

## #77 (JASON POTTS)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers.

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers. Formerly an officer with the Vallejo Police Department in California, Jason Potts is now the chief of the Las Vegas Department of Public Safety. He is also the current president of the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing. We chat about the challenges of implementing evidence-based policing as a police leader.

### Jimmy McNulty:

Baker, Let me tell you a little secret. A patrolling officer on his beat is the one true dictatorship in America. We can lock a guy up on a humble, we can lock him up for real, and we can say, fuck it, pull under the expressway and drink ourselves to death. And our side partners will cover it. So no one, and I mean no one, tells us how to waste our shift.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime. I trust you recognized that was a clip from The Wire where Jimmy McNulty explains to a fellow cop the level of autonomy afforded frontline patrol officers. That becomes relevant in my chat with Jason Potts, who like myself started in patrol, where we talk about motivating proactivity among frontline officers.

Jason began his policing career with the Vallejo Police Department in Northern California, where he moved up the ranks to captain, leading the Operations Bureau, Investigations Bureau and Emergency Services Unit. He worked crime suppression, investigations, narcotics, SWAT, field training and internal affairs. He served with the local FBI's Violent Crime Task Force, and the Oakland Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force. He's also a military reserve special agent with the Coast Guard Investigative Service.

Now as chief of the Las Vegas Department of Public Safety, he manages the city jail and leads the deputy city marshals who provide public safety at city parks, trails, tourist corridors and city facilities. He's a former NIJ LEADS Scholar, and National Policing Institute fellow, and he has a master's degree from UC Irvine. As I said, he's also president of the

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American Society of Evidence-Based Policing, and it was at their annual conference in Spokane, Washington State that I managed to grab him for a quick chat.

**Jason Potts:**

But everyone pronounces it that way.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What is the right way to pronounce it?

**Jason Potts:**

Vallejo.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How did you end up in the Vallejo Police Department?

**Jason Potts:**

I grew up there. Yeah, I grew up in Vallejo.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What part of California is it?

**Jason Potts:**

Bay Area. It's between Oakland and Sacramento. Rough area. High crime, went bankrupt in 2008. Talk about just a unique policing environment. We're the American Nightmare series and Netflix was one of the number one streaming Netflix series three or four months ago. Not a very flattering view of Vallejo. About a girl, a lady was raped and we suspected it was her boyfriend, and our officer, our detectives just got locked in. Talk about confirmation bias. They got locked in on her and then this rapist was out there doing his thing and raped her not only once, but twice, kidnapped her.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, good God.

**Jason Potts:**

And again, we just got locked in on the boyfriend, as most detectives do. Yeah. It was always the acquaintance or the boyfriend or the husband, and it's not the boogeyman. I always tell my daughter when she's walking home from college, don't let little Johnny take you home, because little Johnny's the one that's going to rape you. It's not the boogeyman in the bushes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. What was it like policing in an area where you grew up?

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**Jason Potts:**

It was great, only because I think officers that police in the areas where they grow up, they're actually just more invested in the community, more passionate about it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You see a bit more of the gray areas rather than just black and white.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah, you have some passions. You want to do it, you want to police it and you want to work hard. Because it's your community. And let's face it. I mean, growing up in that community, very diverse community, one of the most diverse in the U.S. I think there's something to be said for, I used to play sports with these kids and I wasn't involved in an officer involved shooting. Our department had at one point, 30-plus percentage of our department was involved in a shooting.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's really high.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah, it was really high. We had some challenges in that culture, for sure. It's a good department though. Some good cops until, like I said, until we went bankrupt, 2008, we actually were paid pretty well.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You were a captain by then, weren't you?

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah, I was. Yeah. I left as a captain. Chief came in, from the outside. Shawny Williams brought in the deputy chief and I was the captain.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How many officers were in that department then?

**Jason Potts:**

At one point we had 150, and then we went down to about 77 when I left.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief.

**Jason Potts:**

Yes. It was wild. So talk about an up-tempo department, at one year we had 30 murders, 269 shooting events.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

30 murders, and you had like 70-something cops.

**Jason Potts:**

Yes. Wild. Wild department to police in.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That is crazy.

**Jason Potts:**

Yes. A wild department to police in. So definitely some challenges. It's a lesson for all of us is that our cops are paying attention to our elected officials. When you're up there just bad-mouthing the police, they're going to de-police.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. You can de-police formally and you can de-police informally.

**Jason Potts:**

Of course.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's that horrible world that we live in, and I've seen this in Philadelphia where you've got much more progressive politicians, and people do pay attention to what they say because it's not just an issue of what's the budget going to look like. But if I get involved in things, will I get some level of official support from local government?

**Jason Potts:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

If I have to make a tough call or have to make tough decisions or have to think about from a management perspective, investing in proactive policing, what is that level of support?

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely. Are they going to be supported? I always say this, you can't get your police to be proactive at 3:00 A.M. at the corner of walk and don't walk, unless they feel trusted and supported. Because think about it, when cops go in service, they have all the autonomy in the world. It harkens back to Jimmy McNulty in *The Wire*. I love *The Wire*, and he talks about the one true dictatorship in America is an American police officer.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That level of discretion kicks in because he passed away recently, unfortunately. But Rosenfeld pretty much recognized that the focus in fact was the real deal when police rolled back, crime increased.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you can do it on a citywide level, a national level, but you can see it at the micro level where it just makes a difference in communities and street corners.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. You had a career outside of policing before you joined police?

**Jason Potts:**

Well, yes. I started off as a border patrol agent, did that for a little over two years. I was in Calexico, California.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now I'm guessing that's down south.

**Jason Potts:**

Yes, right there in Mexicali border. I was military, I was Coast Guard, so I was a young Coast Guard Coastie. I was military. I always tell kids, "That's your best opportunity to get that responsibility." I was a coxswain, so I was a 21-year-old kid driving a 41-foot search and rescue boat. The vessel commander of that boat, the coxswain, the officer of the day at 21 years old, running search and rescue operations in San Diego.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Fantastic.

**Jason Potts:**

And so the best way to get the responsibility early on, and-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's so much for that. I mean, there are some jobs that are just downright fun.

**Jason Potts:**

Oh, they were great. San Diego.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I used to do armed response in Central London on motorbikes in my mid-20s, and I thought, "I'd do this for free."

**Jason Potts:**

This is so fun.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When the weather's great, it's fantastic.

**Jason Potts:**

I know it was the same way. It was San Diego. I'm cruising around the San Diego Harbor rolling around in a rigid hole inflatable or in a 41-foot utility boat and doing boardings. Got involved in maritime law enforcement. That's where I got my itch.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you end up in the police department, Vallejo.

**Jason Potts:**

Vallejo.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'll get it. I could edit this and probably get it back in, but you know I'm just going to leave it as fucked up as I always do. What happens to all the people in Vallejo. You grew up there. But then you got into evidence-based policing. You one of the founding members.

**Jason Potts:**

Yes, of American Society of Evidence-Based Policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

American Society of Evidence-Based Policing. My claim to fame is I'm the first paid-up member.

**Jason Potts:**

There you go.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah. We always appreciate you being there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm the first person to do it with any money.

**Jason Potts:**

That's it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What brought it to you?

**Jason Potts:**

What brought it to me? I think I've always prided myself on being very operational most of my career. I was a SWAT operator. I was a SWAT commander, been involved in violent gang task forces, DEA, Undercover narcotics. By the way, best time of my career is undercover narcotics.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've spoken to a few undercover people.

**Jason Potts:**

Oh, it was fun.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, it's a ride.

**Jason Potts:**

It was fun. And I was buying crystal meth from mid-level drug dealers in Oakland. It was just a lot of fun.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But that's in your spare time. What were you doing at work?

**Jason Potts:**

It was so much fun. Yeah, exactly. It was so much fun. And then I applied for the NIJ LEADS Scholar program in 2015. I was the second year cohort. I saw a solicitation for it, and so I say, why not? And I actually, I did my Capstone project with body cameras and the effect on policing strategies, video recordings. And so I was always interested in research. And you know why I was at UC Irvine? I really got into Lawrence Sherman U, by the way.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm so sorry.

**Jason Potts:**

Read a lot of your work, the Eric Pizas of the world and Nancy LaVignes, and now I'm in these conferences and getting to know you all and consider you guys friends. It's just really neat. And so I put in for it and I'll tell you that NIJ LEADS Scholar program really was the trajectory that changed my career, big time.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Hopefully for the better.

**Jason Potts:**

For the better. At the time, if you remember, we used to talk about how it was a detriment to us when we first started this American Society of Evidence-Based Policing. But I think a lot of us have really benefited from it. A lot of us are police chiefs. We have Louis Molina that was the New York Department of Corrections Commissioner. He was a chief before me at the City of Las Vegas. We have Renee Mitchell, a high-level executive in private firms. There's lots of folks that have really benefited. Rachel Tolber, chief of Redlands.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So Vallejo had a financial crisis. You were a captain at the time. You moved across the city to Las Vegas. What's the relationship between you as chief of public safety, if I get that right, what's the relationship between you and what you control compared to, I think most people are more familiar with Las Vegas, Metro Police Department.

**Jason Potts:**

I'm glad you asked that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a complicated relationship, isn't it?

**Jason Potts:**

It is, it is. And I could give you a quick brief history of it. So the City of Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Police Department, and Clark County Sheriff consolidated in 1973. So when you call 911, you get the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. I work for the City of Las Vegas. I'm the chief of the city of Las Vegas, Department of Public Safety. So we have a city jail and we have about 100 cops, deputy city marshals, and we have animal protection. So I have about 420 employees. We're tasked mainly, we're rooted as park police and we have our Fremont Street Experience and we have our STRAT area. Those are our two tourist corridors. So that's our task.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I was going to say it's park police. There's not a lot of vegetation in Vegas.

**Jason Potts:**

Right, no, no, the desert, and everything else. But it's fun.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

More cactus.

**Jason Potts:**

Right. But I'll tell you, Las Vegas has some of the best parks in the world. They really do. There's 83 parks that we're tasked with patrolling, phenomenal money that's put into those parks. That's us. And so again, when you call 911, you



get the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. We're proud of our relationships with Metro. They've been better than they ever have been. Sheriff McMahill is just an outstanding leader, and I consider him a friend and a person that I call on quite a bit.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Your early work with evidence-based policing, what was some of the stuff you were doing in Vallejo, and did it help, did it help your understanding? I mean, as you moved into taking on a chief role?

**Jason Potts:**

I'll tell you a lot of times going from operational and they're like, "What are you doing?" I was driving around with my hair on fire. I was always that operational person. And then when I started trying to do RCTs, practitioner-led research through BetaGov, some of the things that we did, we did our first RCT, a randomized control trial with unlicensed plate readers, and I was inspired at IACP and NIJ, the LEADS program, and big shout out to Maureen McGaw that changed policing I believe.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've got a podcast episode. We sat in a park and drank vodka.

**Jason Potts:**

That's it, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Some gut rot that she dragged up from Florida. But yeah, I'm amazed that I did the podcast episode and didn't wake up blind the next day, but yeah.

**Jason Potts:**

Exactly, right? So doing that, ALPR, RCT and folks are saying, "Why are you doing that? Have you lost your mind? What are you doing right now?"

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it is interesting, if I may, because what you end up with is when you're in operations it's all about being really decisive.

**Jason Potts:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's not really a lot of space for doubt. But then when you think about what the experiments are in their studies, they're basically an embracing of doubt. We don't know what the outcome is, so let's test it and find out. And it seems the antithesis of your operational side.

**Jason Potts:**

And I was always a curious sort like that. I was always like that. Even when I worked narcotics, you'd scribble down a note about an informant, it would tell you something. You put it in your drawer and you're like, "Where is that one note where so-and-so said this about Dukie Dee?" And I was like, "Well, why don't we create a system?" We did an email system on how we do intelligence debriefs and have a template, and we could query it that way. So I was always looking to try to improve things and just curious about, "Hey, why is that? Why are we doing it that way?"

Then when I got into NIJ LEADS, I was the second year cohort, and then it just took off from there. It really did. Josh Young introduced me to Renee and here we go.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think that's an underappreciated question. I think there were lots of people that go, "Why do we do it that way?" And then they just shrug and go, "Well, that's how we do it."

**Jason Potts:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it's that small group of people that go, "Why do we do it that way?" And then it just needles away at them and then they want to find out, and then is there a better way of doing it?

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely. When I applied for this job at the City of Las Vegas, Department of Public Safety, they ask me at the end, they go, "You any questions for us?" And I remember asking them, I got some feedback on this in a positive way. I go, "Yeah, I have a question for you." I go, "What does success look like?" And I asked that because I want to know what the end state is. But then I asked another question. I go, "What does failure look like?" And they looked at me. I go, "Failure in my role. And the reason why I'm asking about that is because if I know what failure looks like for you, then I'm going to do everything I can to mitigate it." The feedback was that was really an interesting question and it helped me probably get the job.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Did they understand, were they interested in your evidence-based background?

**Jason Potts:**

They were. They were very interested in some of the things that I did and some of the publications, I wrote Police One quite a bit, published a few times at NIJ Journal, and we did a virtual reality study with Angela Hawken, which was published.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So that's interesting because I feel that one of the things holding back evidence-based policing is that city and town managers and people who essentially hire police chiefs don't know enough about this to ask about it. So because they're not asking about it, because they're not requiring it because they're not interested in it, it's not helping advance evidence-based policing within policing because you don't need it to get a job. If you just come in and be an alpha male, and that's just the women to be all firm and decisive and appear. Yeah, you absolutely know what's going on. They get excited by that. I'm thinking at that level, no, we want people with more doubt, who are prepared to try and test different things. So it's nice to hear that they were more open to that.

### Jason Potts:

I was going to tell you, the City of Las Vegas embraces that doubt, and they talk a lot about pilots. We always talk about, "Let's do a pilot, let's do a study." So it was already just a great relationship in that regard to they really enjoy looking at data and looking at pilots.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that's also important because you end up spending less money. Let's see if this works before we make it city-wide. When I see people just adopting stuff city-wide with no idea of whether it's going to work in their agency.

### Jason Potts:

Absolutely.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I see it as a missed opportunity, but a shocking waste of money as well. You really invested in the budget now and managing that kind of stuff.

### Jason Potts:

Oh yeah. We have a hundred million dollars budget now. When I first started it was 83, and it just keeps growing every year. And so yeah, that's always part of a chief's job. And I have a great budget analyst, and Jen Gallego is her name, and she just really makes it all work for me. Every chief needs a Jen Gallego, I tell you. She's incredible.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

What have you discovered are the things that you never knew when you were a captain what it would be like being the chief? Because it's a big role change, isn't it?

### Jason Potts:

I'll tell you, it is.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you are the buck stock now, right?

### Jason Potts:

Oh my goodness. So when you think of a culture, and I think Bill Bratton says this best, it's how you reward, how you hold people to account, and how you measure. But I think a lot of times we get so caught up in just putting out grease fires as chiefs, and we don't have enough slack time to think about our strategic vision and what we're doing. So just too busy doing the job to do it well. And a lot of times when you think of evidence-based policing, let's test this, let's target test and track and let's do all those things. But my goodness, man, as a chief, you don't have time to be thinking about that stuff. And it's trying to get your folks to align with that. And I think some of the missteps I had, and I think we talked about this, I was reflecting on this before I came in here. Bernard Melekian talked about the three-legged stool, and I think there's four legs of a chair.

And I think every chief needs to have your community, of course, your frontline cops, your elected officials. And I think that fourth leg, it's really important is your command staff. And I think when I first took this job, I think I was a little complacent, thinking that the command staff, my middle managers, my lieutenants and above would align, just because I'm the chief, right? But if you're not explaining that enough to them and they're not seeing the why, the win-win for them, they're not going to go along with you. And if they're not carrying it the right way, then they're going to push it down to the sergeants. And it's going to get pushed down even further. And we've talked about this, the sergeant rank is the most important rank I believe, in policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. They can make or break whatever you do.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely. And if the sergeants aren't bought in, forget it. But I'll tell you, I think our middle managers or lieutenants are almost as important because they're the ones that are going to be supervising and leading those sergeants. And so yeah, definitely learned some things there. And reflecting on the importance of the command staff position and those lieutenants and above.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Given the short tenure of many police chiefs, I mean it's three years, three, four years is kind of the average these days.

**Jason Potts:**

But big cities, and I think Perth put out a report, I think it's up to seven, and the smaller, smaller cities, but still, and I have much respect for chiefs that do seven in 10 years.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh my goodness. Yeah.

**Jason Potts:**

I really do. Especially now, with the politics that chiefs have to deal with nowadays, it's just much different. It really is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The challenge with that is that if people think you're only going to be there three, four years, if you come in as a reformer, you can lose one of those constituent groups if you're not doing kind of business as usual, if you actually want to reform and make some changes. There's a department I've worked with in the past where people at the middle level were introduced to me as, "Oh, those are the B team." As in they be here when you get here, they be here when you leave.

**Jason Potts:**

Love that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And they're just going to wait you out.

**Jason Potts:**

Of course they are.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Unless you can actually get them on board.

**Jason Potts:**

And I find that too, "Hey, chief, what you going to do, about two, three years?" I told this one guy, I was like, "Why would you think that? I don't have a shelf life." You can take that for what it's worth, I don't know. I don't know how long I do this, but until I start having folks tell me no, when I become ineffective for my people, when I stop giving them resources, when I stop being able to be a good advocate for them, then I know my days are numbered. And I think every good chief constantly has to assess that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, I spoke to a sheriff from Florida, John Mina. He used to work with the Orlando Police Department and was the chief there. And then he moved across to the sheriff's office and I was saying, how was it? He said, well, when I was chief, I had to play politics all the time. Now I'm just it. I just have to get re-elected every few years. But you are dealing right in the middle of all places, Las Vegas. Politics.

**Jason Potts:**

Oh yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How is that?

**Jason Potts:**

It's good times though. Our mayor, mayor Carolyn Goodman, her and her husband, Oscar Goodman have been mayors for I think 25 years now, going on 25.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's been real stability in government there.

**Jason Potts:**

It's an institution. And so it's not a strong mayor government, it's still a strong council government, but they are such a symbol of Vegas that it's hard to replace them. It's going to be interesting. And I'll tell you just the politics of, again, being in a very nuanced, very different department. I have limited jurisdiction as our marshals. We don't have jurisdiction on private property. We're not a 911 agency. And then I have to be careful of staying in my lane and not going outside of that and going, "Hey, what are you doing? You're posting these gun pictures of your marshals and your flex team and your conditions team that we've established." We established a problem-oriented policing team. So we have two young women that they're just phenomenal cops that are on our problem-oriented and policing team, and they do a great job. They patrol our pedestrian mall, developing those friendships, partnerships and relationships with stakeholders on Fremont Street, looking at the underlying causes of crime. They're really kind of getting into the problem-oriented policing side of things. What's old is new type of thing. And they're really killing it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And what's also underappreciated is that a lot of this, the presentations of referencing 30 by 30, which has been a big thing at this conference, to get up to 30% of police recruits in the academy by 2030, being women, recognizing the researchers there, recognize the value of contribution that women make in policing. And we need to up our game, especially compared to how we're doing compared to others, less use of force, fewer complaints.

**Jason Potts:**

It will speak to folks. A lot of positive outcomes, very positive outcomes. And I was telling you about these problem-oriented policing officers that we have. They're just great officers that just happen to be women. And that's how I see it. It was a great selection on our part. They just engage with all these stakeholders on Fremont Street. It's a tough area to police.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Really.

**Jason Potts:**

We have a homeless issue that's out there. Our homeless resource center is close to Fremont Street. So they have those constant challenges, but they're doing great.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. And also you have that conflict of the homeless people, plus you also have all the tourist populations and the transient population, but also the permanent residents who live in the area.

**Jason Potts:**

Bus center nearby. So there's all kinds of things going on. Talk about crime attractors, right? Not to mention folks who are drinking booze and they're putting the booze in the trash cans.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, you've got it all going on, haven't you?

**Jason Potts:**

Oh yeah. And not to mention the pedestrian mall has a cover and there's air conditioning. So all kinds of reasons for folks to be over there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I can see why it's appealing. The four pedestals that you talked about-

**Jason Potts:**

Four legs of the chair.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

... so you have to try and manage all of those things?

**Jason Potts:**

Yes, as a chief.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What happens if you lose them?

**Jason Potts:**

I tell you, you can lose one. That leg, that chair is wobbly, you lose two, you're done. And so I lose community and I have my electeds and I have my frontline cops and I have my command staff. I think I'm okay. I'm wobbly depending on where you're at. And I think Nancy-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And of course you don't really want to lose the community. Well you don't want to lose any of them.

**Jason Potts:**

We don't want to lose any of them. But I'm just saying you're very wobbly when you lose one. And Nancy Levine, the director of NIJ said it best. "I think it's capacity, it's agency culture, it's politics. It's local politics." It's values that you have. It's even nearby law enforcement agencies. They all play a part in how you can have these things, how you can implement evidence-based decision making.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So given that in mind then, now you've transitioned to being a chief, are you finding it has been harder to implement evidence-based work than you anticipated?

**Jason Potts:**

Yes. And the reason why is this, I know what I need to do, but I've become now as a chief, you're a visionary. You're not a doer. I had a sergeant that just got promoted to lieutenant, he went to a nearby agency and he was really bought into these things. He helped with a contagious fire study with John DeCarlo and Eric Dlugolenski. We did, but trying to find your credible messengers, your folks in your department that are going to buy into this. And I think that's difficult sometimes because they're not going to see it the same way. They're not exposed to it, and it's not really fair for us to think that way.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. We're here at what, the eighth American Society of Evidence-Based Policing conference. And you've been at every single one of them. You're a founding member here, so you are embedded in evidence-based policing more than just about anybody else here.

**Jason Potts:**

Right. And I found as a leader, it's meeting people where they are. And I think someone said it best, there's this book that I love on leadership, Leadership On the Line, he talks about delivering news and change at rates people can absorb. Or disappointing people at rates they can absorb.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Disappointing people at the rates they can absorb. That's like a lesson in my personal life.

**Jason Potts:**

There you go. You and me both, right? Anyone that's married and listens to this right now knows exactly what we're talking about. I've been married for 25 years, so it's disappointing my wife at rates she can absorb and when you think about it that's leadership and it's inspiring others to follow you. It's inspiring others to be better.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Next time I tell Shelly I'm failing with something, I'm going to tell her it's leadership.

**Jason Potts:**

It's leadership. It's leadership. Absolutely. And not to mention, just leadership sometimes from a chief, wicked problems, those adaptive leadership problems that don't really have an easy answer. It's really difficult sometimes. And a lot of times the transition from being a second-level, a captain in an agency, you're kind of more of a doer. I can implement evidence-based policing things. I can do lights on, lights off study that we did in California because I was leading that. And then when you become a chief, you're the one going, "Hey, what do y'all think of this? You want to come along with me?" You know what I mean? They're like, oh, come on chief, we got other things to deal with right now.



**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, what you're really trying help them understand is that more of the job is about ambiguity and it's about change and it's about risk, and people don't like those things.

**Jason Potts:**

I love that you said that because I think Jim Bierman, I consider a friend and mentor, he talks about that I have a high tolerance for risk and ambiguity, and I think as a leader, you have to develop those. When you're long and gone, are you developing that structure, those systems and subsystems where people can embrace ambiguity and change?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've talked about this in the past, but it's the antithesis of what we expect and we train frontline cops to do, and everybody starts as a frontline cop.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And we say, go to an incident on your own with minimal information.

**Jason Potts:**

Figure it out.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

A line of text on an MDT on the car or a sentence that you hear over the radio. It's like, something's going on at this address, it's three o'clock in the morning, go and sort it out.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Just go and unfuck it. And you have to go in with a degree of confidence and certainty that you know what you're doing. And now we're trying to say to people, but there's also a really important place for change and risk and ambiguity and doubt.

**Jason Potts:**

And failure.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And failure, and that seems the antithesis of everything we've taught people for your first say 20 years.

**Jason Potts:**

I'm telling you, I use these things with my kids. There's two types of mistakes. Mistakes of the mind and mistakes of the heart. You've heard that you can tolerate mistakes of the mind. My alarm didn't go off. I was late. I dropped something. I broke something. But mistakes of the heart, the undermining, the lying, the stealing, the cheating, that kind of thing. Obviously folks don't want those kind of people. And so I always tell our folks, just make a mistake. I'd rather pull you back than push you forward.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So is that going to work then if I apply for a chief's position, I'm really big into failure?

**Jason Potts:**

Well, you're right. That's a nice way of looking at it, yeah, we're going to fail. Sure you are. As long as you're not failing the same way over and over again.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How do you do that? Especially, and I don't know anything about the previous chief in the Public Safety Bureau.

**Jason Potts:**

Louis Molina, you know him?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Of course I do.

**Jason Potts:**

So that helped. He's kind of established that, he was there 10 months, but he established that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's not a long time though to move people. The B team, we'd be here when you get here, we'd be here when you leave, would've happily ridden that one out. And then you run into those rubber levers that just spring back and you pull hard on them, but they spring back.

**Jason Potts:**

I'll tell you, I don't know if I'm doing it real well, but yeah, that's a challenge to do that, to get that, to go from that certainty in the way we've always done it because they're entrenched in that. I also lead a jail and you got to keep the buses running, if you will. Everything's kind of orderly in a jail, and that's the way it is. And I actually am interested in evidence-based from a custodial jail perspective. In fact, I have a lieutenant who's really embraced that and we're trying to develop an evidence-based policing playbook. I asked him to look into CrimeSolutions.gov and National Institute of Corrections and those kinds of things. So why not be one of those first agencies and we're actually exploring ICAP, integrating communication assessments and tactics in a jail setting. Why not? And then test it and see if it works.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So de-escalation type training.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I never hear good news coming out of jails.

**Jason Potts:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The only good news you hear over jail is, did you hear anything from the jail today? No. That's the only good news you hear, isn't it?

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely. And so we always worry about the in-custody deaths and how do we mitigate those? Right now we have issues with that. You have fentanyl that's getting into our jails. You have suicides, you have just natural causes of death. Those are the three ones that you deal with and anytime you hear of an in-custody death, you're like, "oh, gosh."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is that one of the, [inaudible 00:27:40] talking about what are the things that can get a police chief jammed up?

**Jason Potts:**

That's it. In-custody deaths in a jail and officer-involved shootings, just really embarrassing things. Those underlying problems. Those problems lying in wait, right? I think Gordon Graham says this best, the low-frequency, high-risk events, and you have to think about those and you better make sure you've got good systems and subsystems in place. I rail against sloganeering and check-the-box training. I think we don't do a good job in American policing by really baking these things into the systems and subsystems of what we're trying to do, I have this silly mnemonic that sometimes my folks at work kind of roll their eyebrows. It's called PITSA and I actually ripped it off Geoff Albert. Policy, Incentives, Training, Supervision and Accountability. We got to hit on policy. We got to hit on incentives, how we reward folks and how to get motivated. Training, of course, good supervision and accountability, everything you need to know about a culture.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I've done mid-level, mid and senior level prominent policing type training with a panda model, which is from book I've read, but I've seen it work in departments and I've seen it fail in departments. And the training's been exactly the same, but they've had the training, but they haven't had any of these other parts to it. They didn't have the supervision, they didn't have the accountability, they didn't have the rest of the culture needed to actually make a change in the organization and move it from status quo inertia to let's get to somewhere ideally better.

**Jason Potts:**

The thing about Minneapolis, they had procedural justice training. They had de-escalation training, yet that still happened. Tyre Nichols in Memphis, I'm sure they had all these things. I believe that we're not baking that into the systems and subsystems of policing. That's where we fall short.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The training's seen more as a cover your ass. I gave you the training, so now I'm fine.

**Jason Potts:**

I know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But didn't actually reinforce it with, I also believe in it and I want to make sure it's happening. And you don't see the leadership mimicking the behaviors they want to see and you don't see the support mechanisms, even down to small things. I've had agencies that took on the training, but then they didn't change any of their paperwork and their forms and that just rubber levered them back to exactly where they've been before.

**Jason Potts:**

Playbooks, checklists, I think I talked about this the opening day is we can learn a lot from the National Transportation Safety Board, the airline industry. I mean, I know you fly, right? And so you have checklists, and listen, there's an incident, something happens. They really look at these incidents, these failures, the medical profession. Anesthesiologists have checklists. And why can't we do that in policing? I think a lot of times being a SWAT commander, we have checklists, why not use those? Because you're going to forget sometimes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Much more widely. For me as a pilot, they were never necessary at the beginning of the day, but I used to have a little seaplane and I used to fly to Florida and back from Maryland. And if you have a long day flying, that checklist is great at the end of the day when you're cognitively wiped out.

**Jason Potts:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it's time to land the plane. It's like, run through the checklist. So we talked about the challenges you had, even though you understand evidence-based policing really well in terms of getting it into an agency and finding other champions, basically. I think you're really talking about who could take it up and run it more at the mid-level and your command level.

**Jason Potts:**

Champions and credible messengers. I think both, people that really care, and give a shit, to do it, those that care and those that can actually deliver it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But can it survive based on that?

**Jason Potts:**

I don't know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How do you, yeah, I mean, no, no. Here's that doubt we should have. Does it work if you just have credible messengers and a few champions or can you actually does, do you have to bring enough people on board for there to be a tipping point that it changes the culture of that organization? That what? We're asking people to become normalized. How do you operationalize kind of evidence-based problem-oriented kind of work?

**Jason Potts:**

That's so true. I would think about what so what and now what, right. When we think about things and how we operationalize, I think for me is why is it relevant to folks? Why do they care enough? That cop at 3:00 A.M., at the corner of walk and don't walk? Why does he give a shit about hotspot policing? And I think he cares when it makes his job easier. Evidence-based decision making I think when we start to turn the corner, when our cops say, "Okay, I get it. It's making my job much more efficient and more effective." The police-to-peace model, the three tenants, are you effective? Are you just, are you empathetic? And I think those are great tenants for policing if you think about it. I think that's when we start to really change the culture here, when we start to think about how we do that to make their jobs easier. But it's a challenge. It really is. Because a lot of cops are like, "This is bullshit."

I think most cops understand the hotspots. I think we're really starting to turn a corner on, we talk about this all the time, hot people, hot places and hot times. And then we deploy ourselves in that way, in that manner. And I think folks get that. I think now, policing is starting to turn a corner there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are you seeing a change in young cops in terms of the committed side?

**Jason Potts:**

I am.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Jason Potts:**

I'm seeing that young cops embrace this much more than your middle managers that are more institutionalized. And I think that's the key there is these young cops get it and they understand, let's face it, cops want to be on a winning team. They want to have like, we're doing this, we're championing evidence-based decision making. It's new progressive stuff, but it's the institutionalized middle managers, the frozen middle that sometimes resist it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The frozen middle. I like that.

**Jason Potts:**

And it's so true because they're the ones that have been in it. It's the way they did it before. And that's what I talked about earlier. You can't be complacent with that major stakeholder, that leg, that fourth leg of the chair.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You've been involved in ASEBP people from the start. Where's next? Where's the important, where would you take things next?

**Jason Potts:**

How do we operationalize this? At first we were bottom-up. We were sergeants and officers leading this. Now we're chiefs and now we're looking at it differently and we go, "How do we get our chiefs to buy into this?"

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right? I mean, Rachel Tobler, who's...

**Jason Potts:**

Or me.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You guys are both chiefs now.

**Jason Potts:**

Right. How do we get the chiefs to buy into this?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've not moved in the slightest. You're making me feel the real incompetent. My professional status hasn't changed through this whole thing. And here you are all leaping up the rank structures.

**Jason Potts:**

But seriously though, how do we-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Thanks for making me feel bad. I appreciate that.

**Jason Potts:**

You got it. You got it. So how do we do that? And I think the next step, and I've said this before too, how do we get into the ICMA's of the world, the International City Managers Association, major mayor's conferences, and these were major stakeholders. That's major influence and I think we lose it, the judiciary prosecutors, I think we're missing some of

these key stakeholders. It almost feels like sometimes we're in an echo chamber. It's a challenge, and I think it's getting these other stakeholders involved.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it's been a real pleasure and it's always nice to see you. We all seem to catch up in fun places around the country.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah, no, it's an honor. I appreciate you, Jerry.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Keep it up and fantastic work, mate.

**Jason Potts:**

Yeah, thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now I'm going to shoot off and find Shelley and just disappoint her at a rate that she can tolerate.

**Jason Potts:**

Tolerate. Exactly. All right brother, thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 77 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Spokane, Washington State in May 2024. Subscribe to Reducing Crime at Spotify, SoundCloud, Apple, or wherever you pod because your karma points will increase exponentially.

Transcripts can be found at [reducingcrime.com](https://reducingcrime.com), and instructors can DM me for multiple choice questions for every episode.

Be safe, and best of luck.