

#01 (TOM NESTEL)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe with ReducingCrime.com, a podcast featuring interviews with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers working to advance public safety. In this, the pilot episode of Reducing Crime, I talk with Police Chief Tom Nestel about the need for ongoing education in policing, innovation, building trust, working in different departments, and evidence-based policing. We cover quite a bit in half an hour.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Learn more at ReducingCrime.com and on Twitter at [underscore](https://twitter.com/underscore) Reducing Crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tom started as a patrol officer with the SEPTA Transit Police in 1982, and then served with the Philadelphia Police Department for 22 years. He reached the rank of staff inspector before becoming chief of police for Upper Moreland Township in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. He has a bachelors degree in criminal justice as well as masters degrees from Saint Joseph's University, the United States Naval Postgraduate School, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In 2012, he returned to the SEPTA Police Department as chief. I caught up with him in April 2018. As we started, Tom had just shared a policing anecdote, and while I can't share that with you because I would like to keep my job, we were still laughing about it when I hit record.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tom Nestel, the king of Twitter in Philadelphia. Thanks for coming in to see me. How are you doing?

Tom Nestel:

It's my pleasure. Hashtag cheese sandwich.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

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You come from a long line of cops, but you're the first one to be killing it on Twitter.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, fourth generation. Yeah, my father was a deputy commissioner. My grandfather was a detective, and my great-grandfather was a policeman, all in Philadelphia. Now, my son's a police officer in Philadelphia.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

As a family, are you getting the hang of it?

Tom Nestel:

We're still trying it out. You know, we're seeing if we're any good at it. We sure do have a lot of us on police now, so there was a joke that we could probably staff our own district.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There'll be a few places in the country you could have your own department.

Tom Nestel:

That's true. Very true. I can tell you that family parties are pretty lively.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How does it feel having a son in the job?

Tom Nestel:

It's great.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you know that, you've been doing this job what, 35 years?

Tom Nestel:

35 years, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you know what he's getting into, right?

Tom Nestel:

Yeah. I go to every police academy graduation, because I think there's no better event than the graduation from the academy. Everybody in that building is happy. It may be the last time everybody's happy, but everybody is happy. It was

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really weird, Jerry, when I was sitting on the stage and looking out at the recruits, like I do every three, six months, and this time, my son was in the group.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But proud, too?

Tom Nestel:

Really was. Really was.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's great.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now, you've got a family background going back all of these years, but you're really embracing all the new technology, all the new ideas. If nobody's following you, you are the king of Twitter when it comes to policing in Philadelphia.

Tom Nestel:

Well, I don't know about that. I mean, I think there are a lot of really good police professionals that are using Twitter, especially in Philadelphia. I say to every young police officer and I say to new supervisors, "The ones that do the best are the ones that adapt. You have to change."

Tom Nestel:

I remember telling a sergeant who was retiring, "You're still in 1983," and it was 2017. You know, you can't be in 1983 in 2017. You have to look at opportunities, and you have to seize the chance to reach a bigger audience and to have a greater effect.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what you're saying is, we can't just learn what we learn in the academy and then hope that's going to see us through 30 plus years.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, I'm a big proponent of education. That nine months in the academy is a tremendous base, a great foundation, but if you don't build on that, then you fail.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

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Especially when we think about people taking on different roles, getting into mid-level leadership positions, sergeants, and [leftenants 00:04:13], and captains. At that point, there's nothing from the academy ... There's not much, at least, from the academy that you can bring with you for that.

Tom Nestel:

Correct, because, look, those jobs are problem solvers. We teach recruits the departmental policy, "This is the way to do it. Don't think. Follow the policy." Sergeants, lieutenants, captains, we're saying, "Here's the problem. Solve it." Well, that's not in the policy. It's in education. It's in networking. It's in creativity. It's way beyond that foundation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When you're looking for a supervisor, I mean, notwithstanding promotion systems and the relative limited control you have over that, but if you're looking for supervisors for particular roles, what are you looking for, then?

Tom Nestel:

I have the opportunity to craft the promotional exam in a way that draws out the skillsets and characteristics that I'm looking for, so I'm going to ask a question, "How would you solve this problem?" If you attack that problem the way we've always done it, you're not that person I'm looking for.

Tom Nestel:

I'm looking for creativity. I'm looking for a unique way to address it. I'm looking for a deep dive with gathering of data and using that information to come up with a great solution, or at least try a solution. May not work, but I'm okay with trying something that doesn't work and going back to the drawing board and trying again. That's the kind of mid-level supervisor I'm looking for.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Better to have tried and failed than not tried anything new at all.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely. The person that is just steering that ship and just moving forward, it isn't the person I'm looking for. It's the person that says, "Hey, you know what? There might be a better route," or, "There might be a better way to sail this ship. Let's give it a try." That's the person I'm looking for.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In some departments, though, anything that hints of risk and the failure that's potentially associated with it can be a little career limiting.

Tom Nestel:

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You know, it depends on who you work for. If your boss is risk-averse, you have to be careful. Another skillset is the ability to communicate, and the ability to be a salesman. I can remember talking to a veteran, grizzled deputy commissioner in Philadelphia, who was more anti-technology than any person that's walked the face of the earth. Pitching the idea of in-car video. This grand, new idea, and he said, "Absolutely not."

Tom Nestel:

I asked for an appointment. You know, it was a written proposal. Right? It was decently done, I thought, and it just came back with a disapproved. Then, I asked for an appointment to see the boss and go see him and give a sales pitch.

Tom Nestel:

Well, you know, that's the kind of person I'm looking for in my command. That's the person that I want to work with, and that's a ... key phrase, work with.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And somebody who doesn't give up as soon as they run into the simplest roadblock.

Tom Nestel:

There are always obstacles. I'm looking for the person that says, "Okay, that's an obstacle. Let me back up and try another way." I gave the sales pitch, and you know, the deputy, who was a smart man in his own right, he may not have been Mr. Technology, but he was a smart man to realize, "You know what? There might be something here," said, "Do your pilot program." It was a tremendous, tremendous success.

Tom Nestel:

Politics aside, it never came through. It never actually left beyond a one-year pilot program, but I got to do the pilot program.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Pilot programs can be a great way to test something out. You're not wedded to it, pushing it right the way through.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you don't seem to see enough pilot programs anywhere in policing [crosstalk 00:07:49].

Tom Nestel:

Right, and you know pilot programs give you a model to use in the future to build off of. You see how you did that pilot program, where the weaknesses and the strengths were, and you build upon it later when either the political will exists or you do a better salesmanship job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've been using one of these technologies, Twitter, very effectively. How have you developed how you use it? Where are the benefits? If I was a mid-level commander, how have you found how to use it effectively?

Tom Nestel:

I think that part of the challenge of policing today is connecting with the public. We've lost some of our connection, or belief, or the default of, "The police are okay," is no longer the default. I think that it's important that people understand that the police are actually human beings. They have a sense of humor, but they're also committed to what they're doing.

Tom Nestel:

If you can do that in 140 characters, or 280 now. [crosstalk 00:08:47] Right, we're loaded up. It can be a tremendously valuable connection to people that you would have never connected before. Then, what I've found is, I get to use folks who don't like the police, don't trust the police, don't believe in the police, and say, "Hey, will you look at this policy draft for me and tell me what you think and give me your input?" At least now, I can go to a number of people who don't think like me, and that's always the problem with policing. You know, you go to people that think like you and say, "Hey, what do you think of this?" I go to people who don't think like me and get their input, and it makes the product so much more valuable.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the vignette authors in the Reducing Crime book is from Scotland, and he was talking about building relationships with communities in times when things are calm, so that you can tap into those when things get a little bit feisty.

Tom Nestel:

Listen, it's an investment, you know? And that's what I've told my boss is, is that this isn't winning over people everyday. It's building trust and gaining a reputation of telling the truth. When things go bad, I tell the truth. I tweet and say, "Unfortunate circumstance today. We arrested a police officer."

Tom Nestel:

Before, you wouldn't have heard a police department saying they arrested a police officer. I had to call a complainant today was unfairly treated by the police, or treated disrespectfully by the police. That's embarrassing. It should have never have happened. All, everybody in a uniform isn't saying, "No, we're always right." We're wrong sometimes, and we want people to know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's still being supported by your troops, for doing that?

Tom Nestel:

I don't know. I mean, I can tell you that my boss is very anxious about Twitter. Very anxious, and justifiably so. The wrong tweet can create a hailstorm, but you try to say the right thing. You try to establish the right reputation. As far as the officers go, I think that officers always feel when you're talking about them in a positive light, they're all for it. When you're talking about an officer being arrested or making a mistake or me connecting with people who say, "Excessive force is the norm for the police," and me communicating, some officers are unhappy with that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It strikes me sometimes that there's almost an unwillingness to accept anything but perfect behavior all the time. That's obviously never going to be the case when you have anywhere between 40 and 60 million interactions between the police and the community every year. Also, I think there's an issue of people are concerned about liability, or the officers are concerned that they might get jammed up, but a lot of the time the public side, it seems that ... they're just happy with an apology.

Tom Nestel:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They just want an apology, and it goes away at that point.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and I agree with that. I think that just being straightforward with them goes a long way. Instead of that form letter that protects the organization's liability and doesn't admit any guilt, I don't think that's as powerful as me calling somebody up and saying, "Hey, you know what? I've watched that body camera video. We've interviewed the officer. You're right. You shouldn't have been treated that way."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It doesn't provide any satisfaction for them.

Tom Nestel:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's what that does.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

At that point, it can often stop.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

[crosstalk 00:12:02] actually say, prevent the issues occurring rather than just have them drag on and on.

Tom Nestel:

Right, and that person is going to tell 10 people about how this particular organization handled a complaint.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've found body worn cameras to be useful in this regard, too?

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, I love them. Police officers are, well, I heard somebody say this once, and it is so true. There are two things you can count on from a police officer. They hate the way things are, and they hate change. Coming to a police organization and saying, "Hey, I have this great idea. Let's put cameras on you that'll record everything you're doing and saying, and that'll be a great idea."

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, police officers don't jump up and down and say, "You are a visionary, sir." They say, "You're trying to jam us up. This is just another attempt to arrest us and put us in jail and ruin our families," but what matters is how an organization uses those cameras. If they're using them to see if you were on lunch for 32 minutes or not wearing your hat or were off your beat for too long, well, yeah. It's not going to have much credibility for the program.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it also says a great deal about the organization at that point.

Tom Nestel:

It sure does. It sure does. What we have found is, look, we use that video. If you're wrong, you're wrong, but if you're right, it's so powerful to be able to say, "We're not even interviewing that officer." We're going to do it with our own investigation of every complaint that we get, but if we look at the body camera video and find that that officer did or said nothing wrong, we're not going back to that officer and putting them in the position of saying, "Come do an internal

affairs. Sit in that hot seat, and prepare for a recorded interview, questioning you about an incident that was reported," because we know we didn't do anything wrong.

Tom Nestel:

We're able to say, "Hey, Officer Smith, due to a complaint made by a citizen, an investigation was conducted in reference to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. As a result of review of the body camera video and audio, you have been cleared of any wrongdoing. Thank you for doing a good job."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Nice. That just doesn't happen enough ... We get people jammed up quickly, but we don't do enough about really telling them they've done a great job.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, like, that final line of "Keep up the good work." That hopefully will keep them going in the right direction. Look, morale is tough right now. There's no denying that keeping morale up is a full-time job, but being able to tell individual officers, "Hey, you did fine here. Forge forward."

Tom Nestel:

Last night, I sent out an email to two officers and a sergeant that were involved in a contact with a citizen. They responded to resistance. We don't use force. We respond to resistance. I told them, "Your response to resistance was phenomenal. It was controlled, it was appropriate. Keep up the good work." I hope that they take that to heart and know that they have support.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Queensland Police Service, Mike Newell, who's a chief inspector in the Queensland Police Service, are doing some trials of them actually using letters in different ways, when we write to people. They're using it for anything from speeding cameras, about changing the word and tone of the letter to achieve more compliance and get different outcomes. These small, little experiments and trials of different ways to do things, to get better outcomes. This sounds like a sort of internal police one, to do exactly the same thing.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely, absolutely. Look, kudos to him to realizing that that can have a powerful effect on a large group of people. You can't keep on doing things the way it's always been done.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Your experience generally in SEPTA are fascinating, but I'm also interested in how you've learned from the different places that you've been to, because you started in Philadelphia with over six thousand police officers there. You went to Upper Merion as the police chief, which was how many guys [crosstalk 00:16:20]?

Tom Nestel:

40.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

40, and fields.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now you're back with the Transit Authority here in the Philadelphia region.

Tom Nestel:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a range of experiences that most people really don't get exposed to.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and you know, when you're a young police officer or a supervisor, and you look at the folks that are high in rank, you say, "Oh, man, that person, that man or woman, they know what's going on." I found out that I didn't know what was going on. I was a member of a police department in the fifth largest city in the nation, and responsible for a ton of stuff, and I thought we were the best and that everything we did was pretty much the right way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a common perspective for most people [crosstalk 00:17:05] in most departments.

Tom Nestel:

It is. It truly is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

[crosstalk 00:17:07] Until they go outside and see somewhere else.

Tom Nestel:

Yes. You know what, just a simple example was I never thought I would leave Philadelphia. I thought I would be there for 40 years and retire after 40 years of being with the Philadelphia [crosstalk 00:17:21].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

As your father before you.

Tom Nestel:

That's right. 43 for him.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Wow.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, but I was a guy who every five years changed. I either got promoted or transferred, but every five years I wanted change. There came a time where I had seized the opportunity to get college education and then get a masters degree, and I thought, "I wonder if I would have a chance at getting a job outside of Philadelphia." Never thought of that. I see this advertisement, so I apply and start going through the process, which was laborious. The more steps you went through, the more I thought, "You know what? I'm getting more excited about this idea. I know I wanted to do 40 years because they know how to do everything, but maybe I can bring my brilliance to Upper Moreland and show them the light."

Tom Nestel:

I get hired, and I go to Upper Moreland. I find out that I'm a smart guy and I know a lot about policing, but damn, they do some things so much better than I had ever done in Philadelphia or thought about doing. Policing was totally different, where we're chasing calls in Philadelphia. In Upper Moreland, the first day I'm chief, I go into the radio room and I say, "Hey, call a car in. I want to go out for a ride." "Well, who do you want us to call?" "[crosstalk 00:18:47] Whoever's closest. Get on the air and call one of them in. Who's available?" "Everybody's available."

Tom Nestel:

Officer comes in. I introduce myself to her. I said, "I just want to be your recorder. I'm going to sit in the shotgun seat, and let's go do police work." And she says, "Okay."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good for you, Chief.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah. We get in the car, drive around. We're driving down the street, and she keys in on something. I'm a decorated police veteran of Philadelphia. I'm a good cop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's nothing you could learn.

Tom Nestel:

There is no way I could miss criminal activity that this officer in Upper Moreland has just spotted. I have no idea what she's looking at. None. We drive down the block. We loop around. She pulls in about five, six doors down from what she was looking at. She says, "Did you see that?" And I said, "Sure did." Because the other thing you learn is, you bluff, you know? I mean ...

Tom Nestel:

As we're walking, I said, "Listen,"-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, it's just like teaching undergraduates.

Tom Nestel:

That's right. That's right. I said, "Listen, I have no idea what you saw." And she says, "Well, the sixth house up from the corner has a white van parked in the driveway. I know the woman that lives there. She is in her 70's. She doesn't have a van. I think something's going on." I said, "Oh, man, that's awesome."

Tom Nestel:

As we're going down, a guy comes from the front door and she looks at him, and she says, "Can I help you?" And the guy says, "Oh, no, I'm just giving out fliers." He's got an armful of fliers. She says, "Great. Let me see your ID," and gets the ID. She says, "Is that your van?" And he says, "Yes, ma'am, it is."

Tom Nestel:

I mean, that's phenomenal police work. Phenomenal police work. That's not how I learned to do police work. I learned to respond to 911 calls, and I learned to be observant about something that was happening, but I hadn't learned how to catalog those observations over a period of time and to know what belonged and what didn't belong, because you're working in different places all the time. You don't have that connection with a block like she did.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Some of that's a degree of necessity, because you're working in a place where you can't call on dozens of troops to come and rescue you, when things go south.

Tom Nestel:

Demand for services, too. In Philadelphia, the demand for services are overwhelming. They don't have enough police officers to handle all the demand for services.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or social workers, or mental health respondents.

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely. Whereas in Upper Moreland, the demand for services, they have enough people to handle it. Now, when the police respond, they're doing so much more. They're doing that neighborhood survey to see if anybody saw anything. They're processing a scene, as a uniformed police officer, or even more amazing to me was, they're putting on the case, as the assistant district attorney for the preliminary hearing. I was in awe.

Tom Nestel:

I said, "This is a police officer, who is serving as the prosecutor for the first level of the case." I couldn't imagine doing that in Philadelphia.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think, then, that there ... should be almost a requirement for senior command positions that people have to experience other departments?

Tom Nestel:

Yes. I feel that my greatest growth occurred when I left. I learned a lot in Philadelphia, and I wouldn't change anything that I did. But the variety of policing that I've now been experienced to, I think has made me a better police commander and better at problem solving than I would have been if I had stayed in Philadelphia for 40 years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You talked about your education. How has your education contributed to value for you as a leader, either at mid-level or, because I know you started when you were at mid-level positions here in Philadelphia, or when you took over the role as a police chief?

Tom Nestel:

Out of high school, I went to college for couple semesters and majored in basketball, and went on the police department, which is all I wanted to do. I was always a creative thinker and always interested in problem solving in a different way. I loved being a police officer, and as a sergeant I had ideas, you know? Once you put your ideas on paper-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Be careful with those, now.

Tom Nestel:

Well, they're dangerous tools. They're weapons. I would send the ideas in to my superiors and say, "You know what? This is a great idea, I'll bet you they'll go for it." They didn't go for it. I'm thinking, "Why is that? Is it just bad timing? Is it a bad idea? Is it the development of the idea? Am I not as good as I think I am?"

Tom Nestel:

I thought, "You know what? ... An idea from someone has more value when that person has experience in education." It's just the nature of the beast, whether you agree with it or not. Experience in education make the value of the idea become better.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

[crosstalk 00:24:07] And you need both.

Tom Nestel:

You do. You do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Experience alone isn't sufficient to get there.

Tom Nestel:

I agree.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because a lot of the times, you can meet people with 30 years on the job, but if they've never left that department, if they've never supplemented it with an education that might provide a different perspective, to some degree they don't have 30 years of experience. They have one year of experience, 30 times.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah. As a young sergeant or young lieutenant, I was pretty confident. I knew what I was doing. As a chief, I'm pretty confident that I need a lot of people to help me, that I don't know nearly as much as I thought I did as a sergeant and lieutenant. I look to other people to give me guidance and input and ideas.

Tom Nestel:

The education truly helped me formulate my ideas better, be more comprehensive in the development of those ideas, and certainly provided me with exposure to people and ideas that I would have never have had.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You talked about the value of confidence, at least, in terms of education and experience. A lot of evidence-based policing, however, is driven by a foundation of doubt, driven by, "We don't really know whether this works," and that's the driving force for, "Let's try different ways of doing it and evaluate to see where we get to." Doubt seems to be the thing that's often lacking in so many senior police commanders.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and I think that those are the folks who actually do the best, are the ones that say, "Did it really work? That program that we tried, we're waving a flag and saying, 'Success,' and we're leaving. But was it really successful? Come on in here, and take a look at what we did, and tell me, did this work?"

Tom Nestel:

I think those are the people that are the most successful.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I see a lot of people, however, especially at things like IACP, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the larger PERF forums, Police Executive Research Forums, that don't seem to have that degree of questioning. They don't have that doubt. There's a lot of confidence, but I don't see as many people as perhaps should be, asking those types of questions.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and I don't know ... I think sometimes when you're in that arena, the natural inclination is to sit tall, puff out your chest and say, "Well, listen to what I have to say." I think that if you take some of those most confident and most successful executives out of that forum and say, "Hey, what do you think about this, this, and this?" They go, "You know, that's a great question. I don't know the answer to that. Let's take these ideas, and let's try this." I don't think they're as confident or all-knowing, when you separate them from the herd.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's an interesting observation, because then it suggests, if we're to make more advances with evidence-based policing, we have to think about the mechanism by which we introduce it to people who are in leadership positions.

Tom Nestel:

Yes, and ... even in that mid-level arena. When I went to Upper Moreland and said, "Let's look at auto accidents. Let's do a data-driven approach on reducing crashes in Upper Moreland," in the supervisors meeting, it was guffawed. It was like, "It happens because the roads aren't big enough, and there's lots of traffic. I mean, what else do you need to know?"

Tom Nestel:

But when you separate those supervisors and sit down one-on-one and say, "What do you think?" "Oh, well, I think we need to look at what time of day it's occurring. Maybe there's a causation factor we can focus on." It's interesting that when you separate them, they come up with more creative thinking.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What you're hinting at there is this culture surrounding larger groups of officers.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's almost as if there is this kind of culture of confidence, this culture of knowledge and experience that we can only break down if we pull people out of that in smaller groups.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and I mean, the herd acts differently than the individual. It's the same thing with people in the street. If there's a huge, violent occurrence, if it's a large crowd they're going to actually be different than one person. I do. I think that, in order to get people to be thinking in that doubting way, you have to separate them and say, "Well, do you know the answers? How would we get to those answers? What method would you suggest?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Part of evidence-based policing is also being aware of the research literature and the studies that are going on and around. That seems to be almost the antithesis of police culture and policing. How difficult is that hurdle to overcome?

Tom Nestel:

Well, that's still a big hurdle. I think it's because of the way that journal articles are written and that research is presented. I'm not saying that police officers are stupid. I'm saying that every group speaks in a different language. If you take the academic language and try to hand it to a police officer and say, "Man, this is quality stuff. Read this," they're going to read the first two paragraphs and then say, "What are you talking about? I mean, give me the meat and potatoes. I want to know what the problem is and what solution you came up with."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Give me the conclusion before you give me the rest of this stuff.

Tom Nestel:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Put the journal article in reverse [crosstalk 00:30:01] so I can just read the conclusion.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, I don't want to see your scientific method. What? What are you talking about? I think that it's the same thing as when you read a narrative from a cop, it's an interesting language that, if you're not a cop, you go, "Why does he talk that way?" It is being able to communicate successfully in the language of the group.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sara Thornton, who's a former chief constable from one of the larger British forces, said, "Policing is the only field where the term 'clever' isn't a compliment."

Tom Nestel:

That's interesting. That's interesting.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How do we overcome, to some degree ... almost that sort of hint of anti-intellectualism that is in a lot of police services?

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, I don't know the answer to that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you're well educated, and I know you spent some time in a PHD program as well.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah. I like education. There are an awful lot of police officers that have no desire to get a college education, or to get a graduate education.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which is okay.

Tom Nestel:

Which is okay. I just think that we need to connect with them in a different way. I think you came up with a great method, with the certificate model. You take some of those classes that they're most likely to be interested in, and say, "Why don't you check this out?" I think that if we gave value to that type of learning, then more police officers would become involved in academia in that group.

Tom Nestel:

In my department, I've been there five years. I've always wanted to have block training, where two hours of training was spent on a topic. We just can't get it off the ground, because we're busy doing policing. Maybe the answer is looking at academic partners to come up with this block type training on topics that intertwine academic theory with practical knowledge. Then, use that as check boxes for assignment. You want to be a detective, here are the elements of learning that we'd like you to accomplish before becoming a detective. You want to do this assignment, here are the elements of learning. Have these different types of block training that can be done by people who are much better at training than we are.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There are some arguments for the notion that often, we're too busy doing the job to learn how to do the job better.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah. I'll tell you what, something I learned at this advanced age is that as a 25-year-old police officer in the elite highway patrol, training just wasn't my priority. I was interested in going out and being a police officer in the middle of the night, in the roughest neighborhoods, and doing the job.

Tom Nestel:

It's different today. Every young police officer I talk to says, "I'd love more training." My immediate response is, "Okay, in what?" "I don't know. I don't know, but I'd love more training."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Too often, focus is just on firearm use and legal updates, though.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, and look, I think legal updates are very important.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sure.

Tom Nestel:

I don't think firearms use is. Frankly, how many of us use firearms? I think that deadly force decision making is a major, and we do that. That's one thing we do successfully is, through the firearms simulator, we do deadly force decision making on a regular basis, but other things that cops are just interested in learning about, I'm fascinated by the fact that it seems to have changed. Where the young officers in their 20's back in my day were not interested in training, and even the yearly certification training were all in December.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It was all about eye rolling.

Tom Nestel:

Getting it done. Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Tom Nestel:

Where today, they seem to really be interested in having training opportunities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is there a need for us to change the professional development model as we proceed through our careers?

Tom Nestel:

Absolutely. Just like everything else.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, as they do in the medical field. You can't get by with the training from five years ago. [crosstalk 00:34:26] need to be continually updating your professional practice.

Tom Nestel:

You can't count on that nine months that you went through in 1982.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For me, it was 1984. We're getting old, mate. We're getting old.

Tom Nestel:

Yeah, we are.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tom, it's been a pleasure.

Tom Nestel:

My pleasure, Jerry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode one of Reducing Crime, recorded in April 2018. You can find more podcasts like this at ReducingCrime.com and wherever you found this. New podcasts are announced on Twitter at underscore Reducing Crime. Don't forget the underscore.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Be safe, and best of luck.