

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS

Stephanie Slater Goldfuss
March 2026

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WHAT IS A BRAND?



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WHAT IS A BRAND?

What is the first thing you think about when you see the badges of these police departments?



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WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT BRAND?



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THE THIN BLUE LINE

- DUTY
- HONOR
- COURAGE
- SACRIFICE



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THE THIN BLUE LINE



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Fw: Item G.4

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Thank You,

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How is our service? [Please take our short survey.](#)

From: William Dora
 Sent: Wednesday, December 2, 2025 11:11 AM
 To: City Clerk <clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
 Subject: Item G.4

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"That's the law"; Parma Police take down Thin Blue Line flag due to Idaho's new flag law

The law limits what flags are permitted to be flown in government buildings and facilities

May 2025: Idaho House Bill 96

The only permitted flags under the new law include:

- The U.S. flag
- The official flag of a gov. entity, U.S. state, or military branch
- The POW/MIA flag
- Official flags of Indian tribes
- Official flags of countries other than the U.S. to commemorate special occasions
- Official flags of Idaho colleges, universities, & public schools.

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WHY WE NEED TO CARE...

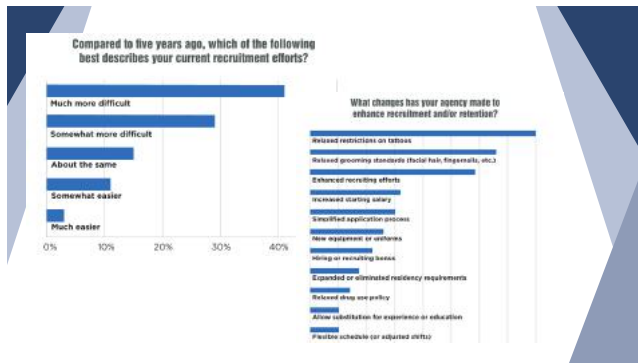
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

The State of Recruitment & Retention: A Continuing Crisis for Policing

2024 SURVEY RESULTS

Scan to read full report

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time to ensure give better answers, and we can see who they really are as opposed to someone who is reacting in the moment and may not consider the best answer to you. **All of these approaches together have greatly increased the quality of candidates we are hiring.**

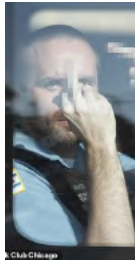
- "I had introduced a new public safety vision through a formal safety mission statement. They introduced for some uniform civilian safety professionals to handle local level from personnel on associated calls for service and require a team response. They also address the Crisis Response team consisting of both the uniformed civilian safety professionals paired with a community social worker to respond to associated calls for service involving a person in crisis. Pursuing a public safety vision allows our vision partners to reflect their attention and time to come prevention, intervention, and response. **We have heard from applicants that one reason they are applying at our agency is due to our public safety vision because it includes additional resources within the department to support seven personnel and better spread out the workload among the whole department.**"
- "Respect for everyone. Accountability for all. Support from the top. High performance and respectful departments."
- "POSITIVE CULTURE - (I cannot speak enough about it. Officers want to be a part of something good, and when they feel they are treated well and have support, they will give support."
- "We work hard to ensure we create a positive organizational culture that supports being the opportunity for engagement and frequent communication between uniformed staff and the chain of command. **Our reputation in the employment cycle is well known for being professional and innovative, and setting the benchmark for excellence.**"
- "We are one year under four years, before we've changed the culture completely. **Addressing issues immediately, allowing all to have a voice or opinion, and ensuring the person comes first.**"
- "We exceed the bar of expectations, and accountability for actions are enforced. Our department could do better. We welcome officer they could get, wherever they are. We have many good applicants because others want to work for our department as our pay is more competitive and command is fair but our mission high standards. We believe if you lower your standards, you lose your best people. **We believe great officers want to be held to high standards as long as they are treated fairly.** Officers have confidence they will be supported when they are right and fairly held accountable when necessary. This is our management philosophy and it has paid dividends in changing the culture of the department."
- "We have restructured the department and changed to a team mentality. This inclusion effort has increased morale, work performance, and retention."
- "Happy employees are the best recruiters."

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**WE BELIEVE WHAT WE SEE
BEFORE WHAT WE HEAR.**



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**PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS ARE
AFFECTED BY THINGS LIKE:**

- Education
- Gender
- Age/Generation
- Faith
- Geography
- Personal/Implicit bias
- Daily Bias



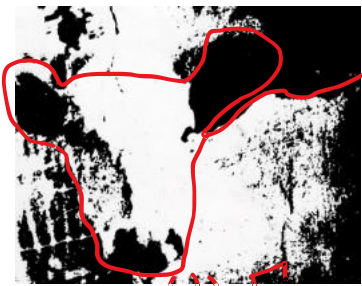
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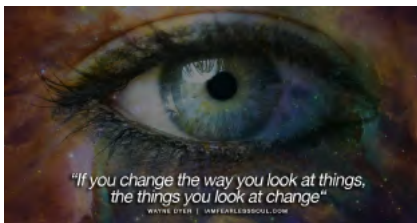
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HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE SEEN?

- Trustworthy
- Professional
- Dependable
- Honest
- Caring
- What else?



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BRAND STUDY - Austin, TX

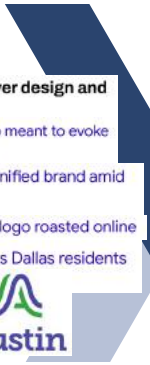
Austin's new logo draws criticism over design and timing

Austin is spending \$1 million on a new logo meant to evoke city's hills, 'violet crown skies'

Austin unveils first-ever city logo and unified brand amid mixed public reaction

'Cracker Barrel attempt': New Austin city logo roasted online

Look familiar? Austin's new \$1M logo has Dallas residents doing a double-take



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BRAND STUDY - Austin, TX



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HOW TO BUILD THE BRAND

- ✔ **DIRECT CONTACT**
 Logos, patches, uniforms, vehicles, website, how your professional staff dress, business cards, volunteers, social media
- ✔ **WORD OF MOUTH**
 People trust people who are like them! Word of mouth is the most influential source of trusted advice.
- ✔ **MEDIA**
 Media mirrors and influences public opinion.

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DIRECT CONTACT



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WORD OF MOUTH

Most influential source of trusted advice; People trust people who are like them.



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WORD OF MOUTH

- Know your audience
- Different demographics want interaction in different ways
- Know your supporters and detractors
- Know others will speak for you
- Create community partnerships
- Liaisons with key community influencers
- Someone else to 'toot your horn' when needed



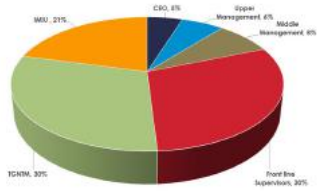
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WORD OF MOUTH

- Who carries your message to the public?
 - Your employees
 - People they know (families, friends)
 - The public who have contact with police ... which is amplified by social media
- Do they have the information they need to speak truthfully about your agency?

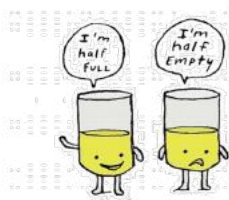
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WHERE DO YOUR EMPLOYEES GET THEIR INFORMATION?



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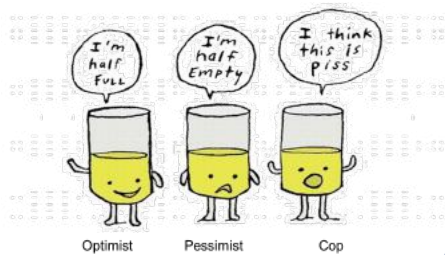
YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE CYNICAL



- Law enforcement personnel get more cynical as they gain years on the job
- What you see affects your perception of the world
- As a boss ... you have to deal with a cynical audience – your subordinates!

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YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE CYNICAL



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WHEN TO FOCUS ON INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Without good internal communication, periods of high-stress and uncertainty result in rumors, taking sides, vying for positions, etc.

- Times of organizational change (new Chief, restructuring, new units)
- Times of crisis
- External attack
- Intense scrutiny by media or public

Leaders must explain the WHY whenever possible. Information is power.

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THE MEDIA



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THE MEDIA

- Symbiotic relationship
- We can't control the media, but we can manage our message.
- Media outlets are a business!
- Media is no longer television, radio and print
- Everyone is a reporter
- The media's job is to inform the public
 - in an easily understandable way ...
 - that is more compelling than the competition ...
 - by deadline, speed is paramount
 - that will draw viewers
- ... and make money for their company

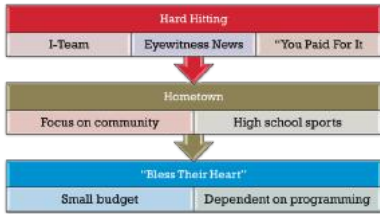
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THE MEDIA - BUSINESS



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NEWS STATION PERSONALITY



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STRINGERS & CITIZEN JOURNALISTS



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FIRST AMENDMENT AUDITORS



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THIS IS WHY WE ALWAYS PREPARE...



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PREPARE



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TARGET AUDIENCES

Before we begin crafting messages, we need to determine who needs to hear it.



1. Victim and her family
2. Police co-workers
3. Anyone he previously arrested, particularly for sex crimes
4. Elected officials
5. Lawyers
6. Residents
7. Potential jury pool

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CRAFTING MESSAGES

- Express care and concern
- Apologize when need and as quickly as possible
- Own mistakes - When you mess up, fess up!
- Define don't defend. Brief on facts as you know them

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CRAFTING MESSAGES

- Leave room for explanation:
- “This is the information that we have right now, as it changes, we will update you.”
- Never start a sentence with “I think” – your opinion is irrelevant



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CRAFTING MESSAGES

- Tell people what happened and what you are doing right now
 - Tell people what they **CAN** do, as opposed to what they **CAN'T** do;
- Instead of: “AVOID THE AREA” say “Fatal crash investigation at 7th and Remington. Use 8th and Astoria.”
- Don't set artificial timelines/make any promises



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CRAFTING MESSAGES

Use Action-Oriented Language vs. Avoidance Language



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CRAFTING MESSAGES



**No comment is a comment!
Instead, try these...**

- We don't have anything to say, add, contribute...
- We haven't read the report, complaint, indictment, lawsuit ...
- We're still gathering facts, just starting our investigation...
- We'll check with our team, our general counsel, our sheriff...

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COP SPEAK

NO!

- Succumbed to injuries
- Fled on foot
- Wooded area
- Ejected from
- Apprehended
- At large
- Transported
- Verbal altercation
- Service weapon

YES!

- Died
- Ran away
- Woods
- Thrown from
- Caught
- Not caught
- Taken/Took
- Argument
- Gun

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MANAGE YOUR MOUTH

- It's OK not to know an answer; respond positively with something like, **"That's information I'll have to get for you"** or **"We'll release that as soon as we can."**
- Don't argue with a reporter, but call them on inappropriate questions
- Don't give personal opinions or answer personal questions



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MANAGE YOUR IMAGE

- Dress appropriately
- Learn to control your nervous gestures
- Ground yourself
- Hands and eyes visible



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MANAGE YOUR IMAGE

- Is your body language contradicting what you're saying?



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KEY TAKAWAYS

- Create your brand
- Actively manage your image
- Everyone plays a role in the brand
- Identify and understand target audiences
- Manage your message – define not defend
- Prepare and rehearse
- Words are important!
- Develop relationships with the media
- Be strategic, not reactive
- Call or text Stephanie!



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