



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

A POLICE CHIEF'S GUIDE TO
MASTERING SOUNDBITES, STORYTELLING,
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHRISTOPHER COOK

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PART I

**WHY STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION?**



CHAPTER 1

WHY SHOULD LEADERS AND ADVISORS CARE ABOUT COMMUNICATION?

On March 3, 1991, a bystander took a video of Rodney King being beaten by four police officers in Los Angeles. This horrific incident was televised nationally, leading to significant rioting, loss of trust, and millions in damage. While many law enforcement agencies at the time hadn't been putting a lot of strategy into engaging with communities through the media, it was clear that a national conversation about policing and race was occurring in America. The video of a beating at the hands of law enforcement was placed front and center before our country. Perceptions about the role of the police played out across dinner tables in Main Street, USA.

Policing was different when I started. When I graduated from the police academy in the mid-1990s, there was no training in communication. Instructors didn't talk about the media. While the curriculum touched on history, the British father of modern policing, Sir Robert Peel, was only mentioned in passing, with little information provided about the complex origins of American policing as an institution. Compliance was achieved through brute force. People did what we told them to do. It was a different era, long before mobile phones with cameras became commonplace. Most academies focused on the

physical side of maintaining command presence through conditioning and fitness. Verbal judo, de-escalation, procedural justice, and relational policing weren't in existence yet—at least to the level of importance that professional, modern, and noble departments hold as valuable in today's environment.

Dashcams were starting to find their way into agencies as the twentieth century ended, as an effort to thwart some of the challenges of the rise of handheld camcorders and video that were negatively affecting the profession. Even though there was no YouTube until 2005, citizens routinely filmed police interactions and shared them with news organizations. Two television names synonymous with the creation of *COPS*, John Langley and Malcolm Barbour, found success through reality television by riding with police officers and showcasing patrol shifts.

It was common to have newspaper journalists and television reporters assigned to crime beats. In some agencies, reporters had office space at the stations where they would collect daily crime blotters and prepare stories. Radio Shack had pioneered scanners that could listen to police radios over the airwaves. There was no encryption back then. When a major incident occurred, a news van wrapped in television station graphics would roll to a scene with a photographer and reporter.

The purpose of sharing this history is to demonstrate a fundamental shift in communication that could be traced to almost three decades ago. Many issues plaguing our profession in the early 1990s still harm us today. Police leaders could no longer hide behind their doors when stories emerged. Agencies were on the hook to message their communities. Communities wanted information. The media wanted agencies to be responsive.

We are at a crossroads. We can either let others define our profession, or we can tell our own story. Policing is made up

of a patchwork of thousands of different agencies. My home state of Texas has almost three thousand police departments representing eighty thousand peace officers.² Across the US, more than eighteen thousand agencies exist. Most are small, some are midsized, and a few cover large urban centers. They may have local, county, state, or federal jurisdiction. My point is that narratives are being created in the name of “police,” purporting to represent all departments nationwide when stories are actually distinct to individual agencies. When they are good stories, they reflect favorably on the profession. They reflect poorly on all of us when they are controversial or negative. This is where we start our journey, building the reputation and image that our police officers and law-abiding citizens deserve through the power of narration, sound bites, and community engagement. It’s the beginning of mastering the art of strategic communication.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Communicating when it matters or not communicating at all can mean the difference in job preservation, community trust, and keeping employees engaged. If you are like me, you may have wondered how we got to this point in policing. Why does it seem the news media always focuses on negative news stories surrounding cops? Why do police chiefs have such a short shelf life? How can some community members throw insults at the very officers who took an oath to protect them while others buy them lunches without them knowing? Why do some members of the public experience such disdain and hatred toward us that they burn our police cars or hurl objects at those sworn to protect them? What has happened to the level of trust that we previously enjoyed in this country? How did some symbols representing the

nobility of policing get hijacked to mean extremism and division? Where do we go from here?

These questions continually arise at law enforcement conferences focusing on contemporary leadership issues. I get a lot of calls from agencies and executives when they feel the squeeze and are put into a negative situation in the community. The most common request I receive deals with managing the communications side of an incident or issue. All too often, executives are ill-prepared to deal with something as simple as talking to the media, releasing a fact set to the community, and messaging internally with their workforce. Strategic communication is the most important aspect that police executives often overlook.

What if I told you that your longevity as a sheriff or police chief depends on understanding and adhering to best practices in communication? For those of you who have either experienced this firsthand or witnessed one of your peers undergo this hard lesson, you would immediately raise your hand in agreement. A key reminder taught in leadership academies around the country is that leaders who cannot or are unwilling to communicate are just one major tragedy away from being on the unemployment line.

Strategic communication keeps your ship on course. When leaders are pushed out, especially during turbulent times, there is a harmful effect across the agency and profession. A cascade of negative news stories and community comments will likely follow a forced departure, undermining credibility and eroding trust in any agency and the profession.

HOW WELL DO WE COMMUNICATE?

There is a problem in American policing due to how officers have been trained to communicate. Historically, policing has typically been viewed as a secretive society—something that outsiders may refer to as an “us versus them” mentality. Police officers have been conditioned to think that the investigation takes precedence over everything else, including releasing any information we fear may derail a criminal inquiry. Unfortunately, this has resulted in countless law enforcement executives losing their jobs, communities in crisis, and officers left holding the bag to restore order and a sense of normalcy.

While no one advocates that agencies release too much information, best practices suggest that basic information be provided to answer questions that a community would legitimately be interested in. This is the balancing act of maintaining investigative integrity while subscribing to the basic tenets of informing the public. In policing, silence is not golden, as many were previously taught. It can have the opposite effect of speaking volumes or allowing people to fill in their own narration of what they believe occurred during incidents. “No comment” is a comment.

Look no further than to recent school shootings, officer misconduct incidents, horrific fires, and other critical incidents that captivate the minds and attention of those we swore an oath to protect and serve. Public information was often nonexistent, mistake-laden, or dribbled out like a leaking faucet. Information that is slow to be released harms an agency and the community and undermines credibility.

All these issues combine to create a perfect storm of misinformation and mistrust. There is no doubt that our people who don their badges, answer telephones, and provide core neighborhood services in the interest of public safety deserve better from our leaders. Our noble profession deserves better.

As leaders, we must commit ourselves to handling public information with excellence. We must strategize on the best way to manage communications. We must train what we would do if the unthinkable landed on our doorsteps.

This means obtaining factually based information in a timely manner. Everyone knows that knowledge of facts can evolve, especially during a critical incident, and that initial information may change as the incident unfolds. The real focus should be obtaining a basic fact set that can be released immediately. We train extensively in other aspects of policing, such as firearms proficiency, use of force, and emergency vehicle operation, however, we continually overlook the basics of releasing facts to the public, media, and our employees. Why is that?

I am not purporting that there is a conspiracy to cover up incidents, nor am I saying that these issues are intentional on the part of leaders. I believe most executives want to excel in their positions, emphasizing positive community engagement. I am advocating for reaffirming and committing to strategies that put our profession in the most effective position. Everyone knows it is much easier to police in communities that respect their departments. Have you ever wondered what the core foundation of building trust is? It's communication. It's being strategic about communication efforts.

Bottom line: we hire executives to lead police agencies of all shapes and sizes. We train them on budget, policy, and the inner workings of their governmental structure. Rarely do we formally strategize on how to communicate effectively. It's as if the profession assumes that communication will occur naturally. While some charismatic leaders possess a natural gift in oral and written communication, as professionals, we can no longer approach communication haphazardly and hope that our leaders will get through the tough times on their own. We must commit to learning, partnering with peers, attending leadership conferences, and investing in tools and strategies that work.

Additionally, the problem is that we are creatures of habit. For decades, we barely released details about an incident, or we hid behind the notion that we could not release video of an officer-involved shooting until the district attorney said we could. Some states indeed have very restrictive laws governing the release of public information. Some of us are stuck in the past and keep doing what we have always done—embracing a “nothing here to see or talk about” mentality. Some agencies have determined that their department will only push releases on social media, thereby bypassing traditional media. Ironically, we see a shift to removing the ability to comment on some posts. This is detrimental to our profession and will further erode public trust and continuing challenges for agencies.

Communication takes many different facets—internal, external, written, spoken, video-based, audio content, and social media. Police leaders cannot fully understand community perspectives without committing to getting communication right. Unsurprisingly, several successful law enforcement executives form community advisory boards, chiefs’ panels, and consultative groups to stay in touch with the community’s perceptions and mindset. By listening and actively participating in conversations, both internally and in external-facing groups, executives can become more informed, which leads to better decision-making across the board.

The saying “it’s lonely at the top” can take on a new meaning, suggesting that the top may be the last person to know what is happening inside the organization or within the community. That is why leaders must formally commit themselves to communication practices and find ways to receive information from various sources.

One way for a leader to accomplish information gathering is to have the right people monitoring community social media posts, which can alert an agency that trouble, or perception of trouble, is brewing. The correct people can also

produce content that meets the communication demands of the jurisdiction and can quickly release appropriate information. Best-selling author Jim Collins said it best: “Great vision without great people is irrelevant.” His book *Good To Great* features a multitude of leadership principles for the private sector that also have significant relevance for governmental agencies³. Agency heads will learn how to ensure the right person is in the correct position to lead communication in the subsequent chapter.

STRATEGIC THINKING

What is strategic thinking? Leaders and communicators must embrace a way of receiving information, assessing it, formulating a plan, executing the strategy, and then evaluating their effectiveness. The acronym, modified slightly from military planners, is ACE:

- **ASSESS**
- **CHOOSE A PLAN**
- **EXECUTE AND EVALUATE**

It takes time to think strategically. When faced with a tough situation, I often place my iPhone into the “do not disturb” setting, empty my office of distractions and people, and clear my mind. First, I write out the problem or issue our team faces. Next, I jot down the objective and goal. This is the assessment and planning phase of strategic thinking.

Once comfortable, the next step is to choose a plan. The emphasis should be on considering all the alternatives, balancing risks and rewards, and planning the best possible solution. What will enable the highest likelihood for our team to

reach the objective and goal? A decision is required, for better or worse. Indecisiveness will lead to communication failures. Even if the chosen path is wrong or miscalculated, there will be an additional phase to achieve success.

The last phase of strategic thinking is execution and evaluation. We chose our path; now, it's time to take it. Execution and evaluation can be a tangible series of steps. For example, suppose the decision was to host a press conference, release dashcam video, and bring in outside investigative agency support. The execution phase involves completing those tasks.

Many leaders who have taken my advice on the ACE strategy, including myself, sometimes forget to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. Occasionally, we get lucky and execute a brilliant strategy, lessening the desire to reconsider our plan. You are selling yourself short if you don't take some time to evaluate. The evaluation phase may be a formal process, such as an after-action report or simply informal notes placed in your go bag for future similar incidents.

Trust me on this. Strategic thinking will aid you in your career. I will go one step further: it will propel you through future career advancement. Strategic thinking improves your agency's response. It lessens rumors and misinformation. It builds trust, not only with the community and media but with your employees.

So, how do you start thinking strategically? It's a developed trait that must be intentional. With practice and commitment, you can develop your strategic thinking skill set. Once you adopt the ACE strategic principles, you can apply them in many facets of your professional and personal life. My marriage is better because of this premise. I have a better relationship with my city manager due to ACE thinking.

The sky is the limit on how you can embrace this concept. ACE will assist you with strategy development, from team planning and visionary roadmaps to forecasting future

initiatives that are important to your agency. Strategic thinkers are accustomed to continually searching for improvement within their organizations. They anticipate problems. In doing so, responding to challenges becomes less stressful and easier to manage. Imagine having a strategy to deal with any obstacle as a police executive. Your current goals, mission, and vision statements should align with strategic thinking and communication strategies to put you in an advantageous position should any problem arise.

While on the topic of strategic thinking, it is appropriate to discuss risk-taking. Law enforcement is inherently a dangerous and risky business. Most police executives face litigation regularly. We adopt policies and practices to mitigate risks, but the very nature of our profession carries certain risks. A significant element of thinking strategically is assessing issues and problems, developing goals and plans to elevate community standing, and choosing a path that involves taking risks. Now, I am not talking about taking unnecessary risks. I am referencing encouraging our teams to innovate to solve problems.

For example, I was among the first executives to start a body-camera-of-the-week program in Arlington, Texas. It was innovative and bold. Most agencies could not imagine dumping footage, seemingly irrelevant, to the community without an open records or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. But, it negated the community mindset that body camera footage always showed a negative interaction. At the time of this groundbreaking initiative, the only body camera videos being shown across Texas dealt with officer-involved shootings, officer misconduct, and police pursuits that typically resulted in major crashes.

Using the ACE strategic thinking template, we assessed the problem: communities believe we only shoot people, chase people in cars, and engage in misconduct, reinforced by

those types of videos. Our goal was to showcase the everyday work of our officers—changing flat tires, responding to calls for service, unlocking people’s cars, and so on. The plan was to find routine body camera footage that could be released weekly. Our chosen path was to brand the program as “APD Body Worn Camera of the Week” and distribute these videos across social media. We executed it with the assistance of our videographer and former television photojournalist, and the public loved this new initiative. It was out-of-the-box thinking at the time. We evaluated the effectiveness and made a few tweaks here and there.

Interestingly, something happened with the body camera video program we had not anticipated. The local broadcast media grabbed the videos from social media and profiled many of them. We moved the needle on public perception regarding capturing video and achieving our goals.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The next topic concerning the *why* deals with strategically communicating. Now that we know how to think strategically, how does this translate to communication? Strategic communication includes tools, principles, strategies, channels, and guiding plans to accomplish your goals and objectives. It reinforces the agency’s mission, vision, and values. “Excellence In Everything We Do” is my agency’s current vision statement. “Honor Above All, Service Before Self” was the vision statement at my prior agency. With these visionary statements, one can recognize, regardless of position or assignment, that the strategic principles of the organizations are embodied in these words.

Once you have developed your leadership strategy, gained through strategic thinking, the next action is to intertwine

communication initiatives to further that strategy. It's about being intentional in your corporate communications. We need to have a plan. During critical incidents, there should be a written guidebook on what to say, how to say it, and how to protect your department's reputation. Strategic communication is about delegating tasks related to pushing information through various mediums and channels. Think of being strategic in your communications in the following manner:

- **YOU WANT TO PUSH THE BEST POSSIBLE MESSAGE.**
- **YOU WANT TO REACH YOUR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES.**
- **YOU WANT TO USE THE RIGHT CHANNELS.**
- **YOU WANT TO BE EASILY UNDERSTANDABLE.**
- **YOU WANT TO BE TIMELY AND RESPONSIVE.**
- **YOU WANT TO ENSURE YOUR MESSAGING REFLECTS YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES, MISSION, AND VISION.**

Anyone can communicate for the sake of communicating. Being purposeful with a plan requires diligence and work. This is what differentiates being strategic in communications from just spewing information. As Simon Sinek points out, "We are drawn to leaders and organizations that are good at communicating what they believe. Their ability to make us feel like we belong, to make us feel special, safe, and not alone is part of what gives them the ability to inspire us."⁴

WHY ENGAGE WITH MEDIA

The media's power to influence and reflect public opinion has become more pronounced since the dot-com boom. Leveraging traditional and social media can position agencies to collaborate better with community members.⁵ Law

enforcement executives can better message their agencies in the chosen desired form and fashion.

I will never forget a lunch meeting with an executive from a midsize agency. The conversation centered on the executive's department not embracing social media or seeing the value in communicating with traditional media. While intently listening to his misguided attempts to justify not communicating, I was intrigued by the thinking. I couldn't help wondering how many other agency executives are in the same boat as this guy. While the conversation continued with pleasantries and ended with the pointed question of whether I believed that their agency was headed in the wrong direction as it related to managing public information, I was quietly performing social media searches on my telephone to demonstrate that regardless of whether their agency embraced social media or not, the community was already engaging in many conversations about their team on several different platforms. The chief was taken aback. In the course of a lunch conversation, I had managed to change the mind of this executive.

Traditional media remains relevant in our society. Even in small-town America, news media may cover events and incidents. It's important to note that we can leverage their reach to bolster our strategic goals. Even in times of adversity, media can assist with conveying the facts.

Through the advent of social media, law enforcement continues to be at the forefront of both the good and the bad. Heroic videos of pulling crash victims from a burning car will reinforce the notion that police are here to help. Arresting a serious offender highlights to the community that we provide a valuable and noteworthy service. Asking for the public to assist our teams in identifying a prolific burglar reinvigorates the notion that it takes the community to participate and provide tips to solve crimes. Posting a photograph of a newly

hired officer and why they joined our profession will humanize our career field.

On the other end of the spectrum, that use of force incident uploaded to YouTube may question your agency's tactics and how the agency polices. A rant by an upset mom on the status of an investigation about her daughter may be viewed as legitimate in the eyes of social media beholders. Throw in an officer misconduct case, and agencies will likely be forced into a dialogue surrounding the issues. Worse yet, imagine your agency being blamed for the misfortunes of another agency. These examples happen more frequently than one would imagine. And, in recent times, deadly force encounters have called into question the whole legitimacy of our profession.

While many of these facets can put a damper on the future outlook of policing, I think they provide unique opportunities to better influence our narratives. *The Art Of Strategic Communication* seeks to do just that—present new ideas and enable executives to leverage traditional media and harness the power of social media, video, and audio platforms to remain the authoritative source for your organization.

MESSAGING TRIANGLE

Dr. Theron Bowman, an accomplished scholar and police chief, posited a messaging triangle for executives.⁶ At its basic core, we should try to frame communication efforts into the following groups.

The triangle has the community at the top point. Employees are on the left anchor, while bosses (city managers, mayors, and elected officials) are on the right anchor. It would be great if we could keep all three groups engaged and happy with our comms strategy. Still, leaders must always have at

least two groups in their corner regarding a communications strategy to reduce the likelihood of trouble.

Dr. Bowman coached that sometimes our messaging may not resonate with employees, however, as long as we had the community and our bosses on our side, we would likely survive the messaging. Similarly, if our messaging strategy agitated the bosses, as long as employees and the community were in our corner, we would probably be OK. Lastly, if the community questioned our messaging but we had the employees and bosses behind us, we would generally be all right.

This is not a scientific experiment that will reign true in every situation; however, I view it as a guidepost to consider when making large, sometimes difficult, decisions that affect the agency, community, and leadership teams. I incorporate it into my strategic thinking and communication strategies. It has also been a great reminder that if my communications strategy pitted two of the three groups against me, I better rethink the strategy and messages or face an uphill battle that may turn bad.

Using the strategic thinking template of ACE, draw a triangle during your assessment and planning phase. This will help you avoid choosing a plan that does not elicit the necessary support that may be needed during the execution phase.

AUDIENCES

There are ten probable audiences that your team will deal with. Crafting the appropriate message to your audiences should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. If you are a police chief, your messaging to your city manager or mayor/city council should look different than the standard news release that goes to everyone. Yes, you probably should include the release of the notification to your boss. Still, you should also

have some high-level comments to frame the conversation with elected officials and bosses. This is one example of why knowing your target audience as a leader is important.

Here are the ten potential audiences:

1. **PRO-POLICE CROWD**—These folks love you, even when times are tough. They are your biggest cheerleaders. However, this is not the audience we usually need to reach since their mindset aligns with our agencies.
2. **EVERYDAY CITIZENS**—These are the people who are typically in your corner. Historically, most citizens support the idea of rule and law and that policing provides a vital service, even though our profession has experienced some recent hits to trust. Also, leaders and advisors need to understand that the level of support can vary across racial and ethnic backgrounds due to historical precedence and high-profile incidents. Our messaging focus should spend much time and effort with the everyday citizen.
3. **ANTI-LAW ENFORCEMENT CROWD**—For whatever reason, these individuals typically do not support policing initiatives. It could be a bad experience they had or a multitude of other reasons. Don't give up on trying to make positive inroads by demonstrating the care and service your team provides. If you encounter this audience, there are times that a reasonable discussion may be able to turn a person to see a positive point of view surrounding law enforcement. Put a lot of effort into trying to change minds and perceptions based upon earning their respect and trust, which could be a long road, but worth it to put someone in your agency's corner.
4. **HATERS**—People who hate law enforcement. Unlike the anti-law enforcement crowd, which may be able to be swayed toward the middle or even into a supportive role, these folks typically are set in their mind and will work to stir trouble at every turn. If your team meets with them and it's evident that they are in this category, it may be best to try to ignore their social media rants or comments made in public. Unfortunately, I have seen many leaders try to reset a hater, only to be taken advantage of when the time is right. We still provide professional service to this group—we just don't put a lot of energy into messaging this type of audience. The good news is that

haters are small in numbers, and your supporters can sometimes drown out their voices.

5. **TROLLS**—The old saying “don’t feed the trolls” applies to communication. These are typically your haters who like to bait the agency in meetings or on social media. Avoid contact where you can, and treat them with kindness and professionalism if you must engage.
6. **YOUR EMPLOYEES**—Leaders and strategic communication advisors must realize that employees are also an audience. Make no mistake—when leaders take the podium to speak during a news conference, employees listen and will have opinions.
7. **NEIGHBORING LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**—In every agency I have worked in, there is a certain level of competitiveness with other agencies, from who can pay the best salaries and gets the most positive media coverage to who has the coolest gadgets and programs. Based upon this, assume that your neighboring agencies are watching your communication efforts—which is expected and may be viewed as a strategic mindset to stay abreast of what is happening. This also means that you don’t talk about another agency unless you get permission from their leader and can do it in a way that reflects favorably on them.
8. **ELECTED OFFICIALS AND BOSSES**—As a leader and strategic advisor, we can’t lose sight of our elected officials, city managers, county commissioners, district attorneys, and other important people who are astutely watching our communications. We must ensure we are messaging appropriately and making notifications before this audience sees it on television.
9. **NEWS MEDIA**—The media is an audience. This book has strategies for maximizing your key messages and sound bites to this audience.
10. **RETIREES, FAMILIES OF YOUR EMPLOYEES, AND FORMER EMPLOYEES**—While these three groups get lumped into the last audience category, your goal is to keep them on your side. A disgruntled retiree or former employee who resigned or was terminated can cause a stir on the communications side. Families can also be a force multiplier as your team highlights the positive work being accomplished by their loved ones.

LAYOUT OF BOOK

The topics are laid out straightforwardly. The table of contents was strategically developed as a reference that one can quickly flip to, depending on the situation your agency is facing. Based on extensive experience in public and media relations coupled with countless hours with tenured colleagues at educational conferences, this book serves as a testament to those who have come before us and those who will uphold best practices that make a better profession and more informed community. Blueprints are included at the end of each chapter. When appropriate, checklists are included that allow one to quickly reference important considerations when your agency is in the “thick of it.”

REINFORCING THE “WHY”

Why should law enforcement leaders care about strategic communications, media relations, and public engagement? Some may think we have never had anything occur in our jurisdiction that would warrant media training or attention. Or better yet, the news media leaves us alone, right? Wrong. In the twenty-first century, we have seen law enforcement agencies all too often cast into public scrutiny based on one of their officer’s alleged or actual actions. For good or bad, this is where we are as a society—something occurs, and now this incident is placed before your bosses and their bosses for the whole community or the entire world to see.

Therefore, getting things right is important. What happens on the West Coast can directly affect the East Coast and vice versa. We no longer live in a world where news coverage stays localized. Depending on the type and magnitude of an incident, news can break across regions and even the

entire country. Judy Pal, a good friend and mentor, recently reported that about a third of crises go international within one hour.⁷ Let that statistic sink in for a minute. In that initial hour, there is probably no way that you have time to gather all the credible facts and create a messaging strategy or employ the ACE strategic thinking template. As an agency, you are already starting behind the curve.

There were many times in my career when I had been driving to a call, and before I even arrived, my telephone was blowing up with reporters and news desks calling to get the inside scoop. It doesn't matter what size agency you work for. I have worked at small, medium, and large agencies. Depending on the type of incident, any department can become the center of an intense news story. Pretending that nothing is going on will not work and will ultimately lead to the demise of your credibility and possibly your career.

I am not conveying that every big story becomes a problem, nor am I indicating that every big story is negative. However, we respond to shootings, robberies, and other violent crime incidents that typically generate news inquiries and public interest. Advertising dollars drive the commercial nature of traditional news organizations. They compete with other news outlets in their quest to be number one. Crime, controversy, and conflict are well-represented topics in a typical newscast.

In some cases, a school shooting, even if no one is seriously injured or killed, may cause national news. A use of force incident that a community member films may appear on the evening news solely based on the captured video, with no regard to the appropriateness of the application of force. Many people are looking for an opportunity to become that next social media sensation with a viral video that involves police. In all cases that take center stage, public information should take precedence over other job responsibilities

to ensure we prioritize messaging correctly. We have other team members who can take care of the investigative aspects, evidence collection, and scene processing. As executives, we must be dialed into strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic communication.

Taking public relations and information management seriously is vital to your success. Regardless of the size of your police department, someone needs to be prepared to handle incidents that arise. This book will help you with best practices that have been developed over decades of experience. Managing news stories and messaging directly to your community members is one of the most important aspects for any contemporary law enforcement agency.

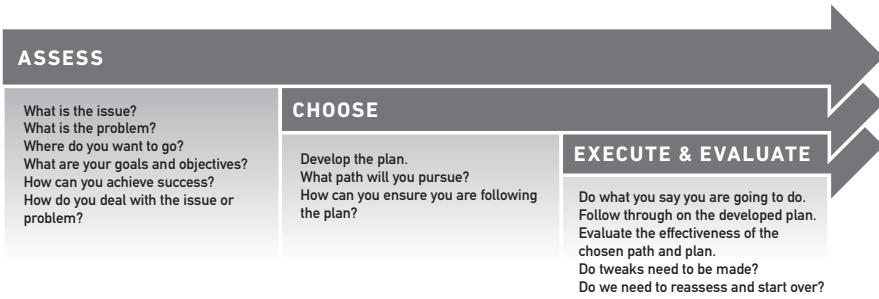
Remember when you saw a breaking news event unfolding on television or social media. If you are like me, you can think of some agencies that commanded the scene and projected confidence in their ability. I bet you can also think of some incidents where the agency was either nonresponsive or went to the microphones unprepared. This spells disaster, overemphasizing the incident and placing scrutiny on whoever is in charge. Questions about your readiness and capability become prevalent. For example, within days of the horrific Maui wildfires that destroyed the town of Lahaina and claimed many lives, the head of the emergency management agency was out, mainly due to communication challenges.⁸ Mismanagement of communications can lead to your failure, not to mention the needless stress you must endure.

By its very nature, law enforcement lends itself to curiosity, with the public having an instinctive desire to know what is happening. We must develop our skill sets to message our communities and work alongside reporters and citizen journalists. I want this book to be a valuable resource you can access whenever needed. The information is based on real-life incidents and experiences, not hypotheticals. Many

lessons were born out of high-profile incidents that forever changed me as a police officer. By their very nature, the big incidents are the ones we need to get correct from the start.

BLUEPRINT—CHAPTER 1

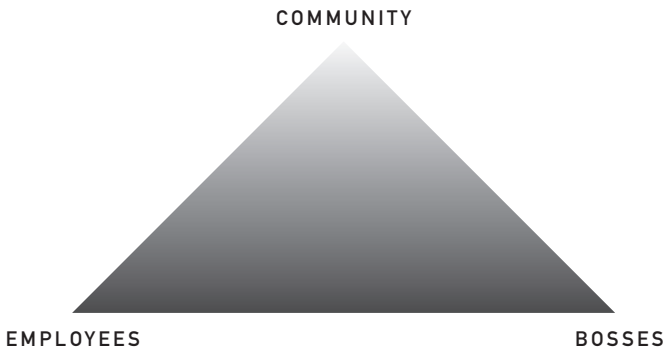
STRATEGIC THINKING ACE TEMPLATE



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PARADIGM



MESSAGING TRIANGLE



CHAPTER 1 PRO TIPS

- Communication is the core foundation for success in an agency.
- Strategic thinking involves the ACE principle—Assess, Choose, Execute, and Evaluate.
- Strategic communication encompasses the tools, principles, strategies, channels, and guiding plan to accomplish your goals and objectives in alignment with your agency’s mission, vision, and values.
- The messaging triangle serves as a check and balance to ensure you generate support for your communication decisions—balancing community, employees, and bosses.

While there are many different audiences, leaders and strategic communication advisors/PIOs must tailor specific messaging to each target audience.