

Making Mission, Vision, and Values Work in a Police Agency

By Theodore L. Bremer Jr.

Most police departments have a Mission statement. Many have a Vision statement. Almost all have a set of Values. That is not the problem. The problem is that too many of these statements were written years ago, approved, posted, printed, and then left alone. They remain true enough that no one challenges them, but not active enough to guide the organization.

A Chief should be able to ask a simple question: where does the Mission actually show up? Does it show up in the use of force Directive? Does it show up in pursuit review? Does it show up in how Sergeants review reports? Does it show up in training? Does it show up in annual evaluations? Does it affect who gets promoted? If the answer is no, the agency does not have a Mission problem. It has a translation problem.

Mission, Vision, and Values should stay. They matter. They explain why the agency exists, where it is going, and what kind of conduct it expects from its Personnel. A police agency exercises public authority. It enforces law. It uses discretion. It makes decisions that affect liberty, safety, trust, and legitimacy. That kind of organization needs a clear statement of purpose and character. But Mission, Vision, and Values cannot be left as stand alone language.

A value of integrity does not become real because it appears on a poster. It becomes real when it is reflected in truthful reporting, accurate documentation, correction of known errors, disclosure of material facts, and refusal to conceal misconduct. A value of preservation of life does not become real because it appears in a policy manual. It becomes real when it affects decisions about force, pursuits, tactical response, crisis intervention, medical aid, and custodial care. A value of accountability does not become real because the agency says the word. It becomes real when Supervisors review decisions, correct problems, document performance, and when evaluations measure conduct that actually reflects accountability.

This is where many agencies drift. The language is sound, but the machinery is missing. The agency has Mission, Vision, and Values in one place. Directives are somewhere else. Training is somewhere else. Supervision is handled through daily practice. Performance evaluations may be run through a form that has not changed in years. Promotion may reward productivity, seniority, popularity, or technical skill without asking whether the person actually reflects the agency's stated Values. Over time, the agency can develop two systems. One is the public identity system. The other is the operating system. The Chief's job is to bring those systems together.

One practical way to do that is through a Guiding Doctrine. Guiding Doctrine is not another values list. It is the bridge between what the agency says and what the agency does. It takes broad commitments such as preservation of life, integrity, accountability, fairness, professionalism, and service, and turns them into decision principles that shape Directives, training, supervision, review, and performance evaluation.

The first principle should be preservation of human life. That principle should not sit only in a use of force policy. It should influence pursuit policy, tactical planning, crisis response, medical aid, prisoner care, juvenile encounters, domestic violence response, and supervisory review. Other principles should be equally practical: legal sufficiency, decision justifiability, threat based decision making, proportionality and necessity, risk minimization, information integrity, consistency, and supervisory accountability. These principles are useful only if they change the

work. If a principle does not affect what Personnel do, how a Directive is written, how a Supervisor reviews conduct, how training is built, or how performance is evaluated, it is not Doctrine. It is another slogan.

The same test should be applied to Directives. A pursuit Directive should not simply say that the agency values safety. It should explain how preservation of life, risk minimization, proportionality, supervisory accountability, and decision justifiability govern pursuit decisions. A report writing Directive should not simply mention integrity. It should require accurate reporting, material fact documentation, timely correction of known errors, supervisory review, and accountability for false or misleading information. A use of force Directive should not simply state that life is valued. It should show how preservation of life, legal sufficiency, threat assessment, proportionality, necessity, de escalation, medical aid, reporting, and supervisory review work together. That is how values move from language into practice.

Training has to follow the same logic. Agencies should not treat policy acknowledgment as policy comprehension. Clicking a box does not mean an Officer can apply the Directive under stress, uncertainty, incomplete information, or public scrutiny. Training should require Personnel to practice the decisions the agency expects them to make. They should identify decision triggers, recognize risk, apply lawful authority, select proportionate options, communicate clearly, document decisions, and explain their reasoning. That can be done through scenarios, tabletop exercises, report review, body worn camera review, pursuit decision review, use of force review, and Supervisor led discussion.

Supervision is where the system either becomes real or dies. A Sergeant makes policy operational by what is reviewed, corrected, tolerated, documented, and reinforced. A Lieutenant does the same through pattern review, Supervisor coaching, complaint review, use of force review, and performance accountability. Command Staff do it by asking whether repeated problems are individual failures, supervisory failures, training failures, Directive failures, or system failures. A Chief can issue the best language in the world, but if Supervisors do not use it, Personnel will learn that it is not important.

Performance evaluation is the final test. If integrity is a value, the evaluation should measure the conduct that demonstrates integrity. If professionalism is a value, the evaluation should measure communication, preparedness, lawful conduct, report quality, emotional control, and respectful treatment. If accountability is a value, the evaluation should measure whether Personnel accept review, correct errors, document decisions, and comply with lawful supervision. Values should not be rated only as impressions. They should be converted into observable conduct.

Promotion and specialty assignment should be treated the same way. If an agency promotes people who do not demonstrate the agency's Mission, Vision, Values, Guiding Doctrine, Directive compliance, sound judgment, and supervisory accountability, the agency teaches Personnel that the posted values are not the real values. Selection decisions tell the organization what matters.

A Chief does not need to rebuild the entire agency at once. The work can begin with a practical review. Start with the current Mission, Vision, and Values. Are they still accurate? Are they current? Are the Values observable? Do Personnel understand them? Do they show up in policy, training, supervision, evaluation, and promotion?

Then adopt a Guiding Doctrine Directive. Make it the official bridge between the agency's identity and its operating systems. Next, audit the high liability Directives first, including use of

force, vehicle pursuits, search and seizure, arrests, crisis intervention, domestic violence, prisoner care, internal affairs, report writing, and supervision. Then align training and supervision. Personnel should be trained to apply the Doctrine. Supervisors should be trained to reinforce it. Then revise evaluations so they measure observable conduct tied to the Mission, Vision, Values, Guiding Doctrine, Directives, and assigned duties.

Finally, review the system every year. That does not mean rewriting the Mission every year. Stability matters. But stability is not the same as neglect. The Chief and Command Staff should be able to determine whether the agency's stated identity still matches its operating environment and whether the rest of the system is carrying it out.

A simple executive review can start with a few questions. When was the Mission, Vision, and Values last reviewed? Does the agency have a Guiding Doctrine? Do major Directives show how they carry out that Doctrine? Does training test application, not just acknowledgment? Do Supervisors use Doctrine in review and correction? Do evaluations measure observable conduct tied to the agency's Values? Are promotion and specialty assignment decisions aligned with the system? Does the agency review results and correct drift? If the answer to most of those questions is no, the agency may have good language without a working structure. That is fixable.

The purpose is not to replace Mission, Vision, and Values. The purpose is to make them visible in how the agency writes policy, trains Personnel, supervises decisions, evaluates performance, and learns from results. Mission, Vision, and Values should not be decorative language. They should be the starting point for how the agency governs itself.

The work of the modern Chief is not simply to say what the Department values. The work is to build the system that proves it.

About the Author

Theodore L. Bremer Jr. is the Owner and Principal Consultant of Bremer Paralegal, LLC, where he works with law enforcement agencies on policy development, accreditation compliance, regulatory auditing, and agency reform. His experience spans public safety, including police, fire, EMS, courts, corrections, accreditation, and consulting. He previously served as a Police Supervisor, Accreditation Manager, and Training Officer during a 25-year law enforcement career. He later worked as a Senior Police Accreditation Analyst and Policy Writer, auditing more than 200 law enforcement agencies and maintaining accreditation-compliant policy language for 226 client agencies. He also served as a lead accreditation consultant to the NYPD Training Academy and the New Jersey State Police during their CALEA accreditation efforts. He is an experienced accreditation assessor. He holds a Master of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida, a Graduate Certificate in Paralegal Studies, and is a member of Alpha Phi Sigma, the National Criminal Justice Honor Society.