

PSC

**PUBLIC SAFETY
COMMUNICATIONS**
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF APCO INTERNATIONAL



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EXPERIENCE APCO 2024 IN ORLANDO

Attractions, shopping and
fine dining are plentiful in
America's No. 1 theme
park destination, p. 14

Leveling Up, p. 19

Putting the Love
in Leadership, p. 27

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Attractions, shopping and fine dining are plentiful in America's No. 1 theme park destination.

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Vonda Jones and Ricky Rowell**

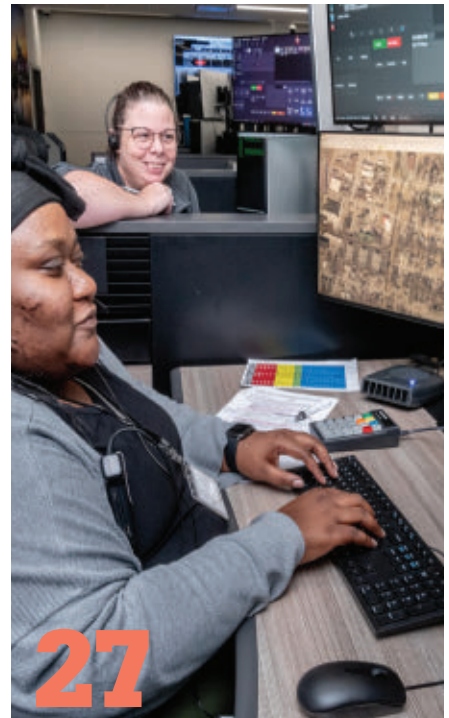


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The Editorial Committee's purpose is twofold: 1) It helps ensure that the magazine's content mirrors the interests of APCO's diverse membership; and 2) it provides the magazine staff with expert resources and writers who can share with APCO's members the knowledge and experience necessary to effectively staff, operate, equip and maintain public safety communications centers.



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By Becky Neugent,
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APCO's Deep Impact

When I began my career in this chaotic ever-evolving 9-1-1 world all those years ago, I never imagined I would end up as the 88th President of APCO International. I was a naïve wide-eyed young mother of two, and the only thing I knew was that I wanted to serve the people in my small rural county where I and my friends lived to the best of my ability. I wanted to do the right thing for the right reasons, at the right time and be of service to others. But somewhere along that journey, due to many difficult challenges both personal and professional, that path was altered and so was I. My dream became bigger, and I knew I had a higher purpose.

Being a leader of any organization is challenging, but this past year has also been one of the most rewarding, humbling and honorable experiences of my life. The over 40,000 members of APCO are all special to me and are the most dedicated and professional true heroes I have ever known. I have had opportunities to meet some of the most amazing people and be involved in decisions to keep APCO progressing forward for generations to come. APCO staff have overcome difficulties as well regarding having a new CEO, the Daytona building renovations, and staff restructuring and shortages but have persevered through it all like champs. I am extremely proud and blessed to know each of them.

To me APCO is more than just an organization, it is a feeling. A feeling that when I think about it in its entirety I am completely overwhelmed at times.

I had the opportunity to speak at the CPE#15 graduation and I had no idea what I was going to say as I had not written my speech. The evening before I got in the elevator and met a nice lady who was carrying a bag with some books. She pressed the button for floor 4 and I was headed to 3. I asked her if she had been to a class, and she said yes. I asked her what kind of class. And she said a leadership class. And I said oh you must be attending CPE. She looked up and said yes. It was then she recognized me. We began to chat for a minute, and I asked her if Dr. Steve still made the class tell their stories. She said yes, but she had not told hers. I asked her why, and she said she was embarrassed because it was too painful. My heart hurt for her because I too had a painful story.

The elevator dinged for my floor, but I continued to the 4th floor and got off with her. It was in that hallway a stranger revealed her story to me and unknowingly inspired me to write my speech for the next day. I knew exactly what I needed to write, and I ran back to my room and wrote my speech in five minutes. The next day as I walked up to the podium I spotted her. She was seated at a table at the front of the room to the left of the podium. And as I read that speech, I looked right at her. She looked at me.

She sat up straight. We made eye contact. She shed a few tears and so did I. After lunch, I walked over to her and gave her a hug and said thank you. She said thank you for believing in me and telling me I am enough.

That is the moment for me that I will remember the most, the feeling, if you will, of APCO and what it means, not just to me but to others.

You never know the impact you have on someone no matter who you are, where you are or what title you may hold. She needed me that day and I needed her although neither of us knew the other. She, or rather people just like her, are the ones who continue to inspire me every day.

Never doubt your own worth and your ability to inspire others. Telling someone how much you believe in them can make all the difference and change their path.

All of us carry our stories with us deep in our hearts, but they don't have to define us forever. We are free to write a new story. One of courage, one of positivity, one of friendship, one of self-confidence, one of passion and compassion, and one of finally not only knowing, but believing, that who we are and have always been is enough.

This is how I feel about APCO, the members, the staff, the CEO and the direction we are headed. APCO will begin to write a new chapter in their already best-selling story, and I believe we haven't seen anything yet. ●

“That is the moment for me that I will remember the most, the feeling, if you will, of APCO and what it means, not just to me but to others.”



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Connect With APCO's Government Relations Team at APCO 2024

APCO's advocacy is driven by the needs of its members, and APCO's Annual Conference & Expo provides a great opportunity for our government relations team to connect face-to-face with the membership, provide updates on our advocacy efforts and learn more about the issues facing the 9-1-1 community. This year, there will be several opportunities to engage with APCO's government relations team during APCO 2024 in Orlando, August 4 through 7. We're using this article to highlight the opportunities in hopes that you can connect with us, whether at the conference or by contacting us directly.

One of our main roles during conference is sharing updates about the advocacy landscape in D.C. Since last year, there have been several developments at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and on Capitol Hill that have impacted APCO's advocacy efforts. For example, in the Fall of 2023, Commissioner Anna Gomez was confirmed by the Senate and joined the FCC's leadership. Commissioner Gomez has been a longtime supporter of public safety communications issues, and she won APCO's Leadership in Advancing Communications Policy Award in 2012. We've been seeing increased activity at the FCC since she joined and expect more action on public safety issues under this dynamic.

In contrast, the landscape in Congress has been made even more complicated due to leadership changes and the fact that it's an election year. Passing legislation to reclassify public safety telecommunications, fully fund the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 and create wellness resources for emergency communications centers (ECCs) has been challenging in the current political climate. Still, we continue to push for these issues and are making progress.

APCO's government relations team will provide several updates on these issues and APCO's other advocacy priorities throughout APCO 2024. Members of our team will provide brief updates during the first general business session, the Chapter Leaders training and the AFC Advisor meeting. We're also hosting sessions in the Cutting Edge Developments track.

In past years, we've hosted a Cutting Edge session to provide a detailed legislative and regulatory update. This year, we're taking a slightly different approach and will host an Advocacy Listening Session. In addition to providing information on APCO's advocacy

efforts, our intent is to use this session to hear from the membership. If you have thoughts to share on 9-1-1 location accuracy, fixing the classification of 9-1-1 professionals, NG9-1-1, emergency alerts, outage reporting, the need for wellness resources in ECCs or anything else that's in (or should be in) our portfolio, we want to hear from you.

A separate session in the Cutting Edge Developments track will feature a panel of ECC leaders from across the country to discuss the industry's biggest challenges and the need for ECCs to achieve advanced emergency communications solutions. This session will be moderated by APCO's government relations staff and will include an opportunity for audience Q&A.

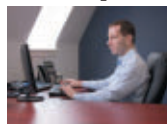
Understanding the challenges our members face and being able to

apply your experiences to APCO's priorities is extremely helpful. APCO's policy positions and advocacy efforts are driven by the needs of our public safety membership. In addition to engaging with the membership on the advocacy issues we're working on, we look forward to the opportunity to hear from speakers and audience members at conference sessions on a variety of interesting issues, such as using artificial intelligence in the ECC, emerging technologies to address language barriers and call processing, using drones in emergency response, and other topics in the Cutting Edge Developments track and other tracks.

We encourage you to connect with us and share your thoughts on these issues at the conference or any time throughout the year. If you'd like to learn more about the issues we're working on, visit APCO's advocacy

page at apointl.org/advocacy or follow our Twitter/X account (@GRO_APCO) for timely updates. To suggest topics for the Advocacy Listening Session or contact us for any other reason, send us a message at GRO@apointl.org.

We hope to connect with you soon! ●



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Attractions, shopping and fine dining are plentiful in America's No. 1 theme park destination.

By William "Will" Young III, Vonda Jones and Ricky Rowell

When you book a trip to Orlando, Florida — even for APCO 2024, APCO International's Annual Conference & Expo — the first thing that comes to mind is likely that big-eared mouse, a magical castle, princesses, extraordinary animated characters, roller coasters, killer whales, swimming with dolphins and even a volcano in the middle of a maze of lazy rivers and swimming pools. With a greater metropolitan area of just over 4,000 square miles, Orlando is more than "The Mouse". The Orlando Magic professional basketball team and the Orlando City SC professional soccer team call the city home, as does the downtown sinkhole lake, Lake Eola. Rich in history and brimming with things to do when you're not attending sessions at the conference, your host committee and APCO know that Orlando is the place to be for the 2024 conference.

A THEMED HISTORY

Most of the country knew little about Orlando until Walt Disney World Resort opened here in 1971. However, Orlando was incorporated in 1875 and, contrary to popular belief, Walt Disney World Resort is nearly 20 miles southwest of the downtown core of the City of Orlando, and it wasn't even the first amusement park in the area. That title belongs to Gatorland, the self-proclaimed alligator capital of the world, which opened in 1949. But after Walt and Roy Disney took a chance on developing a large swath of swampland and pastures in what was then a sleepy corner of Central

Florida, the Orlando that most of us know today was born and has grown to encompass a significant portion of multiple counties and towns. The Orlando-Metro area has many things to offer visitors who might be looking for something outside the typical Walt Disney World, Universal Studios and Sea World trio of destinations.

In addition to those three well-known attractions, the beautiful Atlantic Coast beaches are just an hour away. Cocoa Beach is the nearest, lying on the Space Coast.

If you enjoy learning about local history, Orlando is home to 51 historic buildings, sites and structures, including

12 on the National Register of Historic Places. You can take a self-guided walking tour of all the sites by visiting www.orlando.gov/Our-Government/History/Find-Historic-Landmarks.

There's a lot to do on your downtime while you're in town for the conference. Just remember, in addition to your colleagues, there are likely hundreds of thousands of other visitors to the area so when you're packing for the conference, be sure to pack a little extra patience as well.

What, in addition to Disney, Universal and Sea World, can you do on your downtime while you're in town for the conference?



I-DRIVE

Your first option might be to head over to International Drive, where you can visit the Orlando Eye and see the city from 400 feet in the air, or perhaps even take a helicopter tour over the city. “I-Drive” as the locals call it, is also home to an array of other attractions, including several mini golf courses, escape rooms, museums, restaurants and even a lesser known, but just as fun amusement park called Fun Spot America, home to a multi-level go-kart track and Orlando’s only wooden roller coaster. I-Drive has something for everyone.

Here’s a sample of I-Drive’s delights:

- **Chocolate Kingdom, the Factory Adventure Tour**, is an interactive journey that uncovers how chocolate transforms from the bean into the creamy, dreamy chocolate bar. A personal chocolate tour guide joins forces with a handsome prince and his dragon sidekick to take guests through a cacao tree greenhouse, a one-of-a-kind chocolate museum, a mystical river of chocolate and a micro batch bean-to-the-bar factory using old world machinery.
- **The Escape Game Orlando** requires teamwork, following clues and solving puzzles to complete your mission and become the hero of these immersive 60-minute adventures. You might escape ... you will have fun.
- **ICON Park** is a 20-acre, open-air, gate-free entertainment destination with adventures for the whole family. ICON Park offers more than 50 restaurants, funky bars, boutique shops and can’t-miss attractions anchored by The Wheel, a jaw-dropping observation wheel that stands 40 stories tall. Your vacation to Orlando isn’t complete until you’ve seen it from 400 feet.
- **WonderWorks** visitors experience over 100 hands-on, interactive exhibits and attractions at Orlando’s iconic upside-down house. It’s an amusement park for the mind. Feel a 5.3 magnitude earthquake, touch 100,000 volts of electricity, climb the three-story indoor ropes challenge course, ride in the 4D theater, compete in a game of laser tag and more. It’s fun for all ages.
- **Sea Life Orlando Aquarium** puts visitors face-to-fin with sharks, stingrays, sea turtles and more. Prepare for a world of glittering scales, humongous tentacles and razor sharp teeth. Plunge deep into the ocean, explore the 360-degree ocean tunnel and touch friendly starfish and anemones.
- **Madame Tussauds Orlando at ICON Park** lets visitors strut with the stars. Dazzle friends with the ultimate selfie by striking a pose with Taylor Swift, swinging punches with Muhammad Ali and saving the world with a superhero.
- **Andretti Indoor Karting and Games** offers a range of classic arcade and prize games as well as contemporary selections including the two-level laser tag arena, 7D Xperience Motion Theater, racing simulators and Spark Immersive Augmented Reality Duckpin Bowling Lanes. VR Central simulates other worlds with immersive virtual reality attractions.

SHOPPING

Maybe you love a great shopping deal. Orlando is home to four outlet malls, one of which is the state’s largest. At over

773,500 square feet of discounted shopping, Orlando International Premium Outlets on International Drive is just 15 minutes north of the convention center. Perhaps that's too much shopping for you. Well, within 10-25 minutes of the convention center are the more moderately sized Orlando Outlet Marketplace, Orlando Vineland Premium Outlets and Lake Buena Vista Factory Stores.

NIGHTLIFE AND DINING

Orlando has a vibrant nightlife with multiple concert venues, lounges, comedy

clubs, breweries, wineries and even a few speakeasies. Four core areas, Disney Springs, International Drive, Universal Citywalk and the Downtown Church Street District, provide a night of bowling, stand-up comedy, live music and relaxation with friends.

Perhaps you are considering expanding your culinary horizons. The number of restaurants unique to Orlando can help with that. In all, the Michelin Guide contains 51 metro-Orlando restaurants, including four Michelin-star restaurants, 11 Bib Gourmands and 36 recommended restaurants. From

salami to sushi, Orlando has something for everyone's palette.

GETTING AROUND

So what's the best way to get to this multitude of attractions and amenities? The APCO 2024 conference location at the Orange County Convention Center is close enough to nearly all major highways that getting anywhere is easy if you have a car. Many conference attendees won't have cars, of course, and visitors can use various well-known ride-share apps to get around town. In addition, the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority, or LYNX bus system, represents one of the most robust public transit systems in Florida. LYNX has multiple stops around the convention center and at local hotels. Learn more about LYNX and even plan some of your downtime destinations by visiting www.golynx.com.

WELCOME TO ORLANDO

Conference week holds valuable professional development and networking opportunities and opportunities to see the latest in public safety technology, learn about health and wellness topics and more. We hope you find time to enjoy Orlando as well. You can learn more by going to apco2024.org/hotel-travel/visit-orlando/ and visitorlando.com. Welcome to Orlando and the 2024 APCO International Annual Conference & Expo. ●

William "Will" Young III is a Police Public Safety Telecommunicator for the City of Clearwater, Florida, Police Department. He's a third generation Floridian who has called Central Florida home for his entire life.

Vonda Jones is Emergency Communications Manager for, Winter Park (Florida) Police and Fire and served as past president of the APCO Florida Chapter.

Ricky Rowell, RPL, is the Nassau County (Florida) Sheriff's Office 911 communications manager and has served in numerous other county public safety communications positions. He is a Florida Chapter and APCO International Life Member and past Florida Chapter president. Rowell is executive council representative on the Florida APCO board and is the APCO 2024 conference chair.

MEET THE HOSTS OF APCO 2024: THE FLORIDA CHAPTER

By Vonda Jones and Ricky Rowell

The Florida APCO chapter was founded on September 20, 1944, so 2024 marks the 80th year in service to our profession. We are excited to showcase what our state has to offer while serving as the APCO 2024 host chapter.

Over the past 80 years the Florida APCO Chapter has grown and developed to reach the current 3,500 members across the Sunshine state helping keep our state and communities safe.

Throughout the past year the chapter has been busy planning for the 2024 conference in Orlando. Through a membership committee, we have worked on growing our membership, and we have used social media to inform and update our members. We established a chapter wellness committee for the chapter membership to support the health and wellness of Florida's public safety telecommunicators.

The Florida APCO chapter continues to improve and serve its members and the 9-1-1 industry through committee work, training and volunteer opportunities.

The Florida APCO chapter board and its members are eager to see everyone in attendance at the conference in Orlando August 4-7.

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CONFERENCE CONNECTION

Attendance at APCO's annual conference can broaden your horizons and acquaintances.

By Emily Smith

Two hundred and fifty-one days — that happens to be my longest snapchat streak. The only reason I downloaded the app to begin with was to receive pictures of my little cousins who live 800 miles away. Along the way, I added work friends and decided to keep it. What does this have to do with APCO? That particular Snapchat streak started at APCO 2023 in Nashville.



Zachary Dykes and Emily Smith together at APCO 2023 in Nashville.

It may sound silly, but that is a big accomplishment for me. As someone who typically doesn't get close to people or often keep friends for long periods, I have nevertheless consistently talked to a friend I met at the APCO conference for over 250 days. This level of friendship wouldn't have been possible without meeting this friend in person at a conference. One of the best parts about this friendship is that we are in different roles in the industry, yet we can relate to each other's day-to-day job frustrations. We offer each other different perspectives and give each other input when needed. We even talk about things other than work.

No matter the size of the emergency communications center you work in, a lot of us are conditioned to think a certain way about our career in public safety communications. That inaccurate thought or assumption is simple:

"There are only two parts to this career — under the headset and promoted up to supervisor or over to the admin side."

Those words don't have to be said outright for it to be a mindset that is instilled early in your career. I was one of those who believed that administration and training must be separate from those who are actively working under the headset.

I loved my friends on the other side of the building that made everything work behind the scenes. Those who worked the daylight hours and who willingly dealt with everything administrative so that I didn't have to. What I didn't realize was how much I didn't understand their job or understand how to communicate what I might need from them at times. I also didn't realize that this mindset was far from the actual truth. Without the networking done at a conference, that understanding would fail me.

Conferences allow you to open conversations, whether it is networking in and out of sessions, listening to speakers about a certain topic or talking to vendors. It acquaints you with topics you may be unfamiliar with and teaches you about sides of the industry that impact you in ways you may never have realized.

I personally realized that no matter the size, my ECC has the same issues as other centers. I realized that mindset that I somehow subconsciously gained was wrong. "Us versus admin" doesn't need to exist. The communication bridge between the two just needs to improve. So often, both sides are

fighting for the same thing and that's to make the job easier in one way or another. I also discovered the private sector of the 9-1-1 industry that I never knew existed.

I like to work the radio and if it's chaotic, you'll likely find me in the middle of it. When I found out that I needed hearing aids a few years ago, I thought my career was over. How could I work in a career like 9-1-1 if I couldn't hear? Thankfully, with great support and minor adjustments, there's been very little impact on my everyday job function. I just wish that I knew then what I know now after experiencing my first conference. It would have saved me a lot of worry and panic about what my future could look like. I realized I had so many options to change my daily job functions if I needed and still be a part of this industry and make a difference.

The greatest thing a conference can show you is simply that there is a place in public safety communications for everyone. I made connections with people all over the country, and I keep in regular contact with them. We all know how hard that can be in our profession. The networking that I was

able to do at the APCO conference allowed me to open conversations with those at my center in different positions and to help me understand their job and how it coincides with mine. It has allowed me to create lasting friendships outside of my center and by celebrating each other's wins, I "found my tribe."

I would not have believed a year ago that I would have a Snapchat streak of over 250 days. I also never would have believed I would feel confident in having a career in the public safety communications industry if I lost my hearing entirely tomorrow. Today, I can confidently say that the friendships and connections I've made in this industry go farther than any social media app. The pride in my career choice goes beyond anything that I could have fathomed as a child. I have experiences such as APCO 2023 to thank. ●

Emily Smith has been in dispatch for just shy of eight years at Cobb County (Georgia) Department of Emergency Communications. She is a certified training officer (CTO) and tactical dispatcher working night shift. She is on the APCO Young Professionals Committee.

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LEVELING UP

Make these moves on the road to 9-1-1 career success.

By Jennifer Kirkland

No matter where you find yourself on the public safety communications career ladder, you can take concrete steps to rise to the next level. Some people plan out their career step-by-step, and others advance by taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves in the moment. There is no single right way to advance your career. The key to either approach is being prepared when opportunity arises.

First on your list should be to create a file, either electronic or physical, to store your certifications. When you go to classes, conferences or other professional development opportunities, often you receive a certificate of attendance or a certification. File these in a specific place so you'll have it handy if you need to prove you've taken the course as a prerequisite for another course or use it in a promotional process. This file will also be useful if your agency does annual

performance evaluations; you can easily reference the steps you've taken toward achieving goals.

Take advantage of class offerings in your chosen career path. APCO has a full class catalog of both in-person and online classes, designed to build your skills and prepare for advancement. Every class you take improves your skillset, broadens your perspective and makes you a stronger telecommunicator. Classes that teach leadership and personal

development increase the likelihood of promotion. Since approval for training can involve many factors, including limited budget and scheduling, be sure to seek approval well ahead of when you would like to take the class.

Prepare yourself for the application and interview process. Most positions ask for a resume upon applying. Maintain your resume as a living document, adding to it as you accumulate achievements, responsibilities, certifications and skills. Have a draft cover letter built and ready to plug in job-specific requirements. Many applications processes use AI and/or algorithms to screen candidates, so it's important that your cover letter and resume contain the right keywords and skills for that specific position.

If your human resources department offers career services such as practice interviewing or classes on interview skills, take

Prepare yourself for the application and interview process. Most positions ask for a resume upon applying. Maintain your resume as a living document, adding to it as you accumulate achievements, responsibilities, certifications and skills.

advantage of this valuable resource. If not, there are many online options. Interview skills should be practiced regularly. The interview is your chance to sell yourself for the position and explain to the employer why you are the best person for the job. Practice until your presentation is smooth and polished. Be yourself and remember that the interview is also your opportunity to evaluate the company and whether the job is a good fit for you.

Finally, the importance of networking cannot be overstated. Networking can be formal or informal, and mixing both methods

is best. It's important to build connections outside your ECC, especially if you intend to move up and out of your ECC. Treat every class and conference as an opportunity to meet new people and create connections. The 9-1-1 profession employs thousands of people nationwide, but it's really a small world. Creating connections and professional relationships with a diverse group of people in 9-1-1 will help you find new opportunities to advance or grow your career. Exchange those business cards or contact info via QR code, download an app to share information or connect on LinkedIn to keep the communications channels open. APCO's PSCConnect is another avenue to stay connected with fellow APCO members.

Getting involved in APCO committees and working groups is another way to meet people in the 9-1-1 profession. With many committees to choose from, there is something for every interest, and you'll build connections and relationships with other APCO members. It's also highly beneficial to get involved in your local chapter. Serving on your chapter board or helping organize your state or regional conference is an excellent way to get to know others in 9-1-1 and to

build your resume, skills and knowledge for career advancement.

Finally, when you're in a professional setting (work, working group, conference, class, etc.) always remember that you're "on stage." People will be watching how you present yourself. Conduct yourself in a professional manner, even when participating in social events that aren't part of the official programs. Dress appropriately and represent yourself and your agency well. You never know where and when your next career opportunity might come along so make sure you're at your best.

Following these tips and best practices ensures you're ready when opportunities present themselves. The 9-1-1 profession can be a long and rewarding career, and there are many options for advancement or refinement of skills. The profession needs you; thank you for answering the call. ●

Jennifer Kirkland, ENP, CPE, RPL, has over 22 years of experience in the 9-1-1 profession, encompassing many roles. She is currently the Colorado State 9-1-1 Program Manager and can be reached at Jennifer.kirkland@state.co.us.

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TRAINING DAY

Strengthening your “professional muscles” is easier than you might think.

By William “Will” Young, III

Along with mental and physical health impacts, public safety telecommunications often blame the lack of advancement opportunities and the lack of training opportunities as reasons for leaving the field. Significant efforts have been made within emergency communications centers (ECCs) and industrywide to equip telecommunications with tools necessary to address their physical and mental health. But what about their “professional muscle” or, as many would call it, their professional brand?

Many telecommunications believe our profession has too few training opportunities — yet opportunities do exist. APCO alone has multiple training opportunities through a variety of delivery methods. Online classes through the APCO Institute allow participants to train on a schedule that works for them through a course management system available 24 hours a day. APCO also offers in-person and virtual classroom training throughout the year in addition to their industry-recognized leadership programs, the Certified Public-Safety Executive (CPE) and the Registered

Public-Safety Leader (RPL) programs. To learn more visit apcointl.org/training. APCO’s training opportunities are in addition to the myriad of opportunities offered by other industry associations, state and local authorities and various other organizations. Some of these training opportunities are specific to ECCs and telecommunications and others are general professional skills training.

Budgets for training vary among ECCs, but that shouldn’t stop you from strengthening your professional muscle. APCO offers scholarships to attend their training programs and

many state 9-1-1 authorities also offer training grants. Grant opportunities are often available through other organizations that provide support and training resources to telecommunications, and you can get more information about those funding opportunities by asking colleagues or their state 9-1-1 authority for recommendation, searching for titles on PSCConnect or by starting a thread.

You should always advocate for your agency to cover the cost of professional development training; however, professional development is an investment in oneself. Benjamin Franklin once said, “For the best return on your money, pour your purse into your head.” If you can afford to and it will help strengthen your professionalism, don’t hesitate to send yourself to a training event or enroll in an online course. Services like LinkedIn, edX and Udemy offer professional development, often for free, if your administration won’t cover training costs.

How do you advocate for your professional development with your agency’s administration? Often, telecommunications will have a hard time convincing administration that training in a particular area would be beneficial to their ECC. Training for low-frequency events, tactical dispatch training and even critical incident response may seem like a waste of time to a veteran agency administrator who has never experienced a need for that type of training in their time with the agency.

When administrative buy-in is difficult to attain, clearly explain to your administration why you seek professional development and be specific. Use examples that may occur in your jurisdiction. This is 9-1-1; almost anything is possible. You will likely have to do research beforehand, so make certain that you have all the information on the course you are requesting, including the course title,



MOVING AHEAD WITH AN APCO ASSIST

By Lashonda Wilson

FORWARD PROGRESS is key to maintaining one's career course. And one is more likely to find opportunity within the emergency communications industry by investing in their own skills with high-level APCO certifications. To that end, all full, associate and online APCO members are eligible to receive scholarships to further their professional development. Commercial members are not eligible.

APCO Silent Key and Commercial Partner Scholarship Program provides APCO members with funds that can be used towards APCO Institute courses, Certified Public-Safety Executive (CPE), and/or Registered Public-Safety Leader (RPL) programs. These scholarships open on January 1 every year and have deadline requirements based on the scholarship category. There are three separate applications, one each for CPE, RPL and general scholarships. Do your research beforehand to confirm that all requirements are met and that the program you are committing to meets your personal and professional goals.

The scholarship program is funded through donations to APCO's Silent Key and Commercial Partners Program. APCO's Silent Key Scholarship Program honors individuals who contributed to the industry and association in their lifetime, while the Commercial Partner Scholarship Program provides a way for APCO's commercial members to give back to the public safety community.¹

Last year, the APCO Silent Key and Commercial Partner Scholarship Program awarded 92 members over \$79,000 to help them move their careers forward.

REFERENCE

- 1 APCO International (2024). *Scholarship Program Funding*. Retrieved February 4, 2024, from www.apcointl.org/membership/scholarships

Lashonda Wilson is a member of the Editorial and Member Chapter Services committees. She is an Emergency Dispatcher II with the Maryland State Police and holds a bachelor's degree in communications.

description, location, all the associated costs and how it would benefit your ECC. Try to relate the training opportunity to an event that you have encountered within your ECC. When it comes to selling the benefits of a professional development opportunity, don't shy away from being creative. Burnout is a part of the cause for high turnover in public safety communications, and a professional development day may be all it takes to "right the ship" about your feelings toward the profession and staying in it.

Professional development benefits everyone and harms no one. Don't wait for a professional development opportunity to come your way; seek them out, sell your administration on them and constantly look for ways to improve yourself professionally. None of us know everything there is to know about our jobs, and improving professionally through development and training allows us to better serve stakeholders in the 9-1-1 system. ●

William "Will" Young, III is a Police Telecommunicator at the Clearwater Police Department, in Clearwater, Florida. He has served as a CTO and likes to think of himself as a lateral leader championing for continuous improvement among his peers.

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SMALL DOSES, BIG RETURNS?

Microlearning in public safety technology aims to revolutionize training for rapid response.

By Mark Cady

In the realm of public safety technology, where every second counts and the stakes are often life or death, training is paramount. Whether it's firefighters mastering radio equipment, emergency medical technicians (EMTs) communicating with hospitals, or law enforcement officers protecting regional assets, the ability to rapidly acquire and retain knowledge is crucial. Microlearning is a revolutionary approach to training that is transforming how public safety personnel receive education and prepare for their mission-critical roles.

WHAT IS MICROLEARNING?

Microlearning is an educational approach that involves delivering content in small, focused bursts, typically through portable digital platforms. Instead of the traditional lengthy training sessions, microlearning breaks down information into bite-sized modules, often lasting only minutes each. These modules can take various forms including videos, quizzes, interactive simulations or even text-based scenarios. The key is that they are easily digestible and can be accessed anytime, anywhere, using computers, smartphones or tablets.

THE BENEFITS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

The adoption of microlearning in public safety technology offers several significant benefits:

Flexibility: Public safety personnel often have demanding schedules, making it challenging to attend lengthy training sessions. Microlearning allows them to access

training materials at their convenience, fitting learning into their busy lives without disrupting their duties.

Accessibility: With the widespread availability of digital devices, microlearning makes training accessible to personnel regardless of their location. Whether they're at the station, in the field or at home, individuals can engage with training materials when they have a few spare moments.

Engagement: Traditional training methods can sometimes be dry and passive, leading to low retention rates. Microlearning, with its interactive and multimedia elements, fosters greater engagement. Short, focused modules are more likely to hold learners' attention and keep them motivated to continue their training.

Retention: By breaking information into small, manageable chunks, microlearning enhances retention. Learners can review key concepts repeatedly, reinforcing their understanding over time. This spaced repetition is particularly effective for retaining

critical knowledge and skills in high-pressure situations.

Adaptability: Public safety protocols and technologies are constantly evolving. Microlearning platforms can be easily updated to reflect the latest developments, ensuring that personnel are always trained with the most current information.

MICROLEARNING IN ACTION

Several agencies and organizations, including fire departments, emergency medical services (EMS) and emergency communications centers (ECCs), have already embraced microlearning in their public safety training programs, achieving notable success.

Firefighters must continually adapt to new equipment and techniques to effectively combat fires and save lives. Microlearning platforms provide them with on-demand access to training modules covering topics such as portable radio operations with Mayday Operations.

Microlearning

BRIEF



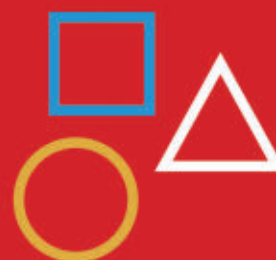
Usually 7-10 Minutes
Maximum of 15 Minutes

GRANULAR



Focuses on One
Topic, Concept or Idea

VARIED



Uses Variety of Games,
PPTs, Videos & Quizzes

Instead of the traditional lengthy training sessions, microlearning breaks down information into bite-sized modules, often lasting only minutes each.

Leaders must champion the benefits of microlearning and support personnel as they adapt to this new learning paradigm.

Additionally, EMTs and paramedics rely on up-to-date medical knowledge and protocols to deliver critical care in emergencies. Microlearning allows them to refresh their skills and learn about new treatments and procedures, enhancing their ability to provide timely and effective patient care.

Finally, in ECCs telecommunicators face diverse and rapidly evolving challenges in the line of duty. Microlearning platforms offer them training on topics ranging from managing the mayday, active shooter operations and comprehension of tactical networks.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

While microlearning holds great promise for public safety communications training, its implementation is not without challenges. These challenges include:

- **Technical infrastructure:** Microlearning adoption requires digital infrastructure,

including reliable internet access and compatible devices. Agencies must ensure that their personnel have the necessary technology to access training materials effectively.

- **Content development:** Creating high-quality microlearning content requires time, expertise and resources. Agencies may need to invest in content development tools and personnel training to produce effective training modules.
- **Assessment and evaluation:** Monitoring learners' progress and assessing their competency can be more challenging with microlearning than with traditional training methods. Agencies must develop strategies for evaluating learners' performance and providing feedback effectively.
- **Cultural shift:** Transitioning to microlearning may require a cultural shift within public safety organizations accustomed to traditional training approaches.

LOOKING AHEAD WITH A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

As technology continues to advance and the demands on public safety personnel grow, the need for innovative training solutions will increase. Microlearning represents a powerful tool for meeting these challenges head-on, providing public safety agencies with the agility, flexibility and effectiveness they need to ensure the safety and well-being of their communities. By embracing microlearning, agencies can empower their personnel with the knowledge and skills they need to respond swiftly and effectively to any situation, saving lives and protecting their communities in an ever-changing world. ●

***Mark Cady** is a retired 37-year veteran of Fire & EMS in Massachusetts. He is the owner of LB Comms - LLC specializing in consulting and project management with public safety projects in the Northeast.*



OBJECTIVE OBSERVATIONS

Ten ways to provide objective, relevant daily observation reports that serve trainees and the public.

By Leila A. Luft

As public safety telecommunicators, we already objectively document call for service entries and narratives. But in my experience with on-the-job training and performance management, it is difficult to document objectively in daily observation reports (DORs). Why is that?

Communications training officer (CTO) fatigue due to short staffing may be one reason. CTOs may also feel pressure when giving constructive criticism, fearing that feedback may push the trainee out the door, making a tight staffing problem worse. Hard conversations are hard to have when trainee performance is not meeting agency standard. In short, CTOs want their trainees to be successful, and conversations about unsatisfactory performance and behavior are hard; documenting them is harder.

Communicating with others often involves emotional responses. CTOs need to remind themselves that, just like filling out a call for service, we must be objective in our daily observation reports.

DORs are the primary tool in our CTO toolbox. They provide a day-to-day overview of timely and objective feedback. This document solidifies the verbal feedback given to the trainee regarding their performance and behavior for every shift. The DOR helps sustain performance-based training compliance in our training program by providing a cornerstone of fairness and consistency. By using DORs and standard evaluation guidelines

(SEGs), we are objectively giving every trainee an opportunity to succeed.

However, CTOs must provide customer service simultaneously to the new hire and to the public. Objective writing is often overlooked in the scope of CTO work. Here are 10 ways to succeed in your DOR writing:

1. USE THIRD-PERSON PRONOUNS.

Avoid using the word “I.” When using first person pronouns, subjectivity easily translates our feelings into reporting trainee’s performance and behavior. Instead, use third-person pronouns such as he, she, they and them. As an example, “He answered the non-emergency line with the proper greeting.” CTOs need to avoid documented phrases such as “I think” or “I believe.”

2. USE A PASSIVE VOICE.

Passive voice focuses on the action of the subject and removes the actor from the sentence. Instead of saying, “Sally answered the 9-1-1 call with the proper greeting,” you can use passive language to say, “The 9-1-1 call was answered with the proper greeting.”

However, avoid overusing passive voice in your narrative, as it can sound like the trainee is completely detached from the writing.

3. FOCUS ON THE EVIDENCE.

Much like calls for service narrative writing, CTOs should only focus on the evidence of trainee’s performance and behavior for that shift.

Is the trainee able to recall knowledge and perform it in practical exercise? Is the trainee able to use resources to problem solve? Is the trainee able to correlate new tasks to past experiences? We don’t document anything unrelated to the job. Especially avoid documentation about protected status information such as race, sex, religion, gender, pregnancy, age or disability.

4. USE A CONSISTENT SETTING.

It’s helpful to structure DOR narratives with a preface each day, much like a shift briefing. A preface can include the trainee’s channel assignment, the day’s teaching objectives, assigned tasks and expectations for the day. The CTO can preface each discussed objective with a task list name or calls for service number and incident code. As an example, “CFS #1239, Admin line, ANIMAL, Sally typed out ‘Avenue’ instead of ‘AVE’ in the CFS location field. She was shown the correct format for street abbreviations and how CAD will give a green checkmark for validated addresses.”

5. DITCH THE POSITIVE HYPERBOLE.

Hyperbole are exaggerated statements used for emphasis and effect. When they are positive, they highlight impressive characteristics and qualities of a person. As an example, in everyday conversation, you might say, “Wow, his typing is as fast as lighting,” or “He knocked that medical call out of the ballpark.” In DOR writing, avoid exaggerated words like “really,” “always,” “never” and “very.” It makes writing appear fabricated or weak. Restrict the “hype” to in-person feedback and praise.

6. HEDGING LANGUAGE HELPS.

Hedging language involves cautionary words such as seem, appears to be, think, believe, indicate and suggest. It’s a helpful tool when trying to avoid first person pronouns. Instead of writing, “I think the trainee is ready for Phase I exam,” you can rephrase as, “It appears the trainee is ready for Phase I exam.”

7. MIND YOUR AUDIENCE.

Minimize dispatch-specific jargon that your audience may not understand. Take the time to proofread for correct grammar and

structure before submitting it to the training coordinator. Have another CTO or training coordinator provide feedback on your DOR writing. Much like we are taught in basic training, write your DOR narrative as if you must go to court in five years.

8. INCLUDE SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTATION.

Attaching calls for service to a DOR can help support the writer’s objectivity. If the trainee completed four out of five traffic stops with little to no assistance, attach the four traffic stops to support your DOR rating and their proficiency. Other supportive documentation includes task lists, quizzes/exams, worksheets, certificates, goal-making notes, self-evaluations, personality assessments, advance assignments and recognitions. Be sure to follow your agency’s retention policies and procedures.

9. GIVE A CALL TO ACTION.

A call to action is an action plan to improve performance and behavior when deficiencies arise. When we document a trainee as deficient we must provide an opportunity for improvement. The CTO can use the

S.M.A.R.T. goal approach (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) to create the call to action in the DOR narrative. Include the trainee in the solution-building process.

10. BE CONSISTENT.

At the end of the day, use some creative freedom and ingenuity to write your DOR narrative. Just be mindful to be consistent with your process with each trainee you are assigned to. Find a smart approach to objective writing and stick with it.

Performance-based training requires consistency, fairness, good communication, empathy and support. By following these 10 tips, your DOR writing will be a piece of cake (see what I did there?). ●

Leila A. Luft, RPL, is Communications Director at York County (Nebraska) 9-1-1 and has been Nebraska public safety communications for 13 years. She’s developed state baseline training standards for Nebraska public safety professionals and is an active Nebraska TERT member and agency instructor for several APCO courses. She holds a master’s degree in criminology from the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

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PUTTING THE LOVE IN LEADERSHIP

One supervisor's journey to becoming a leader in the ECC.

By Juliet Brown

I will never forget the first time I had to reprimand an employee. It was a public safety telecommunicator that I already struggled to connect with, and I was extremely nervous. Instead of speaking to her privately, I wrote the reprimand first and hit submit in the software interface. But the software we use to submit incident reports sent her a notification immediately, and she read it immediately. I could see the steam coming out of her ears, and I excused myself to the bathroom. She met me in the hallway on my return. "Who do you think you are ..." was how it started and only went downhill from there. I felt helpless and hopeless, and knew I had to fix my approach. The biggest issue was that no one taught me how to be a leader. If this is you, there is hope. Here is what helped me as a new supervisor.

— that would've been too easy. Instead, I listened. I listened to their struggles at home and to the details of their son's 3rd birthday party. I forced them to take 10 minutes for themselves after a bad call, even though I knew we needed them on the floor. I hugged them, cried with them and shared my stories of struggles so they knew they weren't alone. When necessary, I was vulnerable first and put my story out there, so they knew that they were safe to tell me theirs. Building these strong relationships has completely changed my career around. Everything I do, whether they like it or not, they know I'm doing it with softness in my heart. That makes the hard conversations easier for all involved.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Relationship building is first because it is crucial to the success of your career and your center to have solid relationships with your employees. We always say, "It's not what you know, it's who you know," but let's take that a step further. Who you know doesn't matter if they have a bad taste in their mouth about you. Relationship building can be difficult because you must genuinely care about your employees and take the time to show them. I found success by committing to small acts of kindness in my center every day. That doesn't mean I bought them endless pizza or coffee

INTEGRITY

Integrity is like a muscle; the more you act with integrity, the easier it becomes to use in hard situations. As scary as it can be to admit when you made a mistake, it can be worse to live with the unknown of what would happen if someone found out. If I do something that I would write someone else up for, then I write myself up for it. I find that this makes it easier to talk to employees about their mistakes. I can pull the record of me reprimanding myself and show them that this is a level playing field for all. For



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example, in September 2023 I had to reprimand myself for words said on the dispatch floor. People often say, “Don’t talk politics or religion at the (insert location/event/community here).” This is also true for the dispatch floor. During a heated debate, I name-called a coworker. It wasn’t a terrible name, barely even a swear, but the problem was that I *meant* it at that moment. Once the words left my mouth, I regretted it. Being the most senior person in the room and the only supervisor, I knew what I had to do. I apologized to him immediately. Once emotions calmed down, we spoke privately and came to a resolution. And then I got to work. I wrote down every minute detail of the conversation, where I went wrong, and how I felt like I abandoned who I was in that moment. I explained that it wasn’t the person or the supervisor I wanted to be and vowed to do better for myself and my people. I emailed the explanation to my director, deputy director and human resources. I was ready to face whatever discipline was to follow. Whenever you can, own up to your mistakes. This will not only clear any negative feelings, but will also build trust, your integrity and your emotional intelligence.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is becoming a key to success as society progresses and Gen Z enters the workforce. Now more than ever, we are required to be emotionally intelligent to resolve conflicts. Emotionally intelligent people can understand their emotions and the emotions of others. They use this understanding to adapt to a situation and (hopefully) have it result in the resolution of the conflict/problem. Compassion is key to emotional intelligence because once you understand where someone is coming from you need to come to a compromise. Compromises often involve empathy, understanding and bargaining/negotiating. Negotiations must be done tactfully because you still have to stay within the scope/rules of your job/emergency communications center (ECC). These soft skills in conjunction take learning and practice. I didn’t wake up one day suddenly more emotionally aware of myself and others. Most of my emotional intelligence work started from Brene Brown’s podcast, “Dare to be Great.” She has hundreds of episodes where she speaks to leaders from all over the world. They talk about leadership books they’ve written and leadership theories they have. I built my first leadership reading list from this podcast series.

I don’t have all of the answers; no one in life does. But these three soft skill concepts transformed me from the supervisor who was met with sighs and silence to one who is respected, valued and understood. Building soft skills is a personal journey and requires work outside of the ECC. It requires you to change how you view yourself and others in all aspects of your life. It is filled with hard conversations, tears and wishing you could take things back. It is also the most rewarding change I’ve made in my entire life. Being a leader who acts with integrity, kindness and emotional intelligence has given me more than I ever dreamed of. Every day I walk into a ECC full of love, with public safety telecommunications who would “go to battle” with me. For that, I am eternally grateful. ●

***Juliet Brown** has been in the telecommunications field since 2014 and spent the last five years in a supervisory role. She is currently transferring into the private sector, and is an employee for Moetivations, Inc. When she is not working for Moetivations, she is filling dispatch shifts for Mount Holyoke College Public Safety and Wilbraham Regional Emergency Communications Center, both in Massachusetts.*



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BUILDING A BETTER ECC

Use Psychology 101 to create an ECC culture that attracts and retains 9-1-1 professionals.

By Dana Armstrong

“If you build it, they will come.”

Many of us have heard the line from the 1989 movie, “Field of Dreams” (which is actually, “If you build it, *he* will come.”).¹ This quote, whispered in the film to main character Ray Kinsella (played by Kevin Costner) was about building a baseball field to realize his dreams. But the concept that if you create something of value that most people need or want, they will come to you can be applied to just about anything in our lives, even our emergency communications centers (ECCs).

In this time of staffing challenges, one of the primary ways to attract people to our ECCs is by building a positive culture. To do that, we need to understand what people need or want. Getting down to basics is a good place to start. Let’s check out Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The bottom tier is about physiological needs (food, shelter, clothing).² Those are the most basic and we hope that our employees and the ones we want to attract already have those things. We want to focus on the next four tiers: safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

The second rung on the hierarchy is the need for safety and security which includes overall health.³ For ECCs, at a minimum we should be focusing on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of our public safety communicators and staff.

The next rung focuses on love and belonging, which includes a sense of connection.⁴ For

ECCs, this could be building a cohesive team, but in this line of work it should go beyond that. We need to feel connected to our work, our coworkers and to the community we serve.

The fourth rung is about self-esteem and focuses on confidence, achievement and respect of others.⁵ We need to provide our employees with the tools they need to be confident in their roles, to achieve success (which could look different for each person — not everyone wants to climb the ladder) and develop an atmosphere of respect.

The last tier is self-actualization, which focuses on morality, creativity, acceptance, experience of purpose and meaning.⁶ We could safely say that most people in public safety strive for morality, purpose and meaning in their work. If our ECCs can help them achieve at least the last two, we may be on to something.

Piggybacking on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, or perhaps simply putting it into practice, the Ritz-Carlton hotels are world-renowned for their top-notch customer service to clients. ECCs serve people every day, both in the field and within their own agencies. We are essentially providing customer service on a daily basis. The Ritz understands that it is their employees who make the positive difference for their clients. “The foundation of driving customer engagement is having engaged employees. Employee mindset has everything to do with whether your business survives or thrives, because engaged employees create engaged and loyal customers.”⁷ The Ritz believes success is built from within.

If your agency is experiencing high turnover, complaints, a lack of morale or any of the above, it’s likely you need to rethink your culture. We know that building a good culture within our ECCs is essential for attracting and retaining good people, but where do we start?

Here are five things to begin focusing on to start turning the tide for the better:

I. MEET THE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

According to Saul McLeod, Ph.D., editor-in-chief for *Simply Psychology*, people need order and predictability, freedom from fear, health and well-being.⁸ For ECCs, this could mean re-evaluating your processes. Look at how your agency deals with employees from the hiring process to the termination or exit of the employee. Eliminating retaliatory measures after receiving feedback, suggestions or questions from employees also helps build a positive culture. Promoting mental and physical health is important to let employees know you care about them.

People want to feel like they belong. In this industry, it’s easy to become jaded and burned out. Giving employees chances to rediscover their “why” and help them to connect positively with their coworkers and staff goes a long way toward building positive culture.

People also want to be valued. It’s important for ECCs to build this into their culture. Recognize people on a consistent basis for doing good work and going above and beyond. Help them succeed and grow by



offering them development plans that focus on goals they want to achieve personally and professionally. Then check in with them to see how they're doing.

Finally, allowing our employees to go beyond the job itself and be creative could be another avenue to build a positive culture. The Cobb County (Georgia) ECC created a "G.R.O.W." (growth, restoration, oneness, wellness) garden where employees volunteer to plant flowers, shrubbery and flowering trees and maintain it so other employees can enjoy the quiet space to decompress. It's therapeutic, philanthropic and creative.

2. DEFINE YOUR VALUES, LIVE BY THEM DAILY AND HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

Deciding what your values are is a first step to building a positive culture. Do you have a civility policy? If not, perhaps your agency should consider it. Cobb County's civility policy includes integrity, service, pride, teamwork, open communications, innovation, diversity and a positive work environment. The policy is not only displayed on the ECCs walls for everyone to see. It is lived daily and people are held to those standards.

3. BE FLEXIBLE

Do you have a "no hat" policy? Most ECCs do. We want to present a professional image to the public we serve. But can we maintain professionalism while also allowing our employees a bit of freedom (within reason, of course)? Cobb County's ECC director recently allowed the use of hats on "casual day" as long as they abide by the "neat, clean and appropriate for work" standard. Was morale boosted a little just by a simple change like this? You bet because the employees asked for it and the director granted it.

4. FOSTER POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

Whether the connections are between peers, supervisor-subordinate, or the new hire and the director, building a culture of positive connections is essential. Create an environment where people inspire each other, support one another, are compassionate and kind.

According to Emma Seppala, Ph.D., Yale School of Management, and Kim Cameron, Ph.D., professor at the University of Michigan, fostering connections produces "highly desirable results."⁹ People tend to get sick less often, they learn faster and perform better on the job.

5. BE PEOPLE FOCUSED

As a great lady once said, "We are mission focused, but people driven." That lady is our own Cobb County ECC director, Melissa Alterio. What she means is that we truly care about the well-being, happiness, growth and success of the department's employees.

The University of Massachusetts agrees with her. They state that "real culture is rooted in an employee's daily experiences, which in turn shape their beliefs," and "these beliefs inform their actions and actions lead to results."¹⁰

Building a positive culture is not a quick fix, especially if your agency is starting from a low place. It's a journey and a process filled with growing pains, twists and turns. Some employees will balk at the change, some will embrace it. It could take several years to change the tide of the current culture, but in the end, is it worth it? In her final interview before being hired at the Cobb County Department of Emergency Communications, Marquita Boyd answered that question. "Everyone was so welcoming. Even when I took CritiCall," she said, referring to a test given to applicants that assesses 9-1-1 job-related skills. "I knew this was the place I wanted to be just by the environment."

So, yes, it's worth it. Remember, if you build it, they will come. ●

Dana Armstrong, MFA, *Employment Facilitator at Cobb County, Georgia Department of Emergency Communications.*

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WHEN PUBLIC SAFETY MEETS THE POLITICIAN

With careful preparation, public safety telecommunicators can effectively advocate for their industry and agency.

By APCO Young Professionals Committee

With the ongoing push for public safety telecommunicator reclassification and other significant legislative and regulatory changes related to the public safety communications, our professionals can benefit from a primer on etiquette, tips and considerations for engaging elected officials to seek their aid on initiatives.

Typically, public safety telecommunicators interact with people over the phone and radio. However, there is a need for us to present ourselves, our profession and our agencies in public. In addition, there is an increased need for us to speak to elected officials on various topics, especially with the

growing popularity for the reclassification of our positions and any other significant changes that directly impact our careers. This article will educate public safety telecommunicators on following agency-specific policies when speaking with officials, give general tips on how to present themselves

and provide pointers on what to expect when speaking to elected officials, both in person and in writing.

PREPARATION

Before contacting elected officials, review agency policies, procedures or other guidelines on such contact. While you may not always reach out officially and speak for your agency, you are always a representative of your emergency communications center (ECC). Some agencies prohibit lobbying or political activity entirely, others may have guidelines or expectations, and others may allow free rein to fight for what you think this profession or your agency needs. Your





agency may ask you to speak on their behalf and bring forward collective thoughts or concerns, depending on your role or the topic being addressed.

Preparation is key to speaking with any elected official, regardless of the level of government in which they serve. There are many steps you must take, some well in advance, to ensure a successful meeting that meets your goals and expectations.

Your first step is to define the topic and objective of your meeting. What message do you hope to promote, or what proposed legislation do you want to support or oppose? Anticipate ways your conversation could be derailed and try to modify your presentation

to ensure that does not occur. Once defined, begin researching your topic. Begin with professional organizations, such as APCO, to narrow down specific talking points and get material to support your message. Do not be afraid to branch out to other groups for more information to support your key points, but vet your sources to ensure your material remains credible. It may benefit you to practice your meeting ahead of time with a friend or coworker, so you are more prepared. In addition, by practicing with someone unfamiliar with the public safety communications industry, you can ensure your presentation is appropriately planned in the event the elected official is unfamiliar with our industry.

REQUESTING THE MEETING

Once you have determined the primary objective, move to the next step, which could include researching and attending a public delegation meeting or requesting an appointment with your elected official. To request a meeting, write to the official and follow up with a phone call to whomever manages their schedule.

Depending on the office structure, this may be the officials themselves or a staff member. In this request, ensure that the topic of discussion is precise and reference bill numbers, if applicable. Elected officials have very tight schedules, so many individuals find it easier to go as a group. It is best to

keep a small group of three to four people and ensure that the talking points and positions on the subject are clear.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

On the day of the meeting, what you wear is essential; attire should be business professional and neutral colors. Bright or odd colors could be distracting or perceived as immature or inexperienced. Agency uniforms may be acceptable; however, check your agency policy and as a courtesy notify your supervisor before moving forward. Avoid wearing politically divisive or politically motivated clothing, and ensure that you are well groomed.

Arrive on time for your meeting, but keep in mind that elected officials may arrive late due to tight schedules. Remain patient and be prepared for delays. Begin your session by introducing yourself and thanking the elected official for meeting. If your research indicated the official has previously been supportive of topics related to your discussion, thank them for their previous support.

Throughout the meeting, be sure to mention how your topic affects you personally, your agency and the community you serve. Never lie and don't be afraid to say you are not sure of something. You can use a phrase such as "I do not know, but I will try to get that information for you." This type of phrasing also opens the door for a follow-up meeting or conversation with that elected official.

End your meeting by thanking the elected official for their time. Follow-up with a thank you letter and any additional information or resources they requested. It may be beneficial, especially for more complex or involved topics, to briefly summarize the meeting or provide a short overview of your chosen topic to ensure the elected representative can remember the key points.

SPEAKING TO OFFICIALS ON BEHALF OF YOUR AGENCY

Before speaking to an elected official on your agency's behalf, it's essential to familiarize yourself with your agency's policies. You must also speak with the appropriate management, as this will ensure that the message you are about to convey aligns with your agency's beliefs. This meeting will also ensure that you follow all policies and procedures regarding speaking to an official on your agency's behalf. You should never assume that your agency wants you to speak for them.

Throughout the meeting, be sure to mention how your topic affects you personally, your agency and the community you serve. Never lie and don't be afraid to say you are not sure of something.

Just as you should research your agency's policies and procedures for speaking with elected officials, you should also research the elected official you are about to speak with. This will give you a background on what issues the elected official cares about. Knowing more about them and their political stances may also assist you in how you approach the conversation.

While speaking on behalf of your agency, be sure to properly announce yourself by stating your name, title and the agency you represent. This ensures there will be no miscommunications regarding who you are and where you are from — especially when speaking with local government.

USE COMMONLY ACCEPTED TERMINOLOGY

When discussing issues on a federal level, the use of "public safety telecommunicator" is accepted. If you are speaking to your state representatives, it is important to use your state's title that is used for public safety telecommunicators. To find what title to use, look at your state's laws regarding telecommunicators to find what your state's statutes use. Common titles can be, but are not limited to, public safety telecommunicator, public safety dispatcher, 9-1-1 professional, etc. It may also be useful to denote whether you are talking about a call taker or dispatcher when discussing specific issues regarding those positions. This will ensure cohesiveness when discussing local, state and federal laws and concerns. If another term is used, such as "dispatcher," it may cause confusion and allow the elected official to pose the question: "What is the difference?" Finally, limit workplace jargon, as this can cause an elected official to become detached from a conversation due to confusion or boredom.

CONCLUDING A MEETING

After speaking with the elected official, thank them on behalf of your agency and

inform them that you will follow up with them soon to assess how the issues that were brought up will be addressed.

Depending on your agency's policy, you may not be able to advocate in an official capacity. However, these policies should not impact your ability to advocate as a private citizen. While you must be cautious about affiliating with your agency and you may be prohibited from some activities, such as testifying before your legislature, you can still make a difference by taking advantage of your rights.

ADVOCATING IN WRITING

One of the easiest ways to advocate is in a written medium. Government websites at the local, state and federal levels should provide contact information so constituents can quickly contact their elected officials through mail, email or by phone. When preparing a written document, it is essential to have a clear message conveyed in a short but thorough read.

Before you begin writing, check with your local chapter of APCO to see if they have a form letter prepared that you can modify for your needs. Form letters have the benefit of multiple individuals presenting the same message; however, they do not convey a personal touch. If a form letter is unavailable or you want to create a personal message, you can do so with a little planning. Resources for writing to elected officials can be found at www.grammarly.com/blog/write-elected-representative/ and <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/letters-to-elected-officials/main>.

Start by preparing your overall message and the supporting facts or talking points you want to convey. A terrific way to do this is by creating a brief outline using bulleted lists or umbrella diagrams to ensure you have a well thought out and cohesive message. Next, take a few minutes to think through a personal story that directly impacts the message you want to convey, as you may wish to include this in your letter.

As discussed above, legislators have a tight schedule while in session, and a staffer will likely read your letter. Ensure your message is received and understood by keeping your remarks short, informational and to the point. It is essential to use proper grammar, punctuation and spelling. Use free online editing services to help the writing process go smoother. Remember to proofread and

have a peer review your letter before mailing it.

Here are key things to remember when writing your letter:

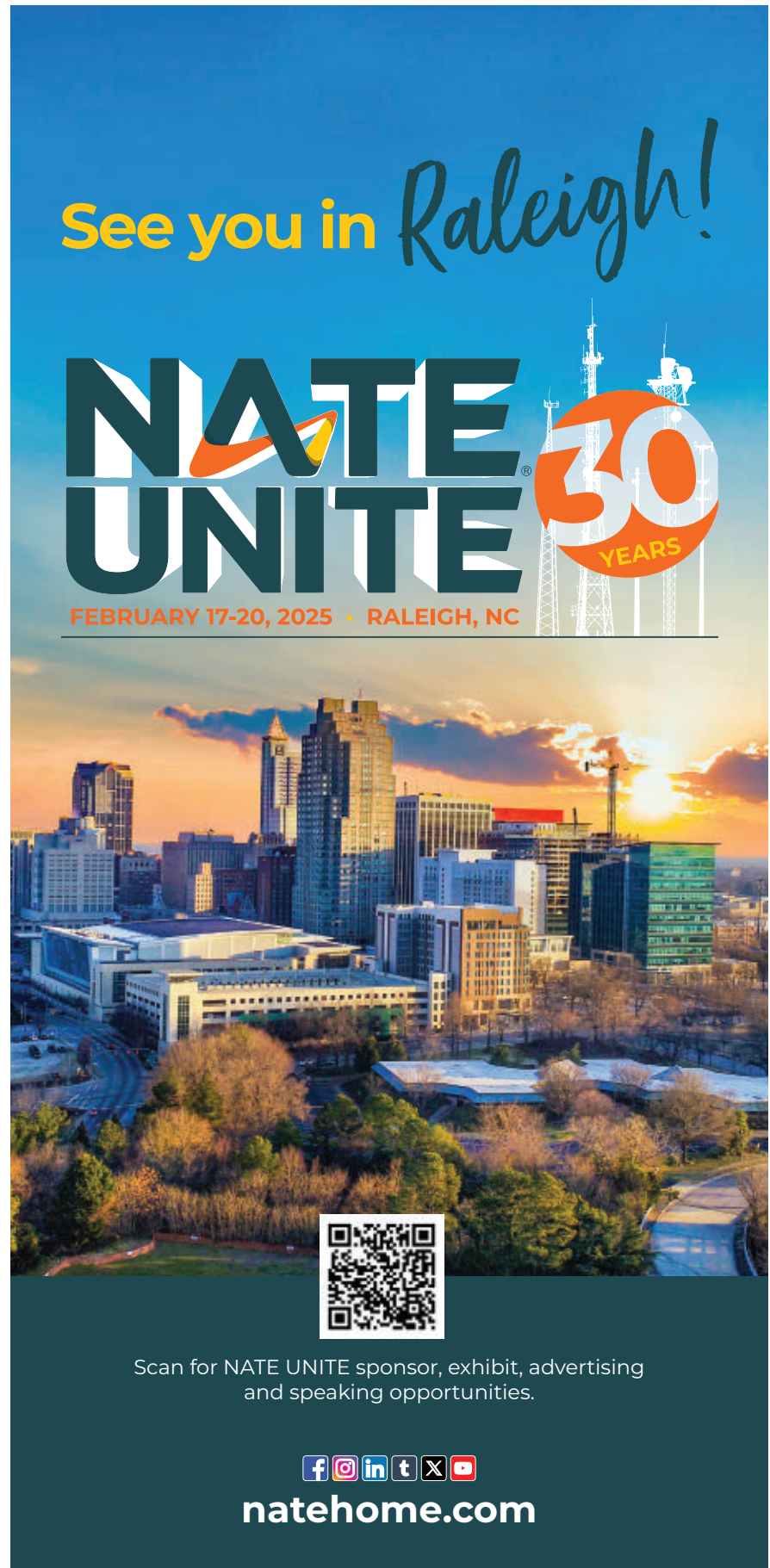
- Use your home address. This will ensure they know the letter is coming from a constituent in their district.
- Address the recipient using their title. (e.g., The Honorable Representative Torres, The Honorable Senator Wilson, The Honorable Alderman Massey)
- Briefly and respectfully introduce yourself. In doing this, establish who you are and your background concerning the topic at hand.
- Provide a summary of what can be expected in the remainder of the letter. Think of this as your thesis statement.
- Refer to the bill name, but also the bill number (e.g., 911 SAVES Act (H.R. 6319)/ Enhancing First Response Act (S. 3556)).
- Politely and professionally issue a call to action in support of your position.
- Politely close out your letter and thank them for their time. Offer additional assistance as needed.

SUMMARY

While public safety telecommunicators may speak to the public or field responders daily on the phone or radio, they only get a few opportunities to speak with elected officials. Effective advocacy about public safety communications requires knowing your agency policy, creating clear objectives through meeting preparation, and researching the official and various topics, including reclassification. It is critical to use the term “public safety telecommunicator” or local level equivalent when talking about your role to ensure a unified message. Ensure that you end the meeting in a positive, polite and professional manner.

Keep in mind that state and federal laws often have important distinctions, such as the differences in the impacts of state or federal reclassification. When planning to meet with federal officials, you may find it beneficial to contact APCO’s Government Relations Office to check for updates and coordinate messaging. You can reach the APCO Government Relations Office at gro@apcointl.org. ●

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HOMELAND EDUCATION

The Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense introduces first responders to an integrated approach for homeland security.

By Jesse McCord

Public safety communications and emergency communications centers (ECCs) are crucial for homeland security because they coordinate emergency responses, gather and share critical information, and maintain communication during crises. They connect the public with first responders and government agencies, ensuring a swift and effective response to emergencies and threats to national security. The Emergence Program offered by the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) in Monterey, California, is an innovative educational initiative aimed at equipping leaders with comprehensive insights into complex homeland security challenges, deeply impacting public safety telecommunications, particularly for telecommunicators at the frontline of emergency response.

Spanning seven months, the program serves as a melting pot for professionals across governmental agencies to collaborate and broaden their understanding of homeland security, while enhancing the strategic thinking, leadership and understanding of roles regarding modern threats, including cyber, terrorism, and health security crises. This approach and the facilitated deep discussions ensure that the program directly speaks to the critical work of telecommunicators, thereby significantly contributing to the advancement of public safety telecommunications by way of education, exposure, networking and collaboration.

CHDS EMERGENCE PROGRAM

The Emergence Program is described on its website (www.chds.us/c/academic-programs/emergence) as “a unique opportunity

for homeland security/public safety professionals who are in the first half of their careers.” It stands out as an innovative initiative designed for the next generation of homeland security leaders early in their careers. It targets individuals displaying high potential in the homeland security field, providing them with an immersive educational experience that emphasizes leadership development, policy innovation and critical thinking. The program imparts to public safety telecommunicators skills such as strategic thinking, effective communication, crisis management and leadership abilities critical for addressing the dynamic challenges in national security. It enables them to respond more effectively to emergencies and coordinate efficiently with various agencies and responders. Incorporating the relevance to 9-1-1 dispatching, the Emergence

Program's diverse curriculum of workshops, seminars and practical exercises nurtures creative and strategic thinking and tailors these skills to the challenges faced in emergency communications. By engaging with city managers to understand “smart” infrastructure plans (technologies like sensors and internet of things devices to improve efficiency and functionality), telecommunicators gain invaluable insights into the broader homeland security context. This cross-level collaboration and exposure equip telecommunicators with enhanced situational awareness, better communication strategies and a deeper understanding of how emergency responses can be integrated and optimized. Such skills are crucial for telecommunicators, often the first point of contact in crises, by boosting their ability to coordinate resources, understand the



“For many attendees, including myself, the Emergence Program was transformative. It not only broadened our understanding of homeland security issues but also refined our leadership skills.”

implications of different emergencies and contribute to a cohesive homeland security strategy. Telecommunicators are challenged to bring their big picture education home to their departments and to develop a “change initiative” by identifying and fixing potential issues that may hinder homeland security emergency response.

The collaborative environment fostered by programs like the Emergence Program enhances the contributions of ECCs to the homeland security enterprise through the development of a robust network of peers and mentors. This networking facilitates knowledge sharing among ECC personnel. They can exchange insights, experiences and best practices, leading to adoption of more effective response strategies and the integration of innovative technologies. Such networks foster interagency collaboration,

allowing for more seamless coordination between ECCs and other homeland security entities. This leads to more unified and effective response to emergencies and threats, bolstering national security.

DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

The Emergence 2301 cohort (2023-2024) of which I was a member is an example of CHDS’s dedication to diverse groups of individuals from an array of high-profile federal, state agencies and local agencies. It ranged from members of the FBI to the U.S. Border Patrol and from members of the New York City Police Department to members of Cococino County (Arizona) Emergency Management and my own Memphis Police Department among others. The diverse representation promotes a wide exchange of perspectives and experiences and broadens

MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR HOMELAND DEFENSE AND SECURITY

THE CHDS ADVANCES national security through education, research and policy analysis in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. From its base in Monterey, the CHDS plays a pivotal role in preparing homeland security leaders to address diverse and complex threats. The center contributes to homeland security through a range of graduate and executive-level courses and policy development, including cutting-edge studies ranging from counterterrorism strategies and cybersecurity to disaster resilience and public health preparedness. It offers extensive online resources, such as the Homeland Security Digital Library, which shares crucial information and best practices on topics including artificial intelligence, global terrorism, climate change, public health and border security. These efforts support the ongoing professional development of practitioners and enhance the national discourse on homeland security challenges and solutions. CHDS bridges the gap between theory and practice and serves as a nexus for collaboration and innovation in homeland defense and security.

participants' views on homeland security, identifying opportunities for change and exploring contributions their generation can make to this evolving field. Public safety telecommunicators typically operate within the confines of their jurisdictions or the 9-1-1 industry. The program encourages them to adopt a broader perspective, understanding how global and regional dynamics impact their local communities and the citizens they serve.

CURRICULUM AND TOPICS

Over 25 instructors from around the country deliver classes virtually and in

person focusing on a curriculum of more than 40 homeland security topics, including:

- **Critical thinking:** Emphasizing analytical skills essential for navigating complex security challenges.
- **Climate change:** Addressing the impacts of environmental changes on national security.
- **Health security:** Exploring strategies to strengthen responses to health crises and pandemics.
- **Artificial intelligence and biotechnology:** Delving into the advancements and implications of these rapidly evolving fields.

- **Force multipliers:** Understanding tools and strategies that amplify security efforts.
- **Cybersecurity trends:** Keeping pace with the evolving landscape of digital threats.
- **Extremism and radicalization:** Analyzing the roots and prevention of radical ideologies.

Participants are provided with literature relevant to the topics, and discussion is facilitated between instructors and participants.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The CHDS Emergence Program emphasizes practical application across government

CHANGE INITIATIVE: TACTICAL COMMUNICATIONS TEAMS WITHIN ECCS

Part of the Emergence Program curriculum is to implement a change initiative at the student's home agency to upgrade the agency's ability to better perform its public mission. My change initiative at the Memphis Police Emergency Communications was implementing a shift from tactical dispatch units (TDUs) to tactical communications (TacCom) teams. TDUs are specialized teams within emergency communications that provide targeted dispatch services for high-priority incidents, typically coordinating resources and information from a remote location. TacComs are designed to handle high-risk incidents by providing advanced, on-scene communication support, enabling direct, real-time coordination between field operatives and command centers. The shift to TacComs improves operational efficiency and effectiveness in managing complex, dynamic incidents.

Benefits of TacCom teams include:

- **Enhanced incident management:** TacCom Teams bring specialized communication skills to critical incidents, ensuring that information flows seamlessly between all involved entities. Their presence enhances the capacity of ECCs to manage complex operations, such as coordinated counterterrorism efforts or large-scale emergency responses, by providing clear, tactical communication support.
- **Improved interagency collaboration:** The multidisciplinary approach fostered by the CHDS Emergence Program mirrors the collaborative essence of TacCom Teams. These teams often work across jurisdictions and agencies, necessitating a broad understanding of homeland security dynamics. The knowledge and skills gained from the Emergence Program enable telecommunicators to function effectively within these teams, fostering enhanced collaboration and mutual understanding among different agencies.

- **Future-proofing public safety communications:** As the landscape of threats evolves, so too must the strategies and technologies employed by public safety professionals. The Emergence Program prepares telecommunicators to anticipate and adapt to future challenges, ensuring that the implementation of TacCom teams within ECCs is both effective and forward-looking. By understanding emerging threats and the impact of technological advancements, telecommunicators can contribute to the development and implementation of innovative communication tactics that address the complexities of modern public safety challenges.
- **Enhanced specialized training:** Exposure is key when training a telecommunicator. Direct exposure to the officers with whom they work is key to fostering collaboration and understanding from both sides of the radio. This direct exposure also encourages communication of needs from both sides. In multiple instances since implementing this team, the procedures of the ECC and the Special Operations units evolved to meet the mission. We have seen enhanced response times, more applicable policies and enhanced education to the point where, in some cases, our telecommunicators can anticipate the needs of the officers in the field. This enhances both officer and citizen safety in the case of critical events.

The leadership and policy innovation components of the Emergence Program empower telecommunicators to take initiative within their ECCs and encourage other innovative approaches to emergency communications. These professionals are equipped to lead change initiatives, improving the overall effectiveness and resilience of public safety telecommunications infrastructure.

“By bringing together a diverse group of professionals and immersing them in a comprehensive curriculum, the program fosters a generation of leaders who are more knowledgeable, adaptable, and prepared to tackle the security challenges of today and tomorrow.”

tiers, ensuring discussions and case studies that participants can readily apply to real-world situations. For instance, a scenario might involve coordinating a multi-agency response to a large-scale natural disaster. Here, a public safety telecommunicator plays a crucial role in managing emergency calls, dispatching resources efficiently, and acting as the pivotal communication link between the incident command, first responders and the affected community, demonstrating the program’s direct relevance to on-the-ground emergency management. This approach enables participants to apply their learning in their respective roles, enhancing the collective capacity to address homeland security challenges.

APPLICATION TO PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecommunicators operate in a high-stakes environment where rapid, informed decisions can save lives. The Emergence Program’s focus on critical thinking, policy innovation and leadership development is particularly relevant for these professionals. By understanding complex homeland security challenges, telecommunicators can improve their decision-making, enhance communication strategies during crises and effectively coordinate with multiple agencies. The program’s emphasis on cybersecurity trends and health security, for instance, prepares telecommunicators to better manage and respond to cyber incidents affecting emergency communications systems or health emergencies like

pandemics, which require swift, coordinated action. Incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) alongside cybersecurity, data analytics and medical technologies exemplifies the scope of “future technology” central to the CHDS Emergence Program’s mission to enhance public safety communications. AI holds the potential to transform emergency telecommunication systems by automating call triage, analyzing data to predict threats and providing decision support, thereby streamlining emergency responses and bolstering situational awareness. Integration of AI and other innovative technologies into public safety operations underscores the program’s commitment to preparing telecommunicators for the evolving landscape of emergency management. To effectively adapt to and leverage these technologies, the program encourages ongoing education through workshops, specialized courses and engagement with the latest research. Additionally, participation in industry conferences and technology forums, along with building a strong peer network, are essential strategies for staying informed and proficient in applying these technologies to improve emergency response and public safety outcomes.

IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP

For many attendees, including myself, the Emergence Program was transformative. It not only broadened our understanding of homeland security issues but also refined our leadership skills. The exposure to a multitude of perspectives and the in-depth exploration of various topics made us better equipped to lead and make informed decisions in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. The program not only offered professional exposure but also nurtured friendships and laid the groundwork for future collaborations among homeland security professionals. It facilitated meaningful interactions with leaders in the field, enhancing communication with colleagues.

COLLABORATION

I was lucky enough to be able to be present during the intersecting schedules of my Emergence program, CHDS Executive Leaders Program, and the CHDS Master’s Program. Over 100 Homeland Security professionals were present, and their presence was leveraged to conduct joint sessions and

one-on-one breakout sessions for discussion and collaboration. This was the highlight of the entire program as it exposed everyone to multiple disciplines and levels of leadership. Both the executive leaders and master’s degree programs were attended by homeland security and private sector leaders continuing their education in the latter half of their careers. Their knowledge, expertise and experience were bountiful founts of knowledge from which to expand my knowledge of disciplines currently outside of my purview.

CONCLUSION

The CHDS Emergence Program stands as a testament to the importance of interdisciplinary learning and collaboration in the realm of homeland security. By bringing together a diverse group of professionals and immersing them in a comprehensive curriculum, the program fosters a generation of leaders who are more knowledgeable, adaptable, and prepared to tackle the security challenges of today and tomorrow. It contributes to enhancing the capabilities of public safety telecommunicators by providing them with a comprehensive understanding of homeland security challenges and leadership skills and how these challenges directly affect public safety communications. This, in turn, influences the successful implementation and future development of collaborative teams within ECCs, ensuring that public safety telecommunications can effectively meet the demands of the 21st century. As a proud alumnus, I can attest to the program’s effectiveness in enhancing leadership capabilities and providing invaluable insights into the multifaceted nature of homeland defense and security, thereby embodying the critical nexus between theory and practical application in safeguarding our nation.

To learn more go to www.chds.us/c/about-chds/ and www.chds.us/c/academic-programs/emergence/. ●

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A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIMER

What public safety communications management and frontline staff should know about career planning.

By Christine Massengale

For the employee who has one undecided foot on the career ladder and one foot firmly on the ground, it is important for an agency to understand what will draw those employees up the ladder. However, more importantly, what do employees need to know, and how do they prepare to take the first step? In this article, we consider:

- Why should an employee consider moving up the career ladder: why *bother* with the additional responsibility, longer hours or potential after-hours/on-call status?
- How should an employee prepare for moving up the career ladder: what skills are most important, and how do they prepare for promotional consideration?

In the years prior to widespread use of social media and other professional networking platforms, interview questions and promotional assessment processes were often closely guarded secrets by managers and hiring panels. When asked the age-old question, “Where do you see yourself in five years,” the typical response was to strive for some level of leadership or upper management. “I want

your job” was the cheeky response of many eager and ambitious applicants.

Hiring managers are not only faced with a diminished applicant pool for entry-level positions but also a shift in priorities for existing employees and a waning interest in promotional opportunities. Professional development and career ladder growth are no longer the only carrot for employees. This makes it imperative for employers to understand their employees’ priorities. For the employee who wants to advance, it means marketing themselves in ways that highlight their strengths and ability to adapt to a leadership role while outlining ways they can enhance work culture, bring fresh ideas and the expectations they have for their work environment.

In the changing post-pandemic employment landscape, a few trends have emerged that seem to have real staying power, and agencies are realizing they must adapt to this shift in the workforce’s mindset. Public safety communications jobs require private sector expertise in emerging technologies, are more emotionally demanding and stressful while maintaining entry-level minimum standards and stagnant public sector pay, often with limited opportunities for advancement.



A recent article by Mark C. Perna, published in Forbes, “3 Reasons for the Coming Leadership Deficit — And How To Fix It,” cites a 2023 Randstad Workmonitor study that states over a third of employees indicate they never want to become a manager. Other statistics in the study note a starker reality for the looming deficit in future leadership roles — that work-life balance now ranks equally with pay for employees’ top priorities at 93%.^{1,2}

Why is this statistic a stark reality for public safety communications? Because, like other 24/7 service-related jobs, the job requires shift work, working weekends and holidays, and time away from home. The bottom line, according to the study, indicates that 39% of the workforce is happy right where they are and that stability is more important than upward movement. This is especially true if it draws them further away from home and family and the ability to live their life outside of work.

So why would anyone want to move onward and upward? Likely, for a combination of the same reasons as always, both intrinsic and extrinsic, although the order of priorities may have shifted to achieving personal goals, effecting positive change in an organization, more pay or better retirement benefits, and generally to make a difference for both themselves and the organization. What has changed are the things employees are no longer willing to sacrifice for career



advancement. Employees do not want to sacrifice time with family, mental health and personal values. Those are priorities that should not be sacrificed, so it is important for agencies to find ways to provide the work-life balance that employees need to remain productive, engaged, promotable and retainable.

For the employee thinking of moving ahead, it's important to understand that a combination of skill sets, institutional knowledge, experiences and attitude is still what employers value. Many agencies have a promotional matrix or assessment that may consider tenure, but employees who want to move ahead shouldn't depend on their tenure as the deciding factor. It isn't an endurance race after all, or at least it shouldn't be the only deciding factor. Otherwise, one could simply sit back and wait one's turn, while the newest employees would have no hope of advancing for many years to come.

How does one develop those valued skill sets (and what are they)? One area in the Randstad study indicates that 72% of employees put a high priority on training, which secures job stability.³ Start with the attitude of a growth mindset and an active rather than passive approach to learning and understanding the world in which you work. Employees gain insight into the agency's ecosystem and an ability to see the bigger picture by understanding others' roles and how they fit within the organization and by acquiring knowledge about the systems.

Ask questions about the phone, radio and CAD systems. When a user experiences an issue, what is the process for troubleshooting the fix? What is the system network? Who are the carriers, vendors and service providers? Employees can gain institutional knowledge simply by observing and asking questions about these processes — even though they may not be their job or responsibility.

Engage in industry activities such as volunteering for committee work or learning about legislative, governance, funding and other issues at the local, regional and national level. Research minimum training standards and the progress of your agency's status with emerging technology, NG9-1-1 implementation, continuity of operations plans and policy development.

Often, it is difficult for line-level employees to find time to learn while on the job. If the agency can support attendance at industry training, conferences and other venues, take advantage of these opportunities to

learn and network with others. Visit vendor booths and learn about other products, even products you don't understand or envision your agency using. Conferences and vendor halls can provide employees with invaluable experiences in talking to other professionals, learning about new technology and exercising interpersonal soft skills by navigating crowds and meeting new people.

Soft skills are highly coveted for leadership roles. Being proficient in a job does not mean an employee has the necessary soft skills to navigate management of those same roles. Doing the job well and leading others to do the job well is not the same thing. It is worth noting that many employees are great informal leaders — they can be persuasive and personable, well-liked by their peers and easily followed. It comes as a surprise if these newly promoted employees then struggle with the realities of being in a leadership role, especially without proper training, mentoring and onboarding.

Leaders may lead naturally, but anyone worth promoting benefits from instruction in necessary skill sets, such as interpersonal communications, managing conflict, decision making, negotiating and motivating others. Other skills and knowledge sets that must be developed include effective written and oral communication, presentation skills and social skills such as the ability to instruct and persuade others.

There are plenty of free resources and activities employees can take advantage of to develop these skills for themselves: self-guided courses online, reading articles and books, role-playing how to respond to work scenarios with friends and colleagues, asking questions and practicing active listening, exercising "what-if" solutions — i.e., what if I was the supervisor who had to handle this difficult situation? Or what if I had to find a solution to an on-going issue?

Many centers provide employees with opportunities to participate in job and recruiting fairs, and public education events. For telecommunicators who are mostly heard but seldom seen, public speaking engagements build confidence and a sense of pride in the agency. By taking advantage of these activities, employees can gain invaluable insight into the public's perception of the job they do, learn how to project a confident, professional demeanor in the public arena, and develop the ability to articulate the agency's mission and values to others.

This helps employees internalize these messages for themselves.

Self-assessment or self-evaluation is often difficult. It's hard to look at oneself objectively, so it may be helpful to ask a trusted colleague to provide insights about your areas for improvement. Conducting the same assessment of others may also prove helpful. What traits or characteristics do you value and like or dislike in leaders or managers? Write some sample promotional interview questions, then ask others these questions and think about their responses. Write your own answers to the questions and research the best responses. Consider whether you would promote yourself — and if not, why not? If possible, ask to participate in new employee interviews. This can help you recognize desirable traits in prospective employees (and, in turn, desirable traits for yourself).

Writing a resume gives you an opportunity to summarize your level of expertise and experiences, highlight your strengths, and identify areas you'd like to develop further. Research sample resumes and keep your resume current. Freshen it up when you learn a new skill or take on additional responsibilities. Find free resume writing workshops for critiques and constructive feedback.

When mapping a career move, it is also worth considering lateral professional growth. Some positions may have a similar pay scale or rank but very different roles and responsibilities. An employee looking for a change in duties may want to explore training positions, technology or other administrative duties. These positions within the organization may also provide an employee a better fit for the work-life balance they need.

Leaders must think strategically rather than tactically. Promotable employees can think through complex problems and offer viable solutions to existing leadership rather than just identifying the problem and bringing it to someone else with the expectation that they will fix it. Strategic thinking requires the employee to recognize issues beyond what directly impacts them and to see different perspectives, organizational and governance limitations, and long-ranging solutions that will set the organization up for success even after they move on or retire.

There are many clichés about observing versus participating, such as being the change you want to see, you can't win if you don't play and if you don't vote you can't

complain. The point is those who want to see strong and effective leaders in their future may have to be the ones who fulfill the role. Whether choosing stability by staying in the same role or seeking promotional opportunities, developing oneself professionally enhances job satisfaction, improves morale, keeps skills relevant and improves the organization, making it a better place to work and a place where others want to work with you. ●

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- 2 Randstad. *Workmonitor 2024*. <https://www.randstad.com/workmonitor/>
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CDE EXAM #67611

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|---|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A recent study indicates that which of the following values (besides pay) is most important to employees: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recognition and importance of job titles b. Work-life balance c. Work environment (comfort level) d. Retirement benefits 2. The same study indicates what percentage of employees have no interest in becoming a manager: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Over a third (39%) b. Over half (59%) c. Most (93%) d. Nearly three-quarters (72%) 3. What are two important values for updating a resume? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Highlighting strengths and identifying areas that need further development b. Making it look more modern and eye-catching c. Providing more detail and embellishing minor accomplishments d. None of these | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What is an important soft skill that leaders should develop? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Typing b. Spelling c. Managing conflict d. Mapping network paths 5. Institutional knowledge of agency systems might consist of a basic understanding of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Wiring diagrams inside control panels b. The vendors and service providers for the CAD system c. The radio network's programming system keys d. The phone system configuration for call routing 6. In the Randstad study, training was highly valued as a way for employees to maintain: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Job stability b. Morale c. Satisfaction d. Interest 7. Lateral growth opportunities may provide employees with other ways to develop professionally. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Promotional assessments may evaluate an employee's: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Institutional knowledge b. Experience c. Combination of skill sets d. Attitude e. All of the above f. None of the above 9. Two ways to do a self-assessment of your own leadership traits are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Look in the mirror and read your annual review b. Ask a colleague to provide insights about you and write promotional interview questions then answer them for yourself c. Write a short autobiography and review resumes d. Draw up a list of problems in your center and identify who can solve those problems 10. Why do employees most likely seek promotions? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. They want greater responsibility b. They want the overtime c. To make a difference for both them and the organization d. They enjoy dealing with complex employee problems and conflicts |
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CHANGING OF THE GUARD

How managers and directors can prepare their staff for succession.

By Stephen Martini

*When I'm gone, When I'm gone
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone
You're gonna miss me by my hair
You're gonna miss me everywhere, oh
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.*
— Cups — Pitch Perfect's "When I'm Gone"¹

This isn't just a catchy tune to which you can use a cup to tap out a fun rhythm; it's also a reality for every one of us. The job we have today will be filled by someone else in the future.

According to Simon Sinek, a thought leader on business leadership, we are either playing a finite game with winners and losers, or we are playing an infinite game, where the purpose of participating is simply to keep the game going. In his keynote "The Infinite Game" at John Maxwell's Live2Lead Event in Atlanta in October 2016, Sinek described an infinite game as having "known or unknown players where the rules are changeable, and the objective is to keep the game in play — to perpetuate the game."

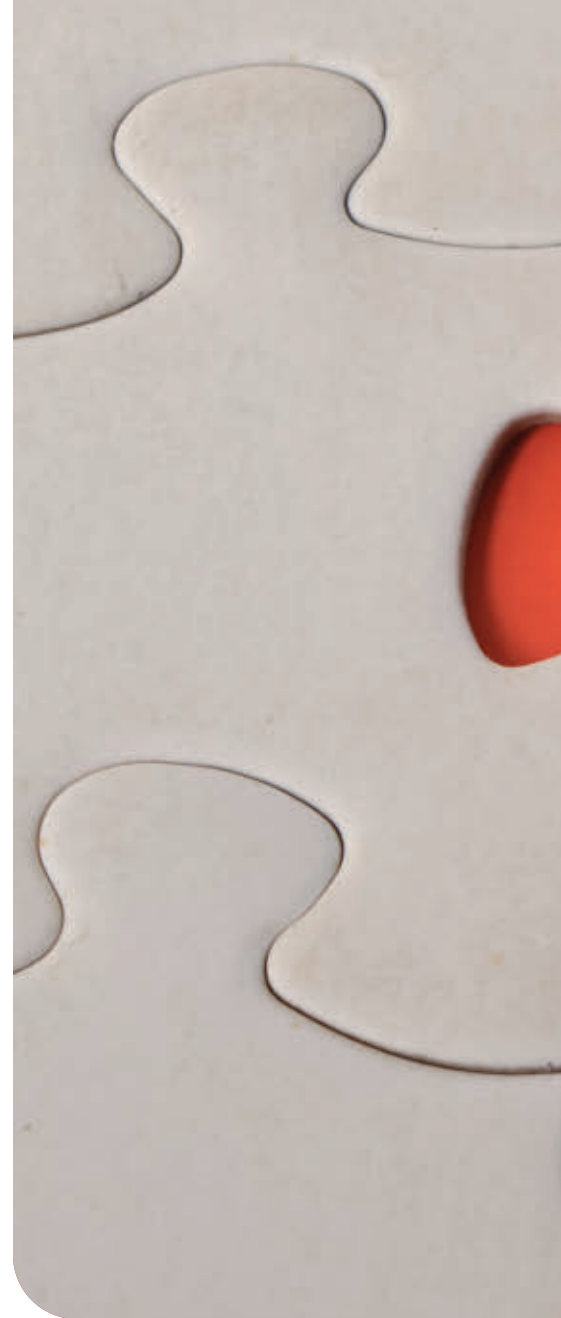
Imagine a circle of people kicking a ball with the objective of keeping the ball from hitting the ground. Players can come and go as they please, being replaced by others, and can use any means necessary (hand, foot, head, etc.) to prevent the ball from landing on the ground. After several hours or several days, the entire group of people playing the game may change while the ball and the objective continue.

In much the same way, public safety communications is an infinite game — answering

the cry for help. In the early 1600s, Dutch colonists on what is now Manhattan Island carried wooden noisemakers that rattled loudly to summon other volunteer law enforcement to assist in times of emergency.² Through the years, the rattles evolved to bells, fireboxes, radios and telephones to the systems we use today. Someone started kicking the "ball," and, through the years, the players have changed, but the infinite game of providing help to those who request it remains. And it will outlast all of us.

So how are you preparing the next person to replace you?

The concept of succession planning can be daunting. We want to grow leaders within our organizations to one day take our place. But





The concept of succession planning can be daunting. We want to grow leaders within our organizations to one day take our place. But what if we do such a great job, or they learn so quickly, they are ready to lead (and others are ready to follow them) before you're ready to step out of your role?

what if we do such a great job, or they learn so quickly, they are ready to lead (and others are ready to follow them) before you're ready to step out of your role? Fearing obsolescence, we tend to pull our punches and keep from equipping those around us to fill our shoes until we're ready to step away. We can't hold people down because we're afraid they might pass us up.

The first step to succession planning is recognizing a rising tide truly does lift all boats. Imagine a captain sailing his vessel headlong into a storm. If only the captain knows what to do next, while his eyes are on the stormy horizon all the eyes of his crew will be on him awaiting their next order. If the captain prepares the crew to also keep their

eyes on the horizon and know the actions needed to prepare the ship for the storm, then the crew can leap into action without delay — saving precious time, energy and even lives.

In the same way, we need to prepare our future leaders to watch the horizon and spot the storms. Standing shoulder to shoulder with those who currently answer to you and collectively assessing the risks and opportunities will help your leadership team understand how to navigate pitfalls and steer into successes when you're not around.

Start with the short-term in mind — identifying depth around key positions where a single point of failure exists.

You need to prepare your current and future leadership team to make decisions

in your immediate absence — in the evenings, on the weekends, on holidays and when you're away.

Frontline team members are often guided by policies and procedures designed to give direction for 80% of situations they may encounter. For situations that fall into the

remaining 20%, supervisors or managers are present to help navigate the decision-making until the frontline employee builds enough experience and confidence to take action.

The same guidance doesn't exist higher up the chain of command. Many times, there are key positions within an organization where policy or procedure guides 20% of the situations, while the remaining majority are decided through collaboration, experience, research, trial, error and recalibration. Additionally, these roles are likely single points of failure — one person with a lot of institutional knowledge and limited or no backup. The only way to prepare promising frontline team members to thrive in those roles is by offering the opportunity to assume those roles on a consistent basis.

So how do we do that?

Provide voluntary training opportunities for the frontline team members to understand how decisions are made at the senior levels of the organization.

Our agency uses a six-hour training program (offered on a single day or over the course of six weeks) adapted from Adam Timm's book, "People Driven Leadership," to share an understanding of how we:

- Solve adaptive challenges (those without a clear answer or solution).
- Enhance a priority on the perspective and experience of people within the organization.
- Apply our mission, vision and values statements to our everyday actions.
- Understand the critical nature of trust to support the infinite game.
- Provide feedback that motivates through coaching rather than discipline.
- Understand the role of the change agent.

Many times, there are key positions within an organization where policy or procedure guides 20% of the situations, while the remaining majority are decided through collaboration, experience, research, trial, error and recalibration.

Training program attendance is mandatory for supervisors and voluntary for those serving as communications training officers or telecommunicators.

Secondly, we offer opportunities to participate in various aspects of the department through committee work: operations best practices, technology, policy and procedures, employee engagement, facility beautification, community outreach and public education, and training. In the near term, the agency benefits from feedback and opinions from all users. In the long term, frontline team members are exposed to the thought processes employed by existing leadership when tackling adaptive challenges.

Thirdly, for those who move into supervisory or management positions, the agency invests in leadership programs beyond basic supervisory coursework, such as APCO's Registered Public-Safety Leader Program, whether financed through agency funding or scholarship opportunities at the association or chapter level. Helping your agency leaders

realize that many of the challenges they face locally are experienced and shared regionally and nationally shifts their focus from within the emergency communication center (ECC) to the broader horizon of public safety communications. Your middle management team then builds their network of professionals they can lean on to research and navigate future issues.

Fourthly, as leaders we must delegate authority to make decisions as far forward in the organization as possible. Doing so empowers leaders to lead and fosters innovation, which is critical to progress. The downside? Delegating authority and empowering innovation inevitably means someone is going to make a mistake during the learning process, so this approach requires leaders to have a tolerance for risk.

In Craig Groeschel's blog, "8 Habits of Great Decision Makers," the pastor, speaker and author on leadership said, "If you don't delegate decisions, you won't develop leaders. If you're the only one who can make most of the decisions, then here's a promise to you — your need to control will become your greatest limiting factor. Within our church, we have a big tolerance for errors because we have a big appetite for growth."

Groeschel went on to say, "Your importance isn't a reflection of what happens in your presence, but what happens in your absence."

In short, our organizations are best prepared to succeed when they function as well without us as they do with us. Want to help your people prosper? Take a vacation. Commit some of your time to volunteering with APCO. Build in opportunities for your team to operate without your immediate feedback so they have the confidence to achieve the mission in all situations.

Finally, it's essential to build opportunities to expose leaders to all aspects of leading each division of the organization. Consider rotational assignments among your leadership team — six months to two years — with the intent to develop talent and increase familiarity with project work.

If the role is specialized (rotating your technology or finance manager, for example), a rotational assignment may not work. However, training, quality assurance, hiring and recruiting, records, compliance standards, and operations each have a focus on supporting the broader agency mission.

Managers are accustomed to doing a variety of tasks and often adapt well. Assignment

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVES AS YOU GROW FUTURE LEADERS

- Prioritize diversity and inclusion, ensuring every individual has equal opportunities for development and advancement.
- Regularly review the progress of potential successors and adjust development plans as needed based on your changing business needs and individual performance.
- Keep employees informed about succession planning efforts and involve them in the process by soliciting feedback, providing opportunities for input and communicating the importance of leadership development to the organization's success.

stagnation is the enemy of retention, so offering the opportunity for our leaders to rotate through other roles and learn how to tackle various projects that support the broader mission from multiple angles broadens the individual and prepares the agency for future successes.

Succession is a vital function for any organization that hopes to endure, and public safety communications organizations are no exception. Agency leaders may be missed

when they're gone, but prioritizing the capability and competence among public safety telecommunicators, supervisors and managers means the emergency-response ball is never dropped. ●

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- 1 "When I'm Gone" lyrics. ©BMG Rights Management. Peermusic Publishing.
- 2 U.S. Dept. of Justice 145539, National Institute of Justice. "The History of the New York City Police Department." Raymond W. Kelly, Police Commissioner. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnib-pcapijpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/145539NCJRS.pdf>

CDE EXAM #67612

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>1. According to Simon Sinek, the objective of _____ game is "to keep the game in play — to perpetuate the game."</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. An infinite b. A finite c. A winning d. A losing | <p>4. Like a sea captain, those who succeed you should learn to recognize the storms on the horizon.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <p>7. Committee work is a productive way to expose team members to the thought processes employed by existing leadership when tackling adaptive challenges.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
| <p>2. The role you are currently filling at your agency will ultimately be filled by someone else.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <p>5. Where should you start focusing when building a succession plan?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Long-term vision — replacing the director in 10 years. b. Short-term vision — identifying current single points of failure around key positions. c. Tunnel vision — focus on your own position and planning your replacement. d. No vision — seek out the most energetic team member and start preparing them to promote. | <p>8. Those promoted into supervisor positions should not be encouraged to complete leadership programs beyond basic supervisory coursework, such as APCO's Registered Public Safety Leader program.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
| <p>3. What is one reason mentioned in the text why we hesitate to grow leaders in our organization?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leaders don't care about growing more leaders. b. Leaders just don't have the time to invest in helping others. c. Future leaders may be ready to lead before the existing leader is ready to leave. d. Middle management doesn't want to promote. | <p>6. Frontline team members should be provided _____ training opportunities to understand how leadership make decisions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Voluntary b. Mandatory c. Innovative d. Routine | <p>9. Delegation is a key to empowering future leaders to innovate but requires existing leaders to have a tolerance for _____.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Delay b. Other people's opinions c. Dairy d. Risk |
| | | <p>10. Rotational assignments are an option to develop talent and increase familiarity with project work.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |

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APCO Conference in the Sunshine State: Then and Now

“Bring your family to the Nations’s Winter sun parlor! Attend the annual conference in Orlando, Fla.”

This year APCO membership will gather in Orlando from August 4-7 for its 90th conference. APCO’s 1940 annual conference was also held in Orlando. We thought it would be interesting to look at the state of APCO, Orlando and emergency communications at both times.

DECEMBER 2-5, 1940: APCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO

In 1940, APCO was a new organization, founded in 1935 as the Association of Police Communications Officers. The APCO Bulletin reported that attendance included representatives of police departments from thirty states in the U.S. and the Republic of Cuba. Office and committee reports were made consecutively with speakers on items of interest, including frequency modulation, teletype equipment and applications, and relationships with the IACP, Army, Navy, Secret Service, FBI and FCC. Frequency allocation was a big concern, with the Frequency Allocation Committee resolving that adequate frequencies for the police services must be made available. Attendees also had the opportunity to talk with about 25 exhibitors.

With Europe at war, the theme of the conference was “Defense,” both for “work against crime and other problems of peacetime and of the interior or civil defense of America and her people in the event of war.” FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was the intended speaker for the annual banquet on Wednesday night but had to cancel due to matters of national emergency. Along with his substitute, entertainment included a tap dance artist and a showing of the Secret Service film about their efforts to detect counterfeit money.

Emergency communications looked much different from today. There was no 9-1-1;

“FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was the intended speaker for the annual banquet on Wednesday night but had to cancel due to matters of national emergency.”

citizens had to call a police or fire number. Radio manufacturers were experimenting with two-way police radios prior to WWII, but then shifted to war production and perfected the functionality with extensive use by air and ground troops. APCO began developing 10-codes in 1937 to reduce use of speech on the radio at a time when police radio channels were limited; in 1940, APCO published a revised and standardized list of 10-codes to make them flexible and worthwhile to every department regardless of size or classification.

There was no Disneyworld, no Universal Studios nor any of the amusements one thinks of today when Orlando is mentioned. Cypress Gardens opened in nearby Winter Haven in 1936 and, by the 1940s, was bringing in tourists to see its water ski show. Gatorland opened in 1949. When the Orlando Army Air Base was established in 1940, the city’s population was just over 36,000 and growing.

AUGUST 4-7, 2024: APCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO

Most of us have a very different picture of Orlando today, with multiple amusement parks, professional sports teams, entertainment options, shopping, restaurants and more (see page 14). The current metro area

population of Orlando in 2024 is 2,101,000 and that doesn’t include nearly 74 million visitors a year. In 2024, AAA ranked Orlando as its No. 1 travel destination in the United States.

APCO and emergency communications have changed just as much. In 1940, law enforcement was almost entirely men. Today, APCO has great diversity in the gender, age and ethnicity of its membership. While still highly involved in frequency allocation, APCO today also provides hundreds of courses throughout the year, certifications like CPE, RPL and agency training program certification, specialized events on hot topics like staffing and wellness, advocacy on critical issues such as NG9-1-1 implementation and outage alerts, and much more.

Based on recent conferences, APCO expects in 2024 to attract 6,000 attendees, including those staffing some 250 exhibitor booths. Attendees and exhibitors will represent all 50 states and nearly two dozen countries. There will be more than 120 sessions where attendees can earn educational credits, along with committee and association meetings, ECC tours, vehicle and dog demonstrations, health and welfare offerings and, of course, social and networking events, including the Wednesday night dinner, which features a band and dance floor.

As in 1940, the 9-1-1 profession continues to grow and change along with its members. Just check out the Cutting Edge Topics track where you will see mention of artificial intelligence (AI), digital alerts and live-streaming, not to mention topics in other tracks such as emotional intelligence, drones, remote 9-1-1 and human trafficking. Cybersecurity (a word not even created until 1989) has its own track.

We hope you can attend APCO 2024 in Orlando and appreciate all that is offered. And take a minute to remember those early APCO members and the foundation they created for our organization. ●



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