

“...without courage, compassion falters...without compassion, courage has no direction.”

-Eric Greitens, Humanitarian/Navy SEAL

*The Heart and The Fist* (2011)

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## BACKGROUND

Our nation is amidst an acute crisis in policing. Numerous police-citizen encounters have ended in tragedy and have sparked broad-based community outrage at police operations and police culture. Beneath the public visibility of this, police officers are committing suicide at alarming rates, occupational stressors are significantly eroding the well-being and performance capacity of police officers, police leadership is nearly paralyzed in status quo, and police culture continues to drift from authenticity. This landscape exists within a perfect storm of social, economic, and political forces that have brought the American Police Institution (API)<sup>1</sup> and the communities it serves to a critical intersect of deep human suffering on both sides of the badge.

The social costs at this intersect are enormous, both seen and unseen, and threaten the very fabric of social order. At times this crisis is illuminated for the American people by media, yet mostly this is a quiet extremis where the API collides against democracy in ways that cause an erosion of public trust, particularly for people of color.<sup>2</sup>

Through all of this, momentum for police reform has rarely been as strong. President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13684 on December 18, 2014 that established a President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (Task Force) with a mission of identifying “how policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust.”<sup>3</sup> The final report of this Task Force will be referenced throughout this paper as the report is fast becoming guiding doctrine for procedural and cultural change within the American Police Institution.

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<sup>1</sup> American Police Institution- a term used by the author to describe the uniformed public safety industry at all levels of government. Primarily refers to the broad organizational and management culture of this mission-diverse group of police agencies.

<sup>2</sup> Justin McCarthy, “Nonwhites Less Likely to Feel Police Protect and Serve Them.” *Gallup: Politics*, November 17, 2014. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/179468/nonwhites-less-likely-feel-police-protect-serve.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. 2015. *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

“Trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve is essential in a democracy. It is key to the stability of our communities, the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services.”

-Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The President’s leadership has compelled conversation across the nation about how to lead the evolution of policing in America. The Task Force report is on the desk, tattered, dog-eared and not simply the reading list, of police leaders. Astute police leaders, and there are many, recognize the social policy crucible in which they find their contemporary leadership. Some will lead forward; others will be paralyzed by tradition and the trauma of bureaucracy that erodes their capacity to lead.

The voice for mindfulness in policing hasn’t reached the C-Suite of policing nor does it have a seat at the table for inclusion in the current discussion stimulated by the President’s Executive Order. With the Task Force Report, an unprecedented opportunity exists to bring the science and efficacious potential of mindfulness in policing to the most senior levels of leadership. Mindfulness training can be presented as an evidence-based and efficacious deliverable that is woven through the philosophical theme of the Task Force findings and recommendations and that offers a foundation for police reform and the positive evolution of policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **MINDFULNESS AS A FOUNDATION**

The human landscape of policing is incredibly complex on both sides of the badge. Police officers are in the business of trauma; human suffering, tragedy, and dark choices of human behavior that too often require them to confront the worst of violence against humanity. Officers encounter populations that are oppressed through legacy and contemporary economic and social forces, to include the criminal justice system itself. This complexity is perplexing for the officers and challenges social sense making, which can ultimately reinforce social bias. As a result, police officers are drawn into a cycle of predictable erosion of their civility and resiliency- and this leads to catastrophic failures at the police-citizen encounter. The result is the tragedy of social justice.

Mindfulness can interrupt this erosion of humanity among police officers and provide hope for healing, enhanced social justice and greater access to democracy. Mindfulness training has tremendous potential to improve the police-citizen encounter and enhance community relations and community goodwill. Mindfulness provides the foundation for resiliency in head (mind), hand (body) and heart (emotion) through teaching skills, including but not limited to, of self-awareness, compassion, attunement to others and emotion regulation.

Cultivating a practice of mindfulness offers untapped possibilities for police officers and resonates with the warrior tradition of “grounded compassion and skillful action”.<sup>4</sup> These skills are critical to the well being of the police officer, the police organizational culture, and the community. Mindfulness nurtures the humanitarian-warrior soul. No contemporary police training steps so far outside the comfort zone of culture to bring such hope for healing deep inside the culture. Too many of the policing solutions over the last decade have been ineffective, with a focus on knowledge building, policy and well meaning but poorly delivered community-based programs. Mindfulness fills the void with skills training that build a strong and resilient human foundation from which to build community. Mindfulness can shift our mindset to the framework of building community from one of policing community.

In short, mindfulness is the path forward to building trust between the American Police Institution and the people it serves.

### **MINDFULNESS IN POLICING INITIATIVES**

#### OREGON: THE BIRTH OF MBRT

Discussions surrounding training mindfulness in policing in Oregon began back in 2006 with Brant Rogers, a certified mindfulness teacher and registered yoga teacher. A collaboration grew from these discussions and in 2007, Brant Rogers introduced the concept of mindfulness to police officers in Hillsboro at two separate, mandatory ‘tactical communication’ training for all hands. Rogers’ piece was about one hour and he had an opportunity to walk officers through the classic raisin mindfulness exercise, some gentle mindful movement and a short sitting meditation. Officers received the training with good humor and skepticism. Several officers later anecdotally reported that they felt that mindfulness training might be helpful to mitigate the intense stressors at work and home.

In 2008 I was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and had additional access to the *C-Suite* at my police agency. I gently introduced the notion of mindfulness training to enhance officer well being and performance to the police command staff and was categorically rejected. Some expressed concern of Eastern Religion and others simply felt existing coping mechanism for occupational stress worked just fine.

For the next several years, I continued to socialize the idea of mindfulness training and the science behind it. I held small discussions with key, ground level leaders in the organization: police trainers, K-9 officers, SWAT officers, and crisis intervention officers. I spend countless hours, repeatedly ‘marketing’ mindfulness and its potential as a training tool. As a result, about a half dozen officers voluntarily went through an MBSR course, on their own time, at their own expense over the course of about a year and half. By late 2009, I had anecdotal evidence from the testimony of these officers that mindfulness training held some efficacy and even strong potential to help police officers cope with stress and perform at a higher level.

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<sup>4</sup> Strozzi-Heckler, R. (2003). *In Search of the Warrior Spirit: Teaching awareness disciplines to the Green Berets*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

In early 2010, Brant Rogers and I worked closely to craft an 8 week training curriculum modeled after Jon Kabat Zinn's MBSR. We called our training Mindfulness Based Resilience Training (MBRT). By that time, my leadership approach was strongly committed to the notion of resiliency in policing at the individual, organizational and community levels. We needed resilience training rather than stress management training.

In the spring of 2010 I presented the MBRT curriculum to the police command staff and proposed a pilot training program. The reception was lukewarm by the senior leadership team, yet they left me an opportunity to recruit internally to support an MBRT course at Rogers' studio later in the Spring.

Within a week Rogers and I were planning ahead when I was recalled to active-duty, as an officer in the Coast Guard Reserve, in support of the response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. About three months later I returned to work at Hillsboro Police Department to a new Chief of Police and restructured senior leadership team. The reception regarding mindfulness training was of arctic temperature.

I resumed socializing the idea at the retail level of the organization, and outside of the organization. I wrote numerous articles for publication and spoke at conferences on resiliency and mindfulness in policing. Rogers continued teaching MBSR in his studio with many first responders attending as a result of our marketing efforts.

During the ensuing years between 2010 and 2012, the Hillsboro Police Department experienced some of its lowest points of morale in its history. Measured by nearly any member, sans the senior leadership blinded by bureaucracy, the organization was toxic. In early 2013 one of our police officers, while off-duty at his home, perpetrated a violence act of domestic violence. Intoxicated and fueled by incomprehensible rage, he shot the family pet in front of his wife and young child and proceeded to threaten his family.

Sheltered in place with a firearm of her own, holding her young child in her arms as they lay in the bathtub, the officers' wife spoke to a 911 dispatcher as a police SWAT team responded. The officer engaged in a gunfight with the responding officers, one of which was among his closest of friends. Miraculously, the incident was negotiated without fatal injury and the officer was taken into custody in a heated physical confrontation. Hundreds of rounds were exchanged in this encounter, and lives were deeply impacted, irreparably.

This incident resounded like an open wound through my agency. City leadership awoke to the underlying toxic workplace and soon the Chief of Police resigned. With the support of the city manager, Interim Chief of Police Ronald Louie called me on his first day on the job and directed me to engage the plan for mindfulness training. This launched a nearly yearlong training cycle with three separate cohorts of Mindfulness Based Resilience Training.

## FIRST PUBLISHED STUDY

Developed from the MBSR model, the Mindfulness Based Resilience Training (MBRT) was offered over 9 weeks with officers attending a two and a half hour session once per week, and one 6-hour retreat toward the end of the training. Research, led by Michael Christopher, at the Pacific University School of Professional Psychology designed and this project and results. This included, in part, self reported measures (taken pre, mid and post training) of perceptions of administrative stress, operational stress, sleep, pain management, anger, reactivity, burnout, resilience and acting with awareness. We trained over 50 police officers during this time. Our research demonstrated improvements in a number of dimensions to include: perceptions of administrative stress, operational stress, sleep, pain management, anger (emotion regulation), reactivity, burnout, resilience and acting with awareness.<sup>5</sup>

This study provided a foundation to bring evidence-based mindfulness intervention (training) to police officers. Improvements in emotional intelligence skill sets, as demonstrated by our study, show promising potential to change well-being and behavior among police officers. This is indeed a path to changing police culture, one individual at a time until the sum of the individual change impacts culture.

## THE RESEARCH CONTINUES

In August 2015, the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary & Integrative Health awarded our research and training collaborative, through Pacific University's School of Professional Psychology, a grant of \$379,500 over a two-year period to further develop and study the effects of Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training (MBRT) with police officers.

## BEYOND THE POLICE OFFICER: THE FIRST RESPONDERS

Since 2014, Brant Rogers has continued to offer MBRT courses at his studio. He has a steady student body of police officers, fire fighters and dispatchers from the region. In fact, he's contracted with several first responder agencies for additional mindfulness training.

## MINDFUL IMMERSION TRAININGS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

For my part since then, I have continued to cultivate collaborative relationships with academia, namely Pacific University and recently the University of California San Diego. I continue to provide talks and short mindfulness trainings to public safety agencies throughout the nation. I'm currently developing a Weekend Mindfulness Retreat for police officers (and other first responders) and expect the first delivery of this pilot training in January 2016 in Bend, Oregon. Working with Steve Hickman at UCSD, we expect to deliver our pilot 5-day Mindfulness Retreat for police officers in mid 2016. These trainings are designed for the line officers and line supervisors.

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher, M. S., Goerling, R. J., Rogers, B. S., Hunsinger, M., Baron, G., Bergman, A. L., & Zava, D. T. (2015). A Pilot Study Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Cortisol Awakening Response and Health Outcomes among Law Enforcement Officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 1-14.

Instead of panicking or returning to business as usual, commit to grounded compassion, pragmatic wisdom, and skillful action. Let awareness be your weapon...Be there for those who have suffered more than we have. Step beyond yourself and be of use to someone. Be courage in uncertainty. Be love in chaos.”

-Richard Strozzi-Heckler.  
*In Search of the Warrior Spirit* (2003).

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### MINDFUL LEADERSHIP: CULTURE CHANGE IN THE C-SUITE

I've recently begun collaboration with some key experts, including Jeremy Hunter at Claremont University, to craft mindful leadership training for senior police leaders. It is critical to specifically tailor mindfulness training for 'operators' and 'administrators' as their stressors are different and mindfulness can meet each group at different, critical points.

### MINDFUL SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE

This fall we are exploring a partnership with academia to bring mindfulness training to schools through our School Resource Officer program. Several of our SROs are mindfulness trained and have an interest in building their own capacity to coach mindfulness on some level with students.

### MINDFUL JUVENILE JUSTICE

We've started a partnership with Pacific University to bring mindfulness training to a local youth correction facility. Police officers and graduate students will be trained to deliver mindfulness training.

### OTHER (SELECT) MINDFULNESS INITIATIVES

Falls Church, VA- Detective Missy Elliot successfully launched an MBRT based training in 2015. Detective Elliot has traveled regionally in the DC area and delivered talks on mindfulness in policing and spoke at the International Assoc. of Chiefs of Police conference in 2014.

San Leandro, CA- Captain Ed Tracey continues to work toward a daylong mindfulness training for police in the Bay Area.

Australia- currently working with a small team in country to deliver a retreat for police officers in 2016.

Canada- Officer Jon Carson at York Regional Police has successfully launched an MBSR based training program in 2015.

Surrey, England- Chief Inspector Mark Preston continues to develop mindfulness training in the U.K.

Without a doubt, there are other initiatives that I've not mentioned. These are simply a few that are intended to highlight the exciting opportunities ahead of us.

### **OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES**

Our current socio-political landscape offers us an unprecedented opportunity to introduce mindfulness to policing. Some key challenges are discussed below.

#### BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO POLICE CULTURE

Adapting mindfulness training, whatever form, to fit police culture is an ongoing process. In our work, we adapted MBSR by removing some of the interpersonal interactions in the training, as well as some of the loving-kindness components. For the most part, MBRT is experiential mindfulness practice.

The most critical factor in bringing mindfulness to police officers include: a trainer with which they can build some level of trust, a safe environment, some scientific background on the practice, and an internal champion. Finally, it's imperative that the trainer(s) have a solid understanding of trauma.

Let's start with the notion of an internal champion. I often recommend to mindfulness teachers with an interest in training police officers that they begin by building trusted relationships with a few champions. This will take time. This is critical because rarely, if ever, will a mindfulness teacher successfully bring training to a police organization on a corporate level. A tremendous amount of vetting occurs in police culture and process. Building a cadre of mindfulness champions allows a trainer to collaboratively introduce mindfulness training to an organization. It's important to build relationships at all levels of the organization, within management and among the front line officers.

Officers also need some briefing on the science behind mindfulness. Some basic understanding of neuroplasticity and trauma are key. This helps frame the logic. The personal suffering experienced by most officers tends to augment the scientific knowledge and push them closer to the mat.

Where we train is an important consideration. A safe place to store weapons and communication equipment, as well as a locked door might be necessary to ease the alertness and allow officers to settle into their bodies. A yoga studio might work well for some officers, yet for others they may not come to training in a venue associated with something with which they have little familiarity.

We may need to take the training to officers, in their environment. Alternatively, finding a neutral training venue- away from the studio and the precinct- may be helpful.

Finally, the officers must feel that they can build some level of trust with the trainer. This is perhaps the most difficult piece. Mindfulness teachers will need to invest in becoming culturally competent with police culture. This isn't easy; much disinformation exists. This will be as uncomfortable for the trainer as it will later be for the officer when asked to sit and meditate. What we find is a common humanity amidst an incredibly complex world. On each side of the badge, we all need to step into this discomfort and embrace that humanity.

### FINDING THE RIGHT SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO

The American Police Institution is among the most traditional, "old school", institutions that exists. Gaining access into the conversation of police reform at critical access points of power is incredibly difficult, even from within. Professional associations are little help in bringing mindfulness to the discussion. Only in the last two years have we begun to see the International Association of Chiefs of Police look at mindfulness and allow a speaker to deliver a talk on mindfulness in policing at their annual conference. One exception has been the FBI; I recently delivered training at the FBI National Academy and found the training staff open and interested in the potential for mindfulness in policing.

### COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL

There exists a deeply rooted suffering within the bureaucracy of the American Police Institution that all too often inhibits creative, collaborative leadership. A review of the last ten years of police management will show little innovation, sans adoption of information technologies and weapon systems. A trend of insular problem solving continues. Until senior police leaders begin to truly seek out and collaborate, seeking diversity of thinking and even conflict, the systems-failure(s) will continue. Mindful leadership training and practice can make a difference here.

The success of the HPD training was due to collaborative leadership. Getting outside of the police paradigm and building multi-disciplinary partnerships is imperative. Collaboration makes cultural evolution possible; without this teamwork and infusion of ideas that bring some level of discomfort, little worthwhile happens. Building relationships with academia, mental health professionals, physical fitness experts, yoga teachers and meditation teachers is important.

### TRAINING CAPACITY: FINDING AUTHENTICITY AND CREDIBILITY

A major challenge we will face as we move forward is the development of the capacity to train police officers in mindfulness. There is a short supply of credible mindfulness trainers that have the talent and cultural competency to train police. This is a very difficult population to train, with unique nuances to the culture that can create significant barriers to connection and learning.

Training programs such as those at UMASS, UCLA, UCSD, and the Engaged Mindfulness Institute will be important as we cultivate police officers that desire to train with these programs and earn necessary certifications to train their own. Having a diverse training cadre of external (non police) and internal (police officers) trainers will be important as this effort evolves.



Law enforcement has a traditional “Train the Trainer” model that simply will not be an effective way of creating police mindfulness trainers. This model typically puts officers through 40 or more hours of training in a subject matter, combined with some instructional training, and certifies them as a trainer. We’ve already seen inquiries from law enforcement officers about this model for mindfulness training.

Additionally, we have begun to see organizations and individuals without credible training certification<sup>6</sup> market themselves to train mindfulness to police officers. For many reasons, this is a destructive practice. We expect to continue to see this trend as the business market for mindfulness training remains open and free of significant business barriers.

### POLICE LEADERSHIP CULTURE

Police leaders have tremendous organizational stressors that often blind them from seeing beyond the boundaries of the organization. Initially, mindfulness is likely to be seen as a wellness program. Our challenge is to effectively get through this barrier and demonstrate that mindfulness training is the key to transformation of policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. One way to do this is to tie the science behind mindfulness with the Presidential Task Force report. Ultimately this is about building trusted relationships with senior police leaders to create an environment for open dialogue and the exploration of new possibilities.

### **LEADING CULTURE CHANGE FROM WITHIN**

A note about police culture: I’ve previously written about the notion of warrior ethos in policing and how this warrior ethos is essentially misguided in modern police culture.<sup>7</sup> There exists political momentum to shift from a warrior ethos (identity) to a “guardian” identity. This is referenced in the Task Force report. The arguments against a warrior ethos, I believe, are superficial and flawed. This topic is an opportunity for a separate paper, yet it is important to mention here.

Rebranding the title is not helpful; changing the way of being is where the power of mindfulness lay. I believe that one reason mindfulness resonates with police culture is that it connects the officer to an authentic warrior ethos; one with compassion, self-awareness and attunement to others. Mindfulness offers the opportunity for us to connect the humanitarian to the warrior, in the spirit of the tradition of the warrior; whether Spartan, Samurai, or modern American warrior culture like that demonstrated in our special operations community. Mindfulness cultivates the compassionate warrior. I don’t believe mindfulness training will be effectively embraced if separated from authentic warrior ethos. We have an opportunity to reclaim that ethos through mindfulness.

Our approach as a nation seems to add more and more training and technology for our police officers. Our solution is continued training for police officers; knowledge and technology. Without a transformation of consciousness, police officers will not have the space to effectively carry out any of that knowledge nor appropriately use the technology.

There is little that is easy about bringing mindfulness to policing. Yet, without mindfulness, the fabric of our democracy is threatened. Let us collaboratively lead forward.

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<sup>6</sup> The author uses the term “certification” generally, with the knowledge that several certification programs exist for mindfulness teachers.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.mindful.org/police-culture-in-america-has-lost-its-way/>