

## #92 (RICH JOHNSTON)

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### **Jerry Ratcliffe:**

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

Rich Johnston is the police chief for Barrie just north of Toronto and Canada, a strong supporter of evidence-based policing. We talk about how it has changed his career and why future chiefs need to get on board with the evidence-based movement.

This is Reducing Crime, and I'm your host Jerry Ratcliffe.

Police Chief Rich Johnston has been a police officer since 1997 and currently serves as the chief for Barrie Police Service. As you'll hear, he spent a short time with the Ontario Provincial Police, but then joined Barrie where he served in all areas of the Barrie Police Service, including operations, operational support, investigative services, and executive leadership. He's the first Canadian to earn the status of lead scholar from the US National Institute of Justice and leads in this case stands for Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science.

He holds a bachelor's in philosophy, which you'll hear us talk about briefly and two master's degrees including the prestigious MSt in applied criminology and police management from the University of Cambridge. He's long been an important supporter of evidence-based policing both in Canada and abroad. In 2022, Chief Johnston received the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police Excellence in Leadership Award and was inducted into the evidence-based policing Hall of Fame at the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University. We chatted during the IACP annual conference in Denver, Colorado, where Rich made time in this hectic schedule to drop by a coffee shop and catch up with me to talk policing.

### **Rich Johnston:**

So you've heard episodes bought? Oh, so many. It's actually altered my career. Not that it means anything to you because you will take no credit for it, but it's altered my career. Seriously. Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So I don't fluff anybody, but were there particular episodes or just particular things that kind of changed how you think about policing that was already ongoing?

**Rich Johnston:**

Tamara Harold

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

she's a sweetheart. She's the best super smart woman and the best presenter I've ever seen.

**Rich Johnston:**

I will second that. She is a rockstar. No, but she, yeah, and completely. So number five back, that

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Was like six years ago now,

**Rich Johnston:**

But it's spoke in such plain, simple, approachable language and I say approachable now, but it's concrete. I get it. Cops get pop. It was really good. I made my wife listen to it four times and she was getting a little annoyed with it. But just because you had the place-based approach

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you've also become a big fan of evidence-based policing.

**Rich Johnston:**

Huge. I know I've heard Alex Murray say before, why did I only hear it about this later in your career? I was 20 some odd years in and then got exposed to it. It's so common sense.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You came into evidence-based policing, like so many people kind of mid-career. Where did policing start for you?

**Rich Johnston:**

I always wanted to be a police officer, but

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I will say though, that always worries me. Like they say, oh, I always knew from the age five I was going to be a cop. I think that's a bit weird, but okay, cool. That

**Rich Johnston:**

Or a hockey player or an astronaut. Canada doesn't have a chance. That explains, it's the middle one, right? I can't skate to save my life. So hockey was out.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Canadian. Has Canada got an extensive space program? It

**Rich Johnston:**

Not, but I'll give credit to my dad and my mom. They both were big on a life of service. However you help your community, you do that and it was always big. Where was this? Where did you grow up? Mississauga, so just outside Toronto in the small and it was awesome. My childhood was uneventful.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's growing up in Canada.

**Rich Johnston:**

It is. Wasn't exposed. I had no ACEs. The adverse childhood experience, no disproportionate number of those. And then I went away to university, studied something really applicable to policing philosophy. Oh my goodness. Major was moral philosophy.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You and Brandon Del Pozo must be just a blast to have at a party, the pair of you.

**Rich Johnston:**

I enjoyed it. I went to school for politics and I fell in love with that philosophy. Yeah. And then after that I got into our provincial police. At the time I was living in downtown Toronto, our major center young in Eglinton.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

My brother and his family live right at Young and Eglinton.

**Rich Johnston:**

I was on Rohampton, but then I eventually ended up in Barrie after just a brief stint up north because I'm a city boy.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Tell me about your time up north.

**Rich Johnston:**

It was 11 months and I think 13 days and just nothing. I was used to no street lights. And where is this Horn Payne? So it's about 12 hours north of Toronto.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Dear God, that's the North Pole.

And I freely admit I'd never been past North Bay but north,

# REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

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**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But good for an experience.

**Rich Johnston:**

Yes,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm not going to convey to the dear listener the look on your face right now.

**Rich Johnston:**

But then after that short stint there, I had an opportunity to move to Barrie and that's where I spent the rest of my career so far.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How long have you gotten in now?

**Rich Johnston:**

28 years.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you just seem to be enjoying the hell out of it.

**Rich Johnston:**

It just flies by and I know everyone says that and now I'm the old guy who says that. But

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What's been the highlights for you then?

**Rich Johnston:**

The change that I've seen, but also the enjoyment of the job has drastically changed as you go through the career. When I first got on the job, what I really wanted to get into was more of the tactical stuff and I spent a great deal of my career in that and I loved it until my chief moved me out from my development, I was told,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Isn't that funny though that we get into parts of the job that we enjoy? I remember working on a bizarrely, a community policing unit, but we weren't doing a lot of commune policing because the guy running it basically used it as his own burglary detection team and we had a blast just nicking burglars all over East London. But an opportunity came up for me and he said, don't turn down opportunities because you enjoy working on this team. You could give up a good opportunity now and then find that everybody else on the team leaves in six months time and it just changes. And that was solid advice and I always remember Phil Gospage for giving me that advice

**Rich Johnston:**

, completely understand it and I reckon I look back now and I'm like, I'm glad someone saw something because right, it moved your career into a place where you can have the kind of impact that you're having. And I'm so appreciative of that. So yeah,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We've met a number of conferences, so you get to see us policing. What's your gut sense of the difference between Canadian and US policing?

**Rich Johnston:**

I don't want to simplify it. I think there are notable differences. I've been to a number of the American Society of Evidence-based policing conferences, which I swear by,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, fantastic conference

**Rich Johnston:**

Absolutely got me into evidence-based policing. But when you look at the policing styles very much there's a noted difference where I think the American style, it's not good or bad, it's just different. It's very much more of an approach of a law enforcement, whereas in Canada it's more encompassing with more of a public safety angle to it and there's an expectation more of that community orientation. I'm sure in the US there's lots of people that do tons of that and there's, in Canada, there's lots of people that just focus more on law enforcement. So appreciating your listeners, but the reality is it's just the image.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think there is a nuance that is lost on some people that there is a difference between law enforcement, very narrow, I'm enforcing the law and policing just the terminology gives you different options. I don't want to get Mickey Mouse and all critical criminology and start worrying about individual terminology, but I think policing is different than just simply law enforcement.

**Rich Johnston:**

A hundred percent agree. I prefer the term public safety. It's a broader term because it's more inclusive of other stuff going on, and I look at our data year over year in excess of 70% of what we do is not prime specific. We're here to help. Policing exists to help a community, but it's still also stuff that the police need to be dealing with. Who picks up the phone after five o'clock at night, right? Yeah. No one else.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I know I don't.

**Rich Johnston:**

Yeah,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But nobody's got a red phone on their desk with an academic at the other end, so I get it.

We talked before about the many ways that you've found your way into evidence-based policing. You've got a book from an inspector of yours that helped drive some of your thinking.

**Rich Johnston:**

My old chief and it was from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, CACP. I'd gone through it and yeah, right in there was a whole section there from a Dr. Larry Sherman.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's not because he was writing about philosophy, was he?

**Rich Johnston:**

No. Completely unrelated. And if anyone does know, I'm generally mocked because of that, but I went back to school two or more times. That's fine. I mean, tell me about your education. So I did do my undergrad 10 years into the job and I loved it. There was a piece missing and for whatever reason I went back and I had the opportunity to do a master's in leadership studies and then a decade later the opportunity to go back again and that's when the Cambridge program came up and I was like, that one was awesome. Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You did the police executive program at Cambridge?

**Rich Johnston:**

I did.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm still working with those guys now and it's a very, very good program.

**Rich Johnston:**

My instructor is Larry Sherman. It was Barack Ariel. And when you read the papers, are the authors?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, I do worry sometimes. I see. See there are a lot of programs, sort of police leadership periphery and then I look at who the instructors are and I nicest possible way. I've never heard of them.

**Rich Johnston:**

Credible messenger makes a whole world of difference and you can cut it out, but I'm telling you right now, because it is credible messengers, the delivery of that message is the receptivity is far higher. It just is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When you've been through and you've seen a lot of these leadership programs, do they hit the right note for policing? Because I think what's unique, and I hope it's not unique, we also covered it the University of Pennsylvania, but what's relatively unique about the program at Cambridge is the evidence-based policing side. The focus on research evidence, and I don't think a lot of leadership programs cover that.

**Rich Johnston:**

Didn't touch it in my initial leadership studies, but it was more of the leaders and trait or character and it was again, the old very rudimentary stuff. But I think it hits some of the note. I don't think it hits at all because I think the complexity of sitting in the hot seat when the door shuts and you're all alone, it depends.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now how long have you been the chief in Barrie?

**Rich Johnston:**

Three years.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When the door shuts, it's kind of lonely. Did anybody warn you it would be kind of a lonely gig?

**Rich Johnston:**

You can say it, but then it's different when you feel it, but then when you're actually in it, it is notable.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What are some of the things that prepared you well for that position?

**Rich Johnston:**

There was nothing that prepared me. Honestly. I did a time as a deputy, I did time as an inspector and you see portions

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Of it, but you had this massive education behind you.

**Rich Johnston:**

We have all this stuff that I'm trained to do as a police officer. The true measure of all that training we do is its transferability into the real world. You look at ecological training theory and it's like what? We train on a static range and doesn't translate into the real world. So

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Tell me about ecological training theory.

**Rich Johnston:**

The idea is it's how the human being learns. It's a constraints led approach. I am required to qualify yearly on a range. I fire 50 rounds into a static target.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I remember it well. I was one of the few armed officers in the UK.

**Rich Johnston:**

Oh, so that's common. But in Canada, in the us, everyone. So it's skill focused. It's exclusively skill focused. The belief is that that's going to transfer into the real world. So when I'm in an active situation and if I had to draw my firearm, all these things would come into play and your brain would kick into the muscle memory. But that's not what happens. There's no smooth trigger pull. No. That officer is slapping the trigger as those shit bang, bang, bang. But what they're doing is they're trying to protect themselves or the community or the public that they're sworn to do. It has very little to do with that training. I think there's some basics that you grab your gun, you have to pull it out, but beyond that, it's all about the restrictions around you. And it's crazy because every year I qualify, I'm hitting a stick my metal baton against the pad. But in the house, it depends as the ceiling low is the walls. Some

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Places you've just got no space to swing anything.

**Rich Johnston:**

So constraints led, or the ecological thought process is in there. So it's not the skill necessarily, but it's the thought that you have to look around you and you adapt. It's about adaptability.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's funny you're saying that because having watched quite a lot of body-worn camera footage of shootings, it is, it's just pull that trigger as many times as possible because there's an imminent threat. But when you see the training kick in, man, there's a really quick reload that follows after that. The muscle memory of the reload is super quick once,

**Rich Johnston:**

But there's some of the stuff that we do in policing. That one's a challenge for me

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now. I think we met the first time when you came to Philadelphia, when I hosted the Second American Society of Evidence-Based Policing conference

**Rich Johnston:**

And that was my first, there we go. I'll tell you. It was awesome. I didn't realize they even existed, although I guess it was the second one and I went in there and I saw an officer present Jeremiah Johnston and he did his own work. I remember watching it thinking I could do something like that. A whole bunch of it was around the tracking afterward. Did it work? We suck at policing in general.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, generally success is, well, we started doing it, so it must work.

**Rich Johnston:**

Is that doomed to succeed?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it was a really simple intervention. If I remember Jeremiah's work, it was just about whether you put the lights on or off and where that make any difference.

**Rich Johnston:**

Reduced randomized, but reduced car break and enters. But what a simple thing to trial. Come on, park up and switch the lights on. But it makes a difference. What an imaginative thing to think about in trial

In our community they call in, they're like Someone broken into my car. Our legitimacy gets eroded when we don't have a really good response to that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I know David Cowen's been speaking recently at the conference that you hosted. He did come up and he was awesome. People understand him. Could they?

**Rich Johnston:**

He's An excellent presenter. Yes, the accent is, but he was also one of your podcast guests.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes.

**Rich Johnston:**

Again, there's another one that directly impacted. It's not about enjoying it. I enjoyed it. David will laugh, but we actually did a version of that because it was just so common sense. Within a six month window, we took our high harm offenders and we did a similar type approach where we had our high harm team go and do door knocks

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And just for the listener we should say, if you're wondering what we're talking about, go and listen to Dave Cowen's episode of the Reducing Crime podcast where he talks about Operation Capesso. It's focused deterrence light. That's

how I describe it. I think you don't have to go through the whole PIVA getting a district attorney or prosecutors involved. You can just have cops go and knock on the door and say, Hey, you need to start flying straight. We're keeping an eye on you. Very simple message.

**Rich Johnston:**

And we saw reductions. We saw drastic reductions in the harm.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You went so far as recently to host a significant evidence-based policing conference. How did that go?

**Rich Johnston:**

Actually, it was from attending so many American Society of Evidence-based policing conferences because they were so impactful to me and I love policing. So the idea was with the Canadian Society of Evidence-Based Policing to host something where we got together in a similar vein. I'm bringing in academics and pro academics and start to build bridges and I will give my organizational researcher Madison's charm and credit for that one because she owns out. I'm building bridges. The idea being you put the academics and the cops in the same room, they start talking and the magic happens. This is like an hour or two outside of Toronto. My desire was to host it in an academic location nearby. My team's like that's just a bad decision. So I'm like, okay, and Blue Mountain is a picturesque area just outside of Berry? Yeah, about half an hour outside of Berry.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So where's next year?

**Rich Johnston:**

Well, it's out Western Canada. Edmonton police service is going to be the champion out there for that. The gracious host.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

They have been pioneers in many things

**Rich Johnston:**

big fan.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What's the story with academia around policing in Canada? It seems to be a little bit more, certainly on the criminology side, a little bit more on the progressive side. There seemed to be fewer scholars prepared to work with police.

**Rich Johnston:**

So my entrance to this was I just assumed because when I went to the American Society Conference in Cincinnati, I saw Rylan Simpson, professor out of Simon Fraser and he's Canadian and he was going back to just Simon Fraser. So I'm like, oh, and I saw,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And there's all these other American policing scholars,

**Rich Johnston:**

Police departments, embedded scholars. So then I reached out to him, cold called him, and incredibly engaged and again, an applied criminologist. Just

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Ryan Simpson is a good guy.

**Rich Johnston:**

So the eye-opener for me, I think I actually saw you there. I went to the American Society of Criminology. I did not enjoy that as much as the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing Conference.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

None of us with a brain enjoys the American Society of Criminology Conference. It is 30 concurrent panels, not one you can think of worth going to.

**Rich Johnston:**

Maybe I'm just a simpleton. I probably am.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You may be worried about it. I know I'm a simpleton.

**Rich Johnston:**

I see the presentations. I'm like, so what can I do with that? That's where I think you see the value of an applied criminologist and certainly I was overexposed to them, so my experience has been anytime I wanted to deal with a Canadian criminologist that was in that field, and there's not a ton. I wish there were way more, but you cold call and they're incredibly welcoming.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, unfortunately the American Society of Criminology writ large is increasingly becoming quite political and has taken stances that I think are unnecessary. I'm not sure I'll be renewing my membership to the American society.

**Rich Johnston:**

So much can be done if you assume good intent initially, there's more in common than generally than what separates us.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Every now and again, there's a presentation that surprises me and makes me happy.

**Rich Johnston:**

I've been told I went to all the wrong things, so that's my fault. No, it is true though, and that's fine and quite literally it's probably what did happen.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Just the bar is the place where you meet most of the policing scholars.

**Rich Johnston:**

I did see a number of them down around there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Top tip for the academics. If you come to the ASC meeting, you'll find policing scholars in the bar.

**Rich Johnston:**

I believe that's where I

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Did see you actually. It's funny, funny. I don't like to fly in the face of public opinion. I think it's fair to say you've become a believer in evidence-based policing, even though, of course, from an evidence-based perspective, there's no such thing as believers. We want to see the evidence. I'm agnostic until I see the research. Me too. There you go. How easy has that been to bring along your department? Got how many sworn

**Rich Johnston:**

We're small. We're just over 250 sworn.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What's been the reception?

**Rich Johnston:**

It depends, right? So some were open-minded, curious, others were indifferent, and then some really struggle with it because it is a challenge to current practice.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah,

**Rich Johnston:**

I'm my own worst enemy sometimes, but there's a couple of things you don't mess with in policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What are those sacred cows?

**Rich Johnston:**

Don't mess with their cars and don't mess with their uniforms. Kit matters and cars matter because that's their office and that's their every day.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean the car, the uniform, it becomes part of your identity.

**Rich Johnston:**

It does. It can shape it, I think, in very, really positive ways, but there are also some ways that I think it may challenge what we're trying to accomplish and work counterproductively, but that is something new. We have to really be critical about. Constructively critical.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do you think there's a way for chiefs who are interested in reform to figure out is there a pace that a department can progress reform? Is there a way to measure that temperature and just figure out what the pace is?

**Rich Johnston:**

This is not scripted because that's an excellent question. Honestly, there is

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No pace. Isn't the fact that you thought for a moment that this was fucking scripted? [laughter]

**Rich Johnston:**

No, I'm just saying this one is that is a leading question I get from my people all the time. It's removing too fast and there is no pace of change at which it is the right amount for everyone. For some people it's way too slow. For some given a particular change, it's the right pace and for others it's way too fast change. It's a funky word, but especially in policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How do you work around that then? How do you find the pace that works for your department?

**Rich Johnston:**

I don't think there is one, and I'll be quite honest, there isn't one because for each of the things that we've tried and we've tried many, many things, some succeeded, failed, and it's sort of in the middle for most. It is one of those where I've stopped trying to do it at a pace and I've gone at a different approach. Look, if you understand why I'm trying to do it, that's as far as I need you to come because you've got to bring as many people with you as possible. If they understand your why, they may not like it, but if the why is legit, if it's transparent, if it's honest, they're like, I get what you're trying to do. I don't like it, but I see what you're trying to do and it's not a negative.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So is the key then, I hate to say building a coalition of believers that sounds a bit like a cult.

**Rich Johnston:**

I asked three things like be curious, just wonder, and it's not a terrible thing. When I went through the police college a long time ago, if you kept asking why you had put a quarter in a jar,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was something that was punished. Stop asking

**Rich Johnston:**

Right now. I'm like, if you're wondering, you're questioning, but then you're thinking about it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But that's a big change, right? Huge. I think a lot of police departments are still in the, if you're asking why you pay a penalty,

**Rich Johnston:**

Just tell 'em to do it and they'll do it. I'm like, and that gets me compliance. I don't want compliance. Buy-in is a wonderful thing or just a choice that they understand why they may not love it, but if they get the why and they can understand your intent is pure, then at least they'll do it. I know you want the simple answer. I rarely give those, sorry.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, but I like the nuance. I think people don't appreciate enough. There is a nuance with this, which is especially with the younger generation of cops, they ask why a whole lot more. I think the struggle is possibly a generation of older supervisors who are not used to that because the very idea is they came through the academy where you had to put a quarter in the jar. If you asked why, because that's not a question we allow.

**Rich Johnston:**

Just do it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Rich Johnston:**

Different times.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are the younger cops better to work with in that regard?

**Rich Johnston:**

And I know there's some research out there on generational differences that it doesn't hold true necessarily. I'm agnostic with that. I find that some of the most curious people, some of the more seasoned

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Nice.

**Rich Johnston:**

It just blew me away.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Congratulations to that old dog out there learning new tricks,

**Rich Johnston:**

Man, just and a rockstar. And then you have some of the younger ones that are just, they're there to enforce the law. It says police not polite. I do find younger officers are a little more, I see more of a holistic approach.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do you think we have to start thinking about different recruitment for this new world?

**Rich Johnston:**

Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Not that I'm suggesting, and I've spoken to our recruit, I'm like, it's time to start pillaging teachers college and you're not going to lie. Sociology classes, psychology classes, pull a medic. I'm having an heart attack. Look, you're going to bring people in or work that into the curriculum. Please do not misunderstand. You need to be able to draw a firearm and discharge it. I'm not taking away from that. You should always be able to.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You're not going to find that from a sociology class.

**Rich Johnston:**

No. But at the end of the day, how much of our police training is on focused on just use of force? Whereas 99.8% of what we do is conflict resolution and we are, but that should be more of a priority in today's world.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it might be interesting to reverse engineer it and go and look at all the calls for service the department deals with and then go back and put the amount of time that officers spend on these different types of calls. That's how much time gets spent in the academy, relatively on training.

**Rich Johnston:**

And that's why you're running a program. And I say that because it's like that curiosity and that thought process is exactly the way we should be looking. What is the actual standards to be a good cop? We need all types in policing, but we can tell you what makes a bad cop. That's perhaps the way we go forward in terms of when we're sifting through, we focus more on those indicators of what we don't want to see versus what we think we want to see. Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

At one point, an ideal police officer was a certain height in a certain section and all that kind of stuff. That's because I think people put a lot of faith in the importance of visibility and visibility is still key. A few months ago I had on the podcast Ben Bradford, who was doing research in some English towns and overwhelmingly the public said they just wanted more visibility from the police. They got that sense of reassurance of just uniform presence seeing the police around. We are nearly 200 years since the formation of the first modern police visibility remains a key part of the job.

**Rich Johnston:**

Why does that continue to surprise us though? And I don't disagree with any of that, A sound statement to make. My challenge is if we know that, then why aren't we doing better with that? We've made concerted attempts in that area. I had mentioned Ryland Simpson earlier. I saw him at an ASAB conference for a reason. It was packed room. He was doing the public perception of police project and it was about Irvine, California, their cars and their uniform and their recruitments that they carry. They wanted to wear ball caps. Senior management at the time wanted P

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Caps. It was very high end place Irvine. That's why they have ACC malls on their

**Rich Johnston:**

Belt like nice. I'm like, you mean their equipment? Yes. I'm like, you know what though? That's the academic ease sliding in there. I'm like, so what are we talking

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

About here? I had a Mont the other day. It was just before the burger came.

**Rich Johnston:**

I throw it out there. I'm like, Amans. Okay. Anyway, the equipment, because that's what he was talking about, they didn't think it looked professional, but they met with Rylan and it was about approachability, trustworthiness, aggression, and measured against six different things. The idea being how few people actually interact with police in a given population. So really your perception is those momentary passing by or when you see them briefly, I saw it. I'm like, well, why aren't we looking at what we're doing in Berry? And we did. You've redesigned the cars. We did and the uniforms a bit. A little bit. Primarily the vehicles. And again,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Have you had any feedback on this?

**Rich Johnston:**

Oh God yes. So we didn't just do it historically. Whoever's running the show is like, do it and we do it. This

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

One, I want something different. And that's what we're doing

**Rich Johnston:**

Because I think it's like, so we actually spoke with Ryland and we ran a study, well, he ran the study, let's be honest. But we assisted in terms of the equipment, in terms of assisting and participating in a survey of over 3000 people similar to our actual population in our province. And so we got the results back and the number one thing that the public want to feel about demarcates, a police car, it's visibility. I'm like, so how do you make yourself more visible? Then we looked at the science behind it. Thankfully for the UK home office science section, they did some work on this bizarre pattern, and

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

This is the kind of blue and yellow fluorescent side of cars

**Rich Johnston:**

Kind of thing. That's 5, 5, 5 nanometers on the light spectrum. It is the most visible to the human eye in light lit conditions. It fires the most cones in the eye. Why do we know that? Because we dug into it. We looked at the back of the car in terms of the what best marks. The back of the car was a single strip of retro-reflective material. Again, that's from University of New Brunswick with transport vehicles. And then we looked at a FEMA and their use of a retro-reflective material at night. Again, all with the purpose of being as visible as possible.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You heard it here first, folks, it'll be the only time on this podcast you're ever going to hear 555 nanometers on the visual spectrum.

**Rich Johnston:**

It doesn't matter how you feel. And I am not allowed to say that My strategic communications people like don't say feelings don't matter. But if this is what's going to make us more visible with potential to be more approachable, viewed as more friendly to the public, why wouldn't you do that? Because that's what we're trying to do anyway.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Have you had pushback from people that wanted to have invisible cars so they could catch more bad guys?

**Rich Johnston:**

So we measured against unmarked and ghost marked, which are low S marked, and I wasn't comfortable with it. The academic term was predatory. And I throw this back in terms of, look, big picture here. Are we there to help or are we there to catch you doing something wrong? Look, we're always going to go after the criminals that's a given. But for Joe normal or Jane normal, are we there to catch you in doing something wrong or are we there to remind you to do the right thing?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It always struck me as the idea that it might be states where only marked police cars can do stops. So we are going to do the minimum necessary to qualify as a marked police car, but you've got to get up close and personal to see one shade of gray against the different shade of gray. So

**Rich Johnston:**

What are you doing and why are you there? Right? Road safety. So if they see you and they slow down, is that not the outcome we're after? It's not the amount of tickets, it's the lack of accidents and the lack of pedestrians struck. That's a real indicator of road safety.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what would you say to people who are thinking about getting on board with the idea of evidence-based policing? How has it changed how you approach the job?

**Rich Johnston:**

It has made me far more curious, far more constructively critical of the way we do things. So we ask why we're doing it this way, and sometimes it's like, oh, that's a great reason that we'll continue. But other times you're like, oh, we've always done it that way. That's no longer going to hold water.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I think it moves people from being a mindless automaton and cheerleader for policing. Can we actually accept that some stuff doesn't work as well as we want it to and then make it better? And that's really being a cheerleader for policing.

**Rich Johnston:**

We hire people for their critical reasoning and then we tell them to come in and just shut up and do the job. No, let's start leveraging all of that. Yes. What's next? What do you mean? What's next? This is it. This is the pinnacle. I'm loving what I'm doing. But honestly, with the research, the Canadian Society of Evidence-Based Policing wants to see it spread. I think as a chief, want to see it spread across my organization and my fear. Every chief's fear would be the killing of the Cubs.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah,

**Rich Johnston:**

I'm going to leave one day

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And somebody's going to come in and you worry that they're going to undo all the good work that you've done.

# REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

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**Rich Johnston:**

I didn't do this. I like it. I do like it, but I didn't do it because of that. I did it because that's what the research informed us work. It's not holier than thou. I just think that there's more to this and it's the mindset and the approach. Do we become less curious, less critical reasoning individuals? I hope not.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. Well, it all sounds flipping great, so hopefully I'll be out to a chance to come out to open the conference next year.

**Rich Johnston:**

You did say no to me two times for Blue Mountain,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I know my to-do list is longer than the German Opera

**Rich Johnston:**

It is long. Yeah. No, and I appreciate it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's just keep doing what you're doing because it's fantastic and it's really interesting. And you become a north of the border, a fantastic cheerleader for evidence-based policing, which is great to see in Canadian policing,

**Rich Johnston:**

Trying. And again, credit to those that have helped me along the way, and it's honestly to all those in Asab. So I'm very thankful for that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I know you're only here very briefly, so thanks for sitting down and grabbing a coffee with me. I appreciate it. Oh,

**Rich Johnston:**

I appreciate it. I love this stuff. Thank you. Next.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 92 of Reducing Crime recorded in October, 2025 in Denver, Colorado. Reducingcrime.com has episode transcripts, and if you are an instructor, DM me for multiple choice questions for every episode. Subscribe at Spotify, SoundCloud, Apple, or wherever. Otherwise, you never know. You might end up 12 hours north of Toronto.

Be safe. And best of luck.