



# ENGAGING HEAD, HAND, AND HEART AT THE CARROLLTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

BY ANN MCGEE-COOPER, GARY LOOPER, AND DUANE TRAMMELL

**C**arrollton, Texas, is a suburb of 115,000 plus citizens in North-west Dallas. The Carrollton Police Department (CPD) has 161 sworn personnel, 78 civilian personnel, 25 sworn reserve officers, and 40 school crossing guards. Bureaus within the department are Management Services, Investigative Services, and Operations.

Police departments are strictly command-and-control operations. It's always been that way. But in Carrollton, Texas, police have forged a hard-won model of servant leadership that defies traditional definitions. A dramatic example of this involved a team of volunteers that drastically lowered motor vehicle break-ins in several sectors of the city.

The servant leadership philosophy was first introduced within the CPD by Chief David James, who had read Robert Greenleaf's essay, "The Servant As Leader," which defied the "hero-as-leader" model so popular in America, then and today (see "What Is Servant Leadership?"). In its place, Greenleaf described a leadership path that puts the growth of others ahead of personal ambition for power, rank, or pay. James knew immediately that this was what he believed about leadership.

"Servant leadership is one critical component of an effective management style. It is one thread in the law

enforcement tapestry that brings consistency and compassion to bear on everyday citizen concerns," says James.

"We have been encouraged by other organizations committed to servant leadership, like TDIndustries and Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates," James continues. "When these two companies organized the Servant Leadership Learning Community (SLLC) in Dallas, we jumped at the opportunity to join."

Chief James has since stepped back to allow Assistant Chief Mac Tristan to represent the police department in the SLLC. For Mac, these quarterly sessions serve to refresh his own commitment as well as connect with other leaders of servant-led organizations in Dallas. Mac always brings an honest disclosure of his own challenges and celebrations. As a result, he has earned the respect and gratitude of everyone in the SLLC. So, the great dream of Robert Greenleaf came to the CPD

through David James, then found another servant's heart in Mac Tristan. And Mac didn't hesitate to take what he was learning at the SLLC sessions back to his team.

The police/citizen ratio is about 1/1000, so typical police work is reactive. Officers can spend all their time on "urgent" matters and routine operations ("Driving for Dollars"), never getting around to the important work of solving chronic problems, developing leadership, or practicing the disciplines of a learning organization. Mac wanted to create a new model for policing after years of command-and-control hierarchy.

## CPOP Traction

Mac's enthusiasm for empowering officers has inspired a Community Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) unit composed of volunteers within the department. CPOP began in May 2004 when Mac invited officers to

### WHAT IS SERVANT LEADERSHIP?

Robert Greenleaf, the man who coined the phrase, described servant-leadership in this way:

"The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve—after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?"

*From "The Servant As Leader," published by Robert Greenleaf in 1970.*

### TEAM TIP

Use the "Take Aways to Ponder" at the end of the article to guide conversation about how you might begin to implement servant leadership in your group.

meet and talk about how they could improve their department as well as their service to the community. His idea was to ignite the passion of these officers by allowing them to act on what they already wanted to do.

Mac also wanted to provide a forum for honest feedback without repercussion, as well as act on urgent crime trends in Carrollton. As a result of his openness and willingness to share power with this group, the officers began to believe in Mac's sincerity, his "walking the talk."

The team's first goal was to communicate more effectively between four sets of 22 patrol officers in different shifts and divisions throughout the CPD. Their second goal was to tackle a tough problem and show the effectiveness of this kind of voluntary servant leadership. The 10 officers on the team ran the meetings, and chose the CPOP name and a chairman. They met twice a month, and Mac made sure he missed some of those meetings to send a consistent message that the officers were the decision makers.

Mac handed out some simple guidelines within which these officers were free to make decisions. When considering solutions to any problems, the team must have a consensus in answering "yes" to each one of these questions:

- Is it ethical?
- Is it legal?
- Is it the right thing for the community?
- Is it the right thing for the CPD?
- Is it within our policies and values?
- Is it something you can take responsibility for and be proud of?

If the team's answer to all of these questions was "yes," then it could plan the implementation and do it!

### Solving the "Impossible"

The first crime problem the team decided to tackle came in response to an ongoing problem in the commu-

nity with vehicle break-ins (BMVs).

"What if we could eliminate vehicle break-ins in our community?" Mac asked the team. Some of the officers laughed (not out loud) at this preposterous suggestion. It was an example of a solution that seemed impossible, but Mac believed that it could be accomplished with the collective wisdom of the group and the spirit of servant leadership.

The department was spending 30 hours for each investigation of a BMV and wanted to cut that down drastically. So, they began by targeting the area where most of the break-ins were taking place. This became a significant ingredient in their success. If they had tried to focus on the entire city, they might well have failed.

Then they communicated with neighbors in that part of the community by going door-to-door, leaving fliers when people were not at home. The night shifts reported areas where street lights were out. Street signs were put up advertising the "H.E.A.T." (help end auto theft) effort.

Officers created a report card that they left on car windshields as they walked or biked the beat. The car got a passing grade if it was locked and no valuables were visible within. Conversely, a failing grade was given (and the reason for it) if the car was unlocked or there were valuables visible. Eventually, as the local media caught on and asked what was happening, the CPD got a lot of free

publicity to help further their efforts.

The results were remarkable. The total number of BMVs reported dropped 94 percent in the first eight months. There were only two BMVs reported in 2006. The team moved into the second and third targeted areas and received no reports of BMVs in the first three months of 2005. There was an 83 percent reduction through mid-2006.

To talk to the officers that pulled off this "impossible" feat is to catch the spirit of servant leadership—to see, feel, and hear the passion and energy that is released when those in the best position to effect changes are empowered to do so. ■

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### TAKE AWAYS TO PONDER

1. Assistant Chief Mac Tristan carefully drafted six questions to guide his officers to implement their ideas. What are a few similar guidelines you could draft to free those who report to you to become problem solvers?
2. This leader ignited the creative imagination of his officers by inspiring them to prevent rather than react to problems. How might you recruit volunteers to make a difference by generating and implementing creative solutions to current problems?
3. This leader often did not attend his officers' meetings to keep ownership of their work with them. Are there occasions when your purposeful absence would encourage more positive ownership by others?