Blue Courage
www.bluecourage.com

Dave Dubois
dave@bluecourage.com
1-603-953-3548
New Hampshire

Mark Perkovich
mark@bluecourage.com
1-480-216-0187
Arizona

Nate Steger
nate@bluecourage.com
1-415-717-1951
California

Chisa Golbourne
chisa@bluecourage.com
1-702-806-5424
Nevada

William Pierson
william@bluecourage.com
1-253-261-7565
Washington

Karen Sullivan
karen@bluecourage.com
1-908-868-9892
New Jersey

Jack Hart
jack@bluecourage.com
1-415-290-2947
California

Howard Powers
howard@bluecourage.com
1-517-515-0427
Michigan

Scott Tyman
scott@bluecourage.com
1-623-330-8252
Arizona

Russ Hicks
russ@bluecourage.com
1-253-255-5769
Washington

Dr. James O’Keefe
james@bluecourage.com
1-646-537-5799
New York

Peter Whittingham
26013@lapd.lacity.org
1-213-842-5953
California

Harold Love
harold@bluecourage.com
1-248-730-2905
Michigan

Kristen Roman
kristen.roman@bluecourage.com
1-608-320-2794
Wisconsin

Noble Wray
noble@bluecourage.com
1-608-345-3835
Wisconsin

Michael Nila
michael@bluecourage.com
1-630-878-4796
Illinois

Daniel Schmer
daniel@bluecourage.com
1-816-665-3199
Missouri

Kristen Ziman
kristen@bluecourage.com
1-630-414-6021
Illinois
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Blue Courage Defined

Blue Courage is a way of being,  
A philosophy that inspires one to  
Embody the noblest of character  
And unquestioned devotion.

It is to flourish in all aspects of life,  
To act with practical wisdom,  
To exude vitality, and  
To hearten human connections.
What is Blue Courage?

Blue Courage is a transformational process focused on the human development of a police officer. It draws on relevant, proven literature and research on human effectiveness, positive psychology, leadership development and neuroscience. The goal is personal and cultural transformation through institutionalizing the heartset, mindset, skillset and toolset of our police officers.

• More than a class – it is a process that is internally led by each agency and not dependent on outside instructors or consultants.
• It is a blend of many disciplines drawn upon to address the “Whole Person” development, engaging the heart, mind, body and spirit.
• The process is designed to address many of the personal challenges police officers face such as: cynicism, relationships, identity, integrity, health, and stress issues.
• Takes officer survival far beyond tactical and critical incident survival and ensures the “readiness” of officers to both prevent and survive the incidents and the aftermath.
• Develops a mental toughness, allowing for the essential “resilience” officers and leaders must have.
• Develops leaders from initial academy orientation and continues throughout an officer’s career.
• Instills a sense of, and commitment to, the purpose and nobility of the policing profession to ensure an absolute service and guardian heart-set.
• Develops a culture of learning, critical thinking, open mindedness, respect and intellectual curiosity.
• Develops a moral compass and the requisite courage to do the hard and right thing in any circumstance that ensures justice, fairness and ensuring legitimacy and procedural justice.
• Ensures that officers understand, embrace and embody the trusting interdependence that is essential for effective partnerships with the community and the justice system.
• Operationalizes America’s historic social contract and policing’s Peelian principles.
What is Blue Courage?

The ability to learn and think, discern, question, be curious, decide wisely, problem solve, intelligently debate, and compassionately serve – all while being morally and physically courageous are the essentials of effective policing. Policing requires the organization and its members to be grounded in the high core values of integrity, courage (moral), and character. To serve effectively, police officers must be happy, healthy, resilient, wise, purpose-driven and principle-centered. These attributes are not unique to policing but are simply the building blocks of a highly evolved, effective human being. Yet, rarely in police training are these attributes developed. They are left to each individual to discover – some do eventually, and many do not.

Blue Courage: The Heart and Mind of the Guardian is an education process designed to ensure the development of a highly evolved police officer who is prepared at any moment to reflect the best of what policing demands. It is designed to forge a culture of leadership, character and service in the spirit of what democratic policing promises its citizenry. It is a process aimed at developing the right: Heartset, Mindset, Skillset and Toolset, enabling officers to meet the demands of modern policing.

Today’s police officers are highly trained and highly skilled operationally. Historically, as much as 90% of police academy basic training is focused on skill development. The same is true of most in-service training for the remainder of an officer’s career. While skill training is essential, it is incomplete. Reflecting on the mind-sets and behaviors that cause police agencies and officers trouble, erode community trust, place officers at greater risk or tarnish the image of policing – rarely are these due to a lack of skills. Most often it is a failure of something else – what Aristotle would call “Practical Wisdom.”

Practical wisdom is how we understand the right way to do the right thing, in a particular circumstance, with a particular person, at a particular time. Arguably, this is foundational to police work and is necessary to master the “craft” of policing.

This educational process is designed not as a class, but a process of continuing education through the development of a reinforcing culture and style of leadership that embodies the high character and ability that the Nobility of Policing demands. It is a process that will influence the influencers – the teachers, FTO’s, trainers, and leaders who shape and mold what police officers will eventually become. And, Blue Courage will be an effective mechanism for transforming the existing police culture.

Blue Courage will be a transcendent process for individuals and organizations – its focus will be on developing the heart, mind, body and spirit of police officers that will endure for a lifetime and not just a career.
What We Offer

Blue Courage offers various workshops, keynotes and presentations, all of which can be customized to fit the audience. Here are descriptions of the main workshops we offer:

**Keynote Presentations**
Inspiring and engaging keynote presentations customized to fit each organization’s needs on a wide range of topics, such as diversity/inclusion, leadership, resilience, the nobility of policing, and practical wisdom to name a few.

**Blue Courage: The Heart and Mind of the Guardian**
Blue Courage is a transformational two-day leadership development workshop designed for all levels of the organization. This revolutionary educational process is a holistic approach to developing our people. It will touch hearts, awaken minds and ignite spirits through dynamic presentations and learning processes.

**Blue Courage Academy (Train-the-Trainer)**
The Blue Courage Academy is a four-day workshop that educates attendees to be able to deliver the two-day workshop to their organization. Attendees are given all necessary supporting materials to successfully teach Blue Courage and impact fellow law enforcement professionals.

**Blue Courage Executive Overview**
A 4 to 8-hour workshop, Blue Courage’s Executive Overview delivers the basic importance of creating a Blue Courage culture of respect and resilience in the law enforcement environment.

**Blue Courage Leadership Academy**
A series of 4 to 6-hour workshops, the Blue Courage Leadership Academy offers essential Blue Courage topics taught one day a month over 6-12 months. Bite size learning is highly effective to ensure that learning is reinforced over time and is not taxing on the time committed to training. Topics include Pursuing Greatness, Nobility of Policing, Respect, Resilience, Inclusive Leadership, Practical Wisdom, Positive Psychology, understanding and changing Culture and Leaders as Coaches.

**The Respect Effect: A Guardian’s Path to Building Trust**
An exploration of the importance of respect to policing and public safety, this unique curriculum built on the neuroscientific principles and behaviors of respect assists members of the law enforcement profession to serve their communities better. This customized curriculum is based upon the book, The Respect Effect: Using the Science of Neuroleadership to Inspire a More Loyal and Productive Workplace by Paul Meshanko. (Also offered to organizations that are not part of the law enforcement community.)

**Inclusive Leadership**
Inclusive Leadership is a transformational, experiential learning based workshop that blends diversity/inclusion learning with leadership development. This intensive three-day course is also offered in other formats to include: a 4-hour for Public Safety course (POST certified), a 1-day basic course, a train-the-trainer for the 1-day course. Areas of focus for Inclusive Leadership include: Understanding and Embracing Diversity and Inclusion, Building Trust, Developing High Performance Teams and Leadership Development.
What We Offer

Blue Courage Resilience
Explores and educates participants on the importance of resilience and stress management that the policing profession demands today. The four-hour course draws on the Institute of HeartMath’s research on resilience, energy and peak performance. The course will also examine positive psychology and mindfulness. Participants will learn the process of “Pattern Interruption” - the practice of quieting the mind by breaking the pattern of our negative thoughts and emotions - the chaos of the day. All designed to create increased mindfulness, awareness, focus and performance.

Blue Courage: Emeritus
With 20, 25, 30 years (or more) of midnight shifts, fights, critical incidents, loss of coworkers, missed family outings, tragedies, politics, loss of close relationships and more, our highly experienced veteran members have selflessly and stoically served their department, community, and profession with nobility, honor, and courage. This 1 to 2-day seminar looks back to honor and validate these decades of service with an appreciation, significance, and meaning that may have been lost over time and a repurposing of heartset and mindset in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual “dimensions of a whole person” needed to envision retirement years as the “end of the beginning” instead of the “beginning of the end.”

Blue Courage: Drive
While a suspect’s “motive” never has to be proven in court to obtain a conviction, the driving question of “why” is how all of us in our roles as leader, spouse, parent, sibling, coworker, and Law Enforcement Officer all try to make sense of other people’s actions (or lack thereof). Based upon Daniel Pink’s Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, this 4 or 8-hour seminar begins with a personal inventory that evaluates current working conditions, discusses the upgrade our mental “operating systems” need, whether money is a motivator for better performance in Law Enforcement, and implementable strategies, regardless of our rank or role in our organizations, to nourish and master our own, our subordinates’, our coworkers’, and our Department’s fundamental human need to be intrinsically motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Blue Courage: Search and Seizure
An unknown French philosopher once said, “When people of action cease to believe in a cause, they then begin to believe only in the action.” When Law Enforcement Officers are not mindful of the purpose and core principles of democratic policing with a Guardian ethos, and lack courage in the moment of testing to always abide by those principles, our “action” becomes focused on the outcome (the number and type of arrests and ensuring convictions), instead of the process (demonstrating honesty, integrity, and empathy in every citizen encounter). This 4 or 8-hour seminar includes not only the most current instruction and application of 4th Amendment rules and cases, but goes above and beyond by integrating the Nobility of Policing, police legitimacy, fundamental fairness, and serving justice as the grounding principles and ethics that all 4th Amendment actions must be centered upon.
Topics Covered in the 2-Day Workshop

Foundations

Purpose: To introduce and orient participants to why Blue Courage is essential for success and offer background information as to how Blue Courage was developed and will be presented.

Research and background information supporting Blue Courage will be presented as well as the four-step pathway from inspiration to mastery. This in-depth module will ensure that participants are learning ready by providing an inspiring overview of Blue Courage to include definitions and examples.

“Before you can learn a new way of doing things, you have to unlearn the old way. So beginnings depend on endings.”

Rick Maurer

Police Culture

Purpose: To ensure that participants understand the power and influence that police culture has on its members, and to understand that culture is “adaptive” and therefore essential for survival.

Police culture is unique with both healthy and unhealthy aspects, all of which significantly influence behaviors. Participants will engage in a dynamic discussion of police culture, how and why it evolves and what role individuals play in either perpetuating or shifting the existing culture. The objective is that officers understand the individual role they play in their culture and that they have the power through their own behavior to alter it for the better.

“Police culture transforms and unifies cops with a shared perception of social justice. Assigned to a territory for which they are responsible, they hold dominion over a shared vision of justice.”

John P. Crank

Nobility of Policing (The “Nobility of Policing” book is provided for participants.)

Purpose: To reignite a sense of passion, purpose and commitment to the profession of policing, and for participants to understand the connection between purpose and engagement with one’s calling.

Cynicism and apathy have long been common in policing. This module sets out to reinforce the principles of our noble profession and to ingrain in officers the importance of purpose in policing. It is a motivating and inspiring reminder of what policing is about, the heroic and rich history and roots of policing, and a reminder of the social contract and ethical responsibilities of democratic policing.

“The Nobility of Policing demands the noblest of character.”

Dr. Stephen R. Covey
**Respect**

*Purpose: To discuss the issue of respect and its fundamental role in building trust and healthy relationships while challenging behavior that compromises respect and human dignity.*

One of the most basic and fundamental principles in human interaction is respect. The police professional who treats every person they encounter with human dignity and respect operates on a higher plane than those who alter their actions based on self-imposed labels, biases or judgment. In this module, we explore the meaning of respect and how it’s applied to policing, leadership and a service mind-set.

> “Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolized.”
>  
> *Albert Einstein*

**Resilience / Hope**

*Purpose: To understand the power of resilience, managing emotions, quieting the mind and storing and recovering energy, while practicing and developing the skills essential for resilience.*

This module explores resilience as it pertains to operational readiness, officer safety, stress management and long-term health and wellness. Participants will learn the power and skills to control thoughts and emotions for the purpose of performing in “peak state” in the face of extreme challenge. Calling on the work of The Institute of Heart Math, participants will learn the science behind developing resilience, while developing a heightened awareness of the “state” they are in at any given moment.

> “Optimal performance requires enhancing personal resilience, developing stress tolerance, and recovering and storing energy.”
>  
> *The Institute of HeartMath*
Topics Covered in the 2-Day Workshop

Positive Psychology

*Purpose: To learn the importance of a positive, grateful, hopeful perspective to a long, healthy, happy and productive life, and the power individuals have to control their thinking.*

The growing field of positive psychology is clear. We can control our thoughts, and the nature of our thoughts clearly influences every aspect of our lives including: attitude, judgment, cognitive ability, health and wellness, and longevity in life. This module provides tangible steps to re-wiring our brains to see the positivity in situations instead of concentrating on the negative. Healthy practices will be presented to participants to ensure they can develop the habits of positive psychology.

> “Happiness is native to the human mind and its physical machine. We think better, perform better, feel better, and are healthier when we are happy.”
> — Maxwell Maltz

Practical Wisdom

*Purpose: To encourage critical thinking and effective decision making through learning the definition of Practical Wisdom and the foundations and virtues of one who does the right thing, that serves the right purpose in any circumstances.*

The authors of the book “Practical Wisdom” teach us that it is about creating the right outcome in challenging circumstances where there is no clear distinction between several options, all of which can be defended as right. This module will teach the essential elements of Practical Wisdom and why it is critical in today’s world of policing. Participants will learn what is required for one to think practically and with what we would call – common sense.

> “Practical Wisdom is the essential human quality that combines the fruits of our individual experiences with our empathy and intellect. It is how we become a good friend, parent, doctor, statesman – or police officer.”
> — Authors of “Practical Wisdom”: Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe
Topics Covered in the 2-Day Workshop

Health / Wellness & High-Performing Brains

Purpose: Participants will learn the role a healthy brain plays in long-term health, wellness and happiness. They will also learn simple routines, and practices to maintain a healthy brain and body.

Culling from the work of Daniel Amen’s “Change Your Brain Change Your Life,” participants will learn that the brain is the hardware in the body that controls performance. This module teaches that brain power can be increased by consciously “feeding” the brain with exercise, sleep, and other essential positive habits. Suggested routines and rituals for maintaining a healthy mind and body will be demonstrated and connected to previous modules for overall well-being.

“What connecting the mind and body is not just a health strategy. It is a movement of consciousness that can change the world.”

Matthew Sanford

The Immortal Cop

Purpose: To understand that while we are all mortal, the nobility of policing and the service and sacrifice to something greater than one’s self can leave a legacy, and make us immortal, never to be forgotten.

The Immortal Cop is about embracing our own legacy. We will discuss the power police officers have to make a distinctive contribution to the lives of those we interact with as police officers. This discussion will inspire officers to awaken to the fact that we are shaping our legacy in every action. That the lives we touch in the course of our careers become the story of our own lives and work. And the good deeds we do in service of others will live on - immortal.

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.”

Pericles – speaking to the families of the Athenian war dead
Participant Reviews

I feel that this course should be (and I hope it is!) the future of policing. We need to reaffirm and support our police officers. When we do that, they feel valued and autonomous and confident in their interaction with the community, and are more willing to understand them.

I think to be an effective officer in the community, it is important to constantly reconnect with your role, mission and purpose as an officer. I believe many officers should be reminded of the nobility in the profession and re evaluate throughout their career whether or not they still have the desire, motivation and ability to be great officer. This course was insightful and resonated the above thoughts about the policing profession.

This course paved the road for reflection. It allowed us to reflect upon us as to why one became a police officer as well as the meaning of policing now. One was not a police officer prior to becoming one and you will not be a police officer when you retire. The shield does not make the officer, the officer makes the shield!

Not the same old stuff that I have had in other classes. New, different, innovative methods and ideas. I absolutely loved and appreciated the fitness portion of the class.

The course should be a must for all agencies; it is a great reminder of why we do what we do. It is refreshing to think there are others who are still sacrificing for the reason of being a servant.

The course was insightful and resonated the above thoughts about the policing profession.

I love the passion and commitment of the Blue Courage team. It's obvious they care and believe. I would suggest this to all law enforcement and wish this could be taught at all academy supervisory schools.

I think our ability to modify the delivery, intermingle the message I can utilize your message to serve me well into the future to keep my guys spirits uplifted, motivated, and all moving forward. So thank you, your people, and your family.
Participant Reviews

Based on the course evaluations, my interviews with the officers, and my personal observations of the instruction, The Blue Courage course really does speak to the hearts and minds of the officers. I have never before heard my officers make comments like “this course changed my life.”

Blue Courage inspires a renewed perspective on the nobility of police work and properly frames why we are doing this job. I absolutely love the foundation of Blue Courage that properly states that we are the Guardians of Democracy. This focus on our constitutional role and oath would make our Founding Father’s proud of this renewed direction that Blue Courage inspires and promotes in policing.

This information is so critical to our profession but goes largely unsaid. What you do is like dusting debris off a shield and putting it squarely back on a cop’s chest. You remind us that we had an ideal and have a purpose. You restore that ideal and you help feed it and you give those who get to hear your message a renewed sense of purpose.

I really enjoyed the program. The program was great for veteran officers that need reminding sometimes about the nobility of our profession. It takes you back to why we all came on the job in the first place.

I thought the training was fantastic! As far as the material is concerned, I thought it was unique and relevant. I have never been to a training seminar that discussed the topics like we did here.

This has been one of the most thought provoking classes/presentations I have received in 31 years of law enforcement. The philosophy of caring, communication, body/mind, a life devoted to servant leadership and incorporation of hear, mind to develop skills to use as our toolset is outstanding.
Sergeant Chip Huth’s special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team had just successfully arrested an armed felon in a Kansas City, Missouri, drug house. The suspect was brought to the porch of the house as Sergeant Huth’s team searched the premises and a middle-aged woman approached, screaming profanities. A crowd began to gather. “She began screaming a stream of profanities at me,” said Huth, “questioning my right to be on her property and to have her son in handcuffs.”

Huth could have taken enforcement action and arrested the suspect’s mother for various violations. He instead chose to walk out, meet her, to listen to her—really listen, “with the intent to understand the true nature of her message.” When she finished her tongue-lashing, he responded:

Let me see if I understand you. You work two jobs to make ends meet...you have to ride the bus to and from your jobs, which puts you at the mercy of the bus schedule...[and] you have to stand outside and wait for long periods of time, regardless of the weather. You worked hard today. You came home with the thought you would get off your feet and relax, but instead you find the police at your house and your son under arrest for selling drugs, and it upsets you very much.2

“Yes,” she said, lowering her voice “Yes, that does upset me.”3 The conversation took a civil turn. Huth asked her some clarifying questions and explained the police’s actions. He could see the anger drain from her face. The crowd began to calm and thin. He then explained to her why the team was searching her home, showed her the warrant, and got her a jacket from inside so she could stay warm.

A fellow officer later questioned whether Huth’s response showed weakness and might have exposed him and his team to safety concerns. Wouldn’t arresting the mother for disorderly conduct have sent a clear message to the neighborhood that no one can disrespect the police?
It is the authors’ opinion that Sergeant Huth used wise discretion in not taking enforcement action, but many might argue that his actions and his demeanor were not the normal response in that circumstance. Why did he do what he did? Because Huth believes that showing respect for all people is a way to build the kind of trust and partnership with the community that is essential for effective policing.

But there is more. In this particular case, Huth’s good judgment enabled him to see that enforcing a law could have compromised his team and his mission. This good judgment—or practical wisdom—demanded certain moral skills such as the ability to truly listen, to empathize, to quickly perceive the particulars of that situation, and to imagine the consequences of alternative scenarios. This woman would not have gone peacefully, Huth noted, and compelling her compliance would have riled the crowd and necessitated several more arrests—and none of them would have gone quietly. His SWAT team would have been taken off the street for a couple of hours, filling out misdemeanor charges, which would have been tied up in municipal court for months. Word of the melee would have spread quickly, cultivating or reinforcing a neighborhood attitude of distrust toward the police. “The original purpose of . . . being in the neighborhood—to make it safer and drug free—[would have been] lost in the shuffle.”

The community complaints would have led to fruitless and counterproductive internal affairs investigations. Since no one on the SWAT team would have done anything technically wrong, the team would have been cleared, creating more community outrage and distrust toward the police. And “the gun-packing, drug-peddling felon” would have become “an instant folk hero in the neighborhood because he ‘stood against the rough-shod police.’”

If the sergeant had chosen a different method to deal with citizens who interject themselves into tense circumstances and question police authority to do their jobs, this situation could have had a much different ending. For this SWAT sergeant to have acted the way he did required both courage—what we call blue courage—and practical wisdom. To police effectively, police officers require both. Discretion is built into the very essence of police work, and exercising it well always demands good character that is built upon a foundation of the virtues of courage and practical wisdom.

The question is how do we develop and educate our officers to ensure their actions embody the spirit, the essence, and the purpose of democratic policing?

**Blue Courage and Practical Wisdom**

The law is the cornerstone of any democracy. It is an expression of principles that aim to preserve the sanctity of a nation. A badge is a symbol of public trust and an officer’s authority to enforce laws, yet it is the person behind the badge who must exercise the judgment as to how the law is used and justice pursued. Exercising sound judgment is essential to effective policing.

The scope of discretion—and its good use and misuse—have long been highly contested in police work. The professionalization of the police in 20th century United States was a response to the broad scope and misuse of police autonomy. Restricting the police to simply law enforcement activities, strict rules, and procedures backed by monitoring, internal investigative units, and disciplinary procedures were among the methods employed to limit widely misused police discretion. The gains in cleaning up the police through this kind of management by rules and supervision had a downside, too. Later reformers—police chiefs such as Darrel Stephens and Lee Brown and academics and criminologists such as law professor Herman Goldstein—sought to reintroduce more discretion and autonomy to encourage innovation.

Problem-oriented policing, for example, sought to free officers from the constraints of bureaucracy and encourage them to take initiatives to find creative solutions to crime problems, moving beyond being reactive forces that responded efficiently to 9-1-1 calls.
the police and communities to promote innovative problem solving with a particular focus on prevention through education and through changing the environment of crimeprone areas. Discretion, wisely used, was seen as the solution, not the problem.

One does not have to take sides in the debate between community and traditional policing models to recognize that wise policing, under any model, can never be fully actualized by a set of rules or procedures. It always demands discretion.

For the police officer who needs to break up a fight in front of a bar, there are likely no identifiable good guys or bad guys. All the parties are likely to be aggrieved and at fault, and no one is going to tell a straight story. What action the officer chooses will depend on the officer’s perception of the situation and ability to imagine the consequences of each move. Whether the crowd is building and hostile, the availability of backup, how serious is the dispute and how intoxicated are the disputants, what techniques has the officer found effective in the past and will they work in this context—all of these demand a wide range of discretion.

- Decisions involving use of force or to remove an individual’s freedom are the most important of all decisions with drastic consequences.
- Many police functions demand activities other than enforcing the law, and these important police roles are much more ambiguous. Giving first aid at accident scenes, helping to find a lost child, dispersing rowdy teens from public places—all of these demand a wide range of discretion.
- Police must constantly balance good principles that pull them in different directions—like Sergeant Huth’s obligation to enforce the law and his obligation to preserve the peace, minimize harm, and sustain community trust.
- Figuring out what a good principle means in a particular case is often difficult. Does pursuing equitable law enforcement always mean an officer should treat everyone absolutely the same—the speeding violation by the partying teenagers and the speeding violation by the expectant father rushing his wife to the hospital, for example?

The kind of discretion exercised by the SWAT sergeant and the officer at the bar are not options for police officers; they are integral to officers doing their everyday jobs well. An officer determined to avoid using discretion will fail or become ineffective. Several reasons for this follow.

To exercise discretion well, an officer needs to know and embrace the purpose or, as Aristotle referred to it, the telos of the profession—not simply law enforcement, but service, justice, and fundamental fairness. Further, exercising discretion well demands habits or virtues of good character such as patience; humility; a sense of fairness and justice; the desire to help others, to listen, and to be empathetic;
and an aspiration to build community trust through collaboration. A police officer cannot exercise these traits without two other critical virtues: (1) courage, to take the risk involved in actually embodying these traits in action; and (2) the practical wisdom, to know when and how to do it.

Few police officers will face the kind of danger that the heroes of 9/11 encountered. But everyone who answers the call of policing understands the ever-present uncertainty and risk. Courage is not simply bravery under fire—it takes courage to challenge a supervisor or a fellow officer making poor decisions that place others in danger or the mission at risk; to speak calmly and firmly in a highly charged, emotional domestic disturbance; to be self-reflective and self-regulating; to admit a mistake; to empathize with others; and to serve the proper aim of policing.

Furthermore, as Aristotle emphasized, courage is not simply fearlessness and willingness to risk one’s life, one’s reputation, one’s job, one’s status, or the good opinions of others. Such an impulse could lead to recklessness or being foolhardy. Courage demands knowing how to find the mean or the balance point between recklessness and cowardice. This is why courage demands the wisdom to know when and how to be fearless and take risks.

Blue courage is defined by the authors as a way of being, a philosophy that inspires one to embody the noblest of character and unquestioned devotion. It is to flourish in all aspects of life, to act with Practical Wisdom, to exude vitality and to hearten human connections.

Practical wisdom is the right way to do the right thing that serves the right purpose, given the particular circumstance, the particular person or persons, and the particular time.

According to the authors, practical wisdom requires a “wise cop” who:
- knows how to improvise to create the right outcome in each circumstance;
- is acutely aware of any social context and how his or her behavior affects others;
- exercises good judgment in making decisions that best serve those involved, given the circumstance of the moment, and given what justice and professional norms demand;
- is humble enough to be empathetic, able to see a situation through the perspective of another, and considerate of how another feels;
- is emotionally in control and uses emotion to inform reason; and
- is an experienced person and works hard to master the craft of policing through relentless learning and practicing of the craft.

Combining blue courage with practical wisdom reflects who the police officer is, not just what he or she does.

The Learning Process

Guidance from police executives and supervisors can be helpful in defining discretionary areas and the array of legitimate and effective intervention methods—that is, the best practices culled from the experience of other officers. But this is not enough.

Leadership and educational opportunities are fundamental in teaching police officers to learn the virtues essential to good character and the moral skills needed to intervene, especially if these courses can help imitate actual experiences by using real-world situations and by working through case studies and figuring out what officers would have done differently and why. It requires a focus on the why as much as the how.

How law enforcement professionals lead their organizations is equally if not more essential than how they educate their officers. Who the leaders are and how they lead shapes the culture and either reinforces or minimizes what officers have been taught. Creating a culture of blue courage and practical wisdom requires extensive influencing of the influencers as well as of young officers. Ultimately, it is the experience itself that will teach character and practical wisdom—especially if it is the right experience.

As Mahatma Gandhi famously said,
“An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.” New recruits learn by watching what is modeled by experienced officers and supervisors who demonstrate courage and exercise good judgment. Experienced officers or trainers who know how to mentor and coach new recruits on the job can speed that learning if they can articulate how and why they made the discretionary choices they are modeling and also help new recruits learn from their own mistakes. Such coaching and mentoring demands practically wise coaches and trainers and a disciplinary system that encourages officers to learn from their errors. One should be able to learn from mistakes and experiences, not cover them up or retreat to protecting oneself from future punishment. 

Relying too heavily on management by rules and supervision encourages officers “to devote themselves to avoidance of mistakes, and the surest way to avoid mistakes is to keep out of the way.” Such management provides “scant opportunity for learning and development because—as a way of thinking—it focuses on adherence to prescribed practices rather than on examination of problems or formulation of new strategies. . . . ‘Keep your nose clean and you’ll do OK’ is the advice new recruits receive from more experienced colleagues. They quickly learn that situations requiring the exercise of judgment (generally situations in which the role of police is most ambiguous) and which therefore demand difficult decisions are, for their career prospects, the most dangerous.”

There have been interesting innovations in this area in recent years. The education-based discipline program created by Sheriff Leroy Baca and the Los Angeles County, California, Sheriff’s Department focuses on behavioral change through education rather than punishment. Mediation programs have been successfully used by the Denver, Colorado, and the Pasadena, California, police departments. Citizen complaints and discipline can be handled by a professional mediator who sits in a neutral place with the officer and citizen to discuss the circumstances of the complaint and reach an understanding. In Kansas City, Missouri, officers can choose to be peer reviewed instead of facing formal disciplinary hearings. The peer review panel suggests behavioral changes that could minimize further complaints. In one case, the panel conducted a role-playing session showing that the officer intimidated people by violating their personal space. The officer followed the panel’s suggestions to move back a few feet and had no further difficulties with citizen interactions. At the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Police Department, the disciplinary procedures there explicitly take into consideration the experience and the intention of the officer subject to discipline. Their guidelines state that “if an employee attempts to devise an innovative, nontraditional solution for a persistent crime or service problem and unintentionally runs afoul of minor procedures, the desire to encourage creativity in our efforts at producing public safety will carry significant weight in dealing with any discipline that might result.”

It is critical that police chiefs be developing a cadre of internal leadership development experts whose full-time responsibility is the continuous education of department personnel. Their focus must be on a holistic approach to growth and development such as is currently being done in the Los Angeles County, California, Sheriff’s Department Deputy Leadership Institute or at the Kansas City, Missouri, Leadership Academy.

Conclusion

A full discussion of how police officers can learn character traits such as courage and practical wisdom is beyond the scope of this article. Clearly learning the habits of courage, empathy, good listening, fairness, patience, and the practical wisdom skills to know when and how to act upon them is essential for police officers called upon to exercise good discretion every day. We know that such courage and wisdom can best be learned through education and experience. We know that most of this experience will be trial and error. We know that most police departments seek to
minimize the very errors upon which learning depends.

Designing institutions that encourage practical wisdom and courage is not easy. This means that chiefs, police administrators, senior officers, and trainers—the influencers—will need a great deal of practical wisdom and considerable courage to learn how to structure the right kinds of educational, leadership, and supervisory experiences.

In short, educating the 21st-century police officer demands an upgrade that focuses equally on essential policing skills and the foundational character and human development of the man or woman behind the badge. In times of shrinking resources and reductions in many of our agencies, it is more important than ever to enhance an officer’s capability, engagement, and ability to apply good judgment. Doing so is a force multiplier that cannot be ignored.

Notes:

2Ibid.
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
6Ibid., chapter 1.
9Sparrow et al., 140.
On Stillness and Silence, the 16 Seconds to Clarity, and Tactical Breathing

By Nate Steger

Prior to attending a davidji lecture given to the Blue Courage Team, I read the following excerpts from his biography: davidji is an internationally recognized life guide, author, meditation recording artist, motivational speaker, and mediation instructor. Known for his practical, real-world methods, he travels the world sharing timeless wisdom on modern day stress management, emotional healing techniques, work/life balance, and finding deeper fulfillment through conscious choicemaking. As the lead educator of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing in Carlsbad, California, davidji apprenticed for nearly a decade under Dr. Deepak Chopra and Dr. David Simon.

Having read it, I asked myself how this material would fare in a roomful of seasoned veterans where the average length of service was twenty years. To our collective surprise, we were all won over and persuaded that this practice embodies the fundamentals of Blue Courage.

His mixture of science, human nature, humor, insight into law enforcement (he has provided military training in Southern California), helped convey the ultimate message.

The amygdala, a small portion of our “animal brain” can send the body—in a second—into an experience of “fight or flight” that our ancestors needed when they heard the sound of a sabertooth tiger walking near them. Instantly, heart rate increased, breathing increased, perspiration increased, blood coagulated in anticipation of being hurt, adrenaline, cortisol, and glucagon were dumped into the blood stream—all short-term needs to survive a life-or-death encounter, but highly toxic to our system if we survived. Today, the amygdala is available to perform the same task should our lives be actually threatened. “Fight or flight,” however, occurs many more times when our lives are not actually threatened leading to major health problems and even death.

Human beings have four emotional needs: Attention, Affection, Appreciation, and Acceptance. We all want to be noticed, loved, needed, and to belong. When those needs are not met, the body reacts, unconscious to our knowing or choosing it, into “fight or flight.” When you thought you were going to be late to this class did you perspire? Did you breathe heavier? Did your pulse rate increase? The average person is in “fight or flight” 8-15 times per day. Now, imagine a police officer over the course of a shift, a week, a month, a year, a career, or a lifetime.
According to davidji, the way to combat the conditioned “fight or flight” response to every external stimulus or internal stress our mind puts us through, is Stillness and Silence “SnS.” This “thought pattern interruption” before, during, and after an event allows us the space for an unconditioned response (not automatically going into “fight or flight”) and the mental space to react calmly and empathetically to situations in front of us. The method to achieve this is “16 seconds to ananda, bliss, and clarity” (16 seconds to clarity). The instructions were clear: focus on your breath and that path it travels in and out of your body and breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, and hold for four seconds. In just that short amount of time, we focused on something other than our issues, our endless stream of thousands of thoughts running through our minds. This process doesn’t stop thoughts from happening, but turns focus, if just for a few seconds, to SnS, Stillness and Silence. In those 16 seconds, heart rate slowed, breathing slowed, perspiration slowed, platelets did not coagulate, blood became more fluid, adrenaline, cortisol, and glucagon were suppressed, and sex hormone, growth hormone, and immune system functions were elevated—all opposites to what hyper-vigilance and “fight or flight” cause within us. This practice not only makes officers react to situations from a place of calmness and mindfulness, but it benefits us as human beings—so that we can outlive this career and enjoy a happy and healthy retirement. The benefits of this practice even appear at the cellular level. Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn is a biological researcher at UCSF who won the “Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine” for discovering the enzyme “Telomerase” which replenishes the telomere—the structure at the end of chromosomes that protects the chromosome and allows for non-cancerous cellular division. In recent years, her colleagues have been investigating the effect of stress on this with the particular emphasis on mindfulness and meditation. Her research revealed “significantly greater” Telomerase activity in those that practice mindfulness and meditation.

The following week, I attended a class by Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman entitled “The Bullet Proof Mind for Law Enforcement.” Here are some excerpts from his biography:

Col. Grossman is a former West Point psychology professor, Professor of Military Science, and an Army Ranger who has combined his experiences to become the founder of a new field of scientific endeavor, which has been termed “killology.” In this new field Col. Grossman has made revolutionary new contributions to our understanding of killing in war, the psychological costs of war, the root causes of the current “virus” of violent crime that is raging around the world, and the process of healing the victims of violence, in war and peace.

One would expect that a military man and combat veteran with a website “killology.net,” would contradict not complement davidji’s lecture. After 6-hours of lecture on world-wide examples of human suffering and tragedy, Lt. Col. Grossman stressed the need for the “sheepdogs” to protect the “sheep” from the “wolves.” He knew that the work of the “sheepdog” in protecting the flock does take its personal, emotional, and mental tolls. He stated that we cannot control the thoughts and images from past events that come into our minds or the intensity in which they present themselves—it’s like a dog nipping at your heels or a leg cramp in the middle of the night—but it becomes a disorder if ignored and untreated and the dog is not “put on the leash.” The “leash” is a tool that you practice before, during, and after events and is called...
“tactical breathing.”

Snipers are taught to use tactical breathing when pulling the trigger for a more accurate shot (pulling the trigger on the exhale). Tactical breathing saved the life of an officer involved in a gunfight who was “spraying and praying.” During a magazine change behind a car in the midst of the shootout, he practiced tactical breathing and delivered the “best shot of his life” which stopped the threat. This breathing allowed the officer to calmly and effectively manage a high stress moment. Whether it’s in the midst of a battle or in dealing with PTSD, it’s tactical breathing that helps you cope with stress and its effects on your body.

Then, Lt. Col. Grossman delivered the “tactical breathing” instruction to this roomful of eager cops: breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, and hold for four seconds.

Whether it’s davidji calling it “16 seconds to clarity” or Lt. Col. Grossman calling it “Tactical Breathing”—and all walks of life and spiritual and meditational practices in between—this breathing has been known about and practiced for centuries. For many of us, however, in this highly stressful yet noble profession, we have failed to integrate this practice into the fabric of our personal and professional lives because it hasn’t yet become a part of our training. Until now.

Written by:
Lt. Jack Hart, San Francisco PD
Blue Courage Team Member

SnS is the first step to mindfulness. For more information regarding this or Blue Courage, please contact myself or Lt. Jack Hart.

Sgt. Nate Steger, Co. D
Blue Courage Team Member