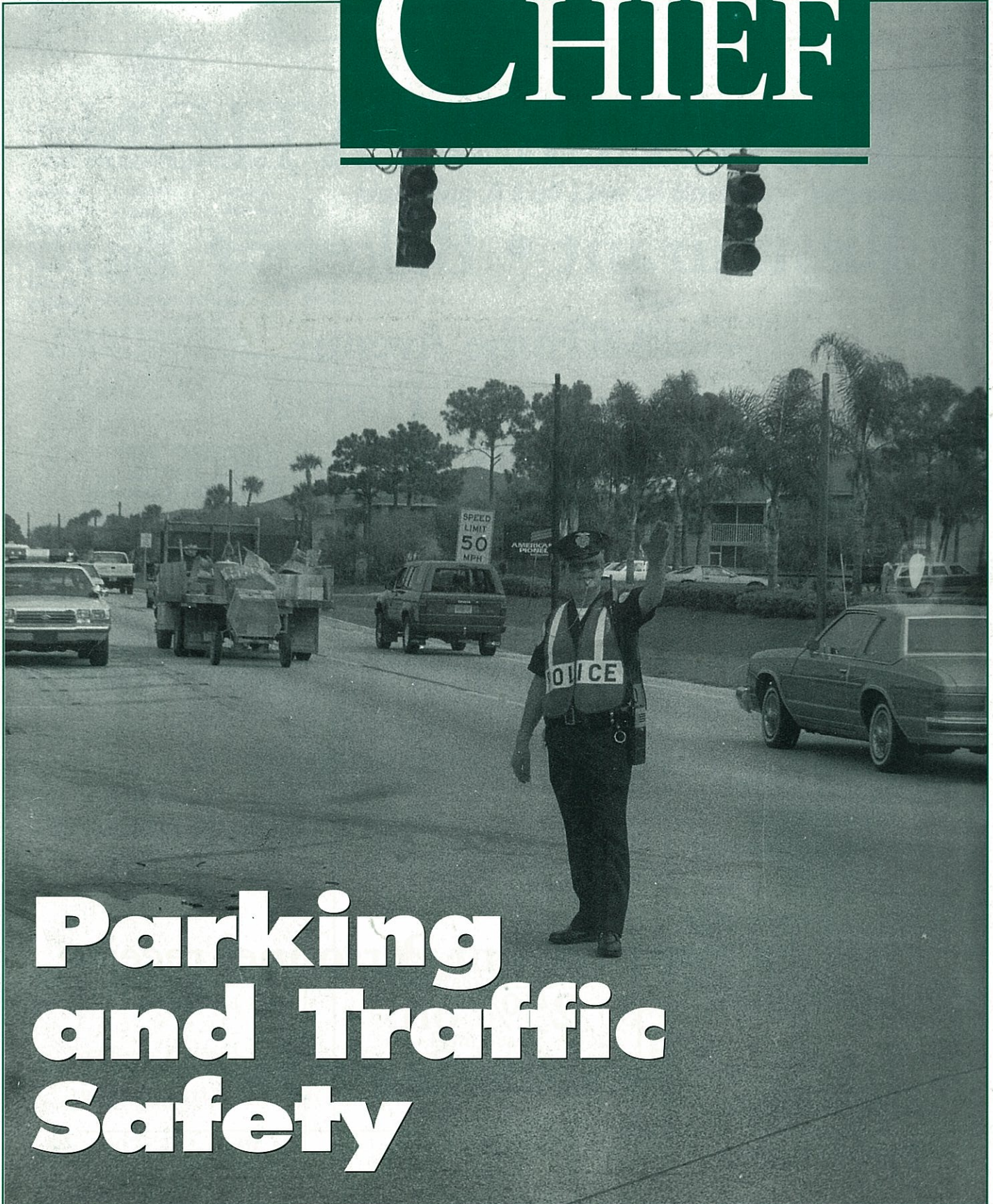


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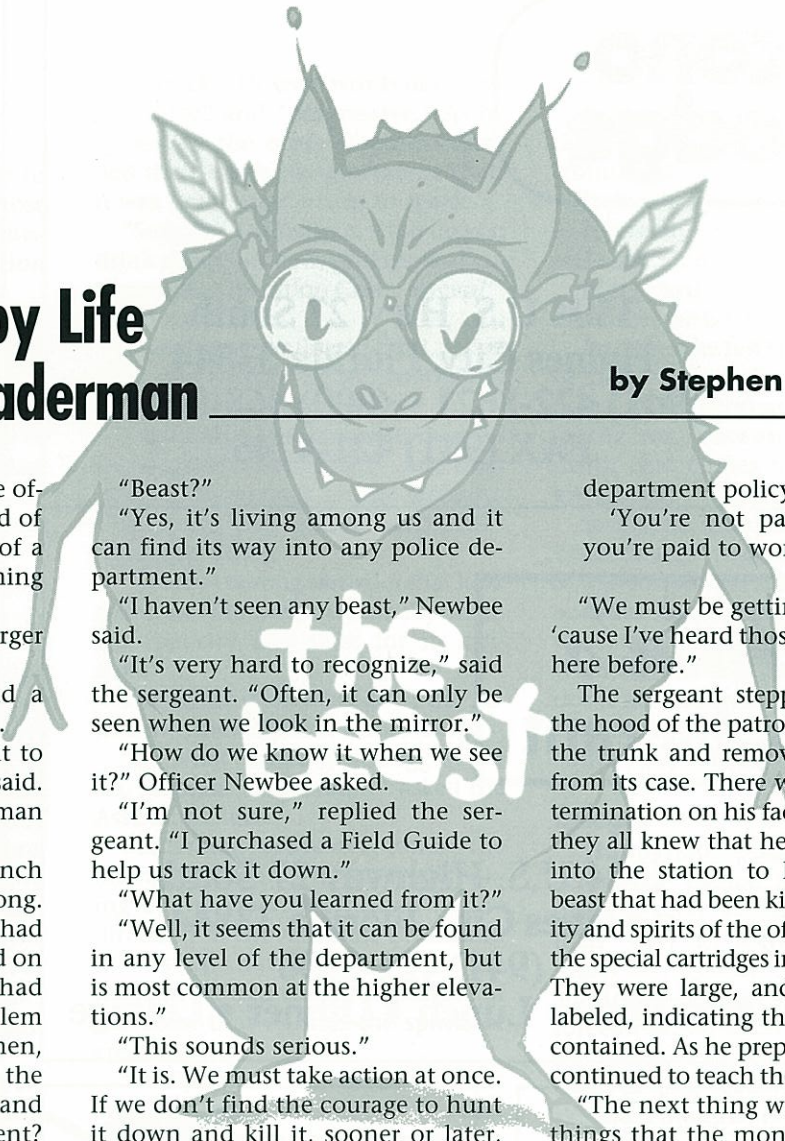
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(A Parable)

**The Short Happy Life
 of Sergeant Leaderman**

by Stephen A. Ramirez



It was lunch time. Three police officers were sitting on the hood of the patrol car under the shade of a large tree, pretending that nothing had happened.
 "Did you order the cheeseburger or Big Mac?" Leaderman asked.
 "I had the cheeseburger and a Coke," Officer Gooden told him.
 "I'll have a Coke too. I need it to help me forget," Officer Newbee said.
 "I guess it would help," Leaderman agreed.
 The three police officers ate lunch and wondered what had gone wrong. It was a good idea that they had presented. They had worked hard on it. They were creative. They had solved the traffic control problem on their own initiative. Why, then, did they get knocked down by the beast that lurks in the hallways and office spaces of every department? Why were they left feeling as if their hopes, zeal, and creativity had been crushed? Worst of all, why did Sergeant Leaderman back down when the pressure was on? A cool wind blew in off the ocean and shook the limbs of the tree. The ocean was rough today.
 "Don't worry guys, I'm gonna try again," Leaderman said, brushing back his thinning hair.
 "Why'd they do it, Sarge?"
 "Yah, why'd they have to go and talk to us like that?"
 "We're not stupid, Sarge. It makes you not want to try anymore."
 "It's not really all their fault, guys," said Leaderman.
 "Whose fault is it then?" asked Gooden.
 "It's the beast that we all must face," Leaderman replied.

"Beast?"
 "Yes, it's living among us and it can find its way into any police department."
 "I haven't seen any beast," Newbee said.
 "It's very hard to recognize," said the sergeant. "Often, it can only be seen when we look in the mirror."
 "How do we know it when we see it?" Officer Newbee asked.
 "I'm not sure," replied the sergeant. "I purchased a Field Guide to help us track it down."
 "What have you learned from it?"
 "Well, it seems that it can be found in any level of the department, but is most common at the higher elevations."
 "This sounds serious."
 "It is. We must take action at once. If we don't find the courage to hunt it down and kill it, sooner or later, the entire department will consist only of glassy-eyed zombies plodding endlessly toward retirement."
 Officer Gooden looked at Officer Newbee. He could see the cold sweat building on the young officer's brow.
 "What does it look like, Sarge?" asked Gooden.
 "That's the worst of it. This beast can look just like us. According to the guide, we can identify it in three ways," replied the sergeant.
 "The first way to identify this monster is by the things it says, such as:
 'That's the way we've always done it.'
 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'
 'Don't rock the boat by bringing your college boy ideas around here.'
 'You can't do that, it's not

department policy.'
 'You're not paid to think, you're paid to work.'
 "We must be getting closer, Sarge, 'cause I've heard those things around here before."
 The sergeant stepped down from the hood of the patrol car. He opened the trunk and removed the weapon from its case. There was a look of determination on his face this time, and they all knew that he was going back into the station to hunt down the beast that had been killing the creativity and spirits of the officers. He placed the special cartridges in his vest pocket. They were large, and each one was labeled, indicating the type of load it contained. As he prepared himself, he continued to teach the young officers.
 "The next thing we look for is the things that the monster does," said the sergeant.
 "OK, what are the habits of this killer?" asked Newbee.
 "The guide says that when officers come forward with creative ideas, the beast will often bite off their heads."
 "That would tend to stop creativity," said the youngest patrolman.
 "It gets worse, I'm afraid. When officers try to better themselves through learning and education, the creature will often slap them down."
 The two patrolmen looked grim. Officer Newbee took notes on a small yellow pad as the sergeant continued to read from the guidebook. They all knew that they were coming up against a dangerous foe and they wanted to be prepared.
 "What else is there?" asked the young patrolman.
 (Continued on page 29)

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Leaderman

(Continued from page 27)

"The last habit indicator seems to be the propensity to punish those who make mistakes, even if the mistake was part of the experimentation and creative learning process."

"Cold-hearted monster!" Newbee had temporarily lost his composure. He checked to see that his pistol and extra magazines were loaded. Drops of perspiration ran along the edge of his ballistic vest. The sergeant looked at him intensely.

"There is one last trait that we can use to identify the creature."

"What is it?" asked Officer Gooden, as he snapped his holster and prepared for what lay ahead.

"It seems that we can identify this creature by the effect it has on our department members," said the sergeant. "Whenever this monster is within our ranks, we will notice that our officers will do exactly what they are told to do, but nothing more. Creativity will come to a halt and leadership will be replaced by a self-serving dictatorial management style. Communication will flow down, but rarely up or across the organization."

"It sounds like a malignant cancer," the young patrolman said.

"It is," replied the sergeant. "If we don't stop it soon, we will stop learning and growing as an organization. Eventually, we will all perish."

Sergeant Leaderman started toward the rear door of the police station. As he walked, he rehearsed all that he knew he must do when it came to be his turn to speak at the department's supervisors' meeting. He walked inside the patrol room door, then down the hallway toward the chief's conference room. When he came into the room, he noticed that everything was as usual. The Chief of Police sat at the head of the table, the Assistant Chief sat at the other end, and all subordinate supervisors sat quietly in the middle.

The Chief began to speak of the many "great programs" he had instituted, saying that they had all been successful in the "fight against crime." The Assistant Chief agreed that the department was "on the

right track." He used words like "cutting edge" and "progressive." As he spoke, all the other sergeants nodded their heads in agreement. Then it was Leaderman's turn to speak.

"Sergeant Leaderman, what do you think about our new, progressive programs like 'Operation Crime Sweep?'" asked the Chief.

Leaderman swallowed hard. "Well sir, I don't think we're making any real impact on the problem."

The Chief's eyes met with those of the Assistant Chief briefly, and then he fixed them back on the sergeant. "What do you mean, sergeant?" asked the Chief.

"We are creating statistics that look good, sir, but we're not really making the city any safer for its citizens."

The Chief glanced back at the Assistant Chief without responding.

"So what would you suggest we do, Sergeant Leaderman?" asked the Assistant Chief.

Leaderman looked over toward the other supervisors. They were all looking at the floor. He turned in the direction of the Assistant Chief, and it was at that moment that he thought he had caught a glimpse of the beast that crushes the spirits of creativity.

"Well, sir, the officers of my shift and I have been working on that problem. We believe that first we should always move to define the true cause of the problem, and then take logical actions to create change."

The room was as quiet as death. Leaderman continued to speak as he knew he must.

"Sir, we have come up with some creative and I think innovative approaches to the crime problem in the central west side of the city."

Leaderman looked up just in time to see the attack coming. He knew that he must use everything in his arsenal to stop the beast in its tracks.

It attacked him with Myopathy and he fired back with Vision and Systems Thinking.

It attacked him with Confusion and he struck back with Mission and Goals.

It attacked him with Self-Serving Micro-Management and he fired back

with Compassionate Leadership. It attacked him with the Procedures Manual and he countered with Communication Skills.

It attacked again with Apathy and Entitlement; the sergeant armed himself with Earning and Performance.

It attacked him with Fear, and he defended with Creativity.

And then he felt the blinding flash of pain. It was the last thing that Sergeant Leaderman ever felt before falling from grace and dying the slow death that comes to all those who are labeled, "Not a team player. . . ."

Several months later, after Sergeant Leaderman's resignation had been accepted and he had moved on to another department, the Assistant Chief could be heard to say, "We did what we had to, Chief. After all, we don't need someone like Leaderman rocking the boat and bringing his college boy ideas around here."

Epilogue

Throughout police departments across the United States, there are officers such as "Sergeant Leaderman" who are a dying slow death under an oppressive and uninspired administration. As leaders in law enforcement, we must always remember that one of the most important traits of true leadership is courage. We must have the courage to protect and nurture the creative young leaders in our organizations. We must also have the courage to remove from our organizations those who are in positions of power and who would crush the spirits of creative learning. Our mission as Police Chiefs and Directors of Public Safety goes far beyond maintaining the budget and giving speeches to council members. Our greater mission is to help develop the law enforcement leaders of the future. ☐

Steve Ramirez is the Director of Campus Safety & Security at Palm Beach Atlantic College. He has 15 years of law enforcement training experience and holds a Master of Science Degree in Adult Education/Training from Palm Beach Atlantic College.