyone knew that it would take more than some nets and a few hours of training to change that.

## Epilogue

In recent times, events involving corruption and brutality within police organizations have damaged the credibility of Law Enforcement professionals nationwide. No place is immune

to the glaring symptoms of a culture in need of repair. Incidents have occurred from New York to Los Angeles, from South Florida to the rural Texas which have resulted in building greater walls between the police and the communities we are sworn to serve.

In November of 1997 the author spent two days at a Police Integrity Regional Symposium, which was hosted by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Service of the U.S. Department of Justice. At the opening remarks of the symposium the participants were informed that we were to act as catalysis for change by developing ideas related to the question of how we as a nation can ensure ethical policing. This of course, is a noble cause if in fact the ideas are ever turned into action.

Dr. Stephen Vicchio of the College of Notre Dame made an observation that struck the core of the problems related to ethics in policing and training that seeks to impact it. During his address of the assembled police executives he said, "There is a story, underneath the story being told. It's not a few bad apples in the barrel. It's the story of how the apples view the barrel." In effect Dr. Vicchio is calling to task the fact that it is the greater culture of any police organization and of law enforcement as a whole which sets the tone. In a word, it is culture that must be changed and just as in the case of the "Kwikphix Tribe," it will take more than a few hours of training to change that.

As law enforcement trainers, we must always remember that the focus should be on learning not training. You can mandate the tribal chief to put all his people through a 40-hour training block on fishing, but if the culture is such that they do not see themselves as fishermen, then it will all be just an exercise in futility. Similarly, ethical behavior, compassion and sensitivity to diverse cultures cannot be mandated via a training session. These behaviors are the result of core values, which must be willingly held by the organization and its members. These core values must be espoused and lived, starting with the executive leadership.

Dr. Edgar Schein of the Sloan School of Management at M.I.T. has stated that "cultures begin with leaders who impose their own values and assumptions on a group." He further posits that it is the dynamic process of culture creation and management that is the essence of leadership. Culture is of course, the "result of a complex group learning process that is only partially influenced by leader behavior." Dr. Schein makes a very important point when he makes the distinction that leaders create and change cultures for the good of the group while managers and administrators live within them. In order to ensure a more professional and ethical police culture, we must provide training which focuses on real learning in relation to the development of transformational leaders.

A great deal of law enforcement training is focused on such topics as weapon usage, tactics, criminal investigation and other functional aspects of basic law enforcement. These are vital topics, which translate directly to the skills, knowledge base and professionalism of field officers. However, very little training/learning opportunities exist to help prepare law enforcement leaders in their role as cultural change agents and managers.

As law enforcement trainers, we must look outside "the box" that is our current culture in quest for greater options in cultural change management. We should look toward the business community and other cultural worlds in our search for answers. All the 40 hour training blocks in the history of humanity will not make a difference if they are forced upon a culture who does not truly support creative learning, risk taking, problem solving and critical thinking. As law enforcement trainers we must stop trying to influence the "few bad apples" and instead seek to change the nature of the whole barrel.

*About the Author: Steve Ramirez is the Chief of Police at St. Mary's University of San Antonio, TX. He holds a B.S. degree in Management and a M.S. degree in Human Resource Development. Steve is currently enrolled in the Executive Leadership doctoral program at the George Washington University. He has over sixteen years of combined civilian and military law enforcement experience. ❶*