

#71 (PETER NEYROUD)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

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

After an illustrious career in British policing, Dr. Peter Neyroud is now a professor at Cambridge University and director of their Police Executive Programme. We talk about the leadership challenges around police firearm use, being called on by the Prime Minister to review police leadership and training, and leaky feeders.

Hello, I'm Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime. Dr. Peter Neyroud had a storied career in British policing, rising through the ranks of Hampshire and West Mercia Police to become the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. He then set up and became the CEO of the National Policing Improvement Agency, NPIA, at what you'll hear was a tumultuous time in British policing. In 2010 at the behest of then British Prime Minister David Cameron, he carried out a review of police leadership and training, which led to the establishment of what is now the College of Policing.

For the last few years, he's been the director of the Police Executive Programme at the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge University. A professor with extensive experience in leadership and evidence-based policing, he took over from Larry Sherman as the director of the MST Programme, one of the leading police leadership programs in the world. Peter is also the co-chair of the Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Coordinating Group, was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in 2004, and in 2011 was made CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list, that is a commander at the most excellent order of the British Empire.

Now, just in case you're listening from the future, at the time of recording and releasing this episode, Conservative Member of Parliament Ritchie Sunak was British Prime Minister. We also mentioned 7/7 a couple of times, and this references four coordinated suicide attacks carried out by Islamic terrorists that targeted commuters traveling on London's public transport back in 2005 on the morning of 7th of July, hence 7/7. Oh, and Peter reveals his old-school motto, which hints that he might just be a Kingsman.

As you join us, we are discussing a presentation we had just seen at the American Society of Criminology Conference in Philadelphia on police shootings.

Peter Neyroud:

It was very, very personal to me because it was a chart of police shootings in the UK compared to Australia and New Zealand, and it shows quite unequivocally that police shootings in the UK, they haven't gone up, they have shaded down and particularly shaded down since 1998/99, and that's a significant date for me because that's when I became the Head of Police Use of Firearms for the UK and I put in reforms to Police Use of Firearms Code and training, also took the at that stage daring decision to put the guidance on the internet.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, "Here's our policy and when we're going to shoot here."

Peter Neyroud:

"This is our policy."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, yeah.

Peter Neyroud:

We kept back the bit about ammunition, etc. because you don't give the opposition everything. But there's lots of talk about abolish and defund and refund and reinvest and reform, and in the world of evidence-based policing, there's a lot of talk about interventions and whatever and not enough about using the evidence to do the big changes. That has to be the next big journey.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you come into the education system, I think, having had a stellar career in policing, I mean, around firearms, if I remember correctly, you were one of the first people who actually had to give somebody an order to use firearms in a situation that was terrorism related.

Peter Neyroud:

I found myself, I've been in number 10-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Number 10 Downing Street...

Peter Neyroud:

Number 10 Downing Street. I've been in number 10 Downing Street, and it was a meeting of the day after 7/7. So we got the four bombs that were due to be four in the underground, and it turned out to be three in the underground and one in a bus.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

On a bus in central London, yeah. That was one of the biggest terrorist attacks in Britain.

Peter Neyroud:

It was the biggest terrorist attack in the UK and one of the most significant attacks on Western global north Capital. It was a terrible day. And about 24 hours into this, the reason I'm hastening into London is that we discover that there are four or five young men arriving on a train from the north, and one of them, it turns out, to be residents in Aylesbury, which it's a middle income town in sleepy Buckinghamshire, not you'd think a center of Jihadi terrorism.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which is within the remit of Thames Valley Police and you're Chief Constable at the time.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, one of my towns. It wasn't the one I would've spent a lot of time feeling sleepless about at all. We think at that stage it's quite possible that he's still loose and there's a mobile phone which appears to belong to him which is still moving around. So I get back to the force very rapidly and to the control room that we've now set up in Aylesbury where this phone is moving around and I'm being told by the military and by my commander who is my assistant chief that if this person is moving around with the equipment that was in the boot of the car that they found at the railway station, then this is a potential threat to mass casualty and it's no option to intercept. It has to be to shoot to kill.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, that's a hell of a thing, an order to give to your firearms officers.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, it was a sunny afternoon, the beginning of the thriller story, but it was a sunny afternoon in Aylesbury, it didn't feel like the moment to be thinking about literally shoot to kill. I mean, no ifs, no buts. Shooting somebody in the head with a sniper bullet is the state deciding to take a life. And yeah, nationally I'd been the Head of Police Use of Firearms. I'd actually be partly responsible for the guidance that allowed this to happen in the event of suicide terrorism because we'd had to adapt to think about what the implications of suicide terrorism are for police use of firearms, and that is that none of the careful attempts to try and avoid taking life would be sensible and justifiable in terms of trying to prevent loss of life to the public. So the police have to take a really difficult step into the void.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It feels like it's a huge gulf between being responsible for sitting in meetings and writing policy documents and having to actually be the person that gives that instruction be where the buck stops.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah. It didn't feel like huge at the time. It's only on reflection though when I came out of the room and we'd managed to trace the origin of the phone and discovered actually it was in a mosque, not the Sainsbury's supermarket next door

that we thought it was in, because one of the many things you discover in an afternoon like that is that even the security services tracking systems are not quite as precise as they sometimes tell you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Fortunately, the whole thing resolved itself without...

Peter Neyroud:

It resolved itself. Although ironically, the individual that we found in possession of the phone was Lindsay, the terrorist's partner who subsequently turned out to be a very significant player and ended up in East Africa. The immediate action of that afternoon was played out very quickly and in very rapid briefings because we thought we had very little time to resolve it, but we couldn't have done what we did, I wouldn't have felt as confident to do what I did unless the organization had spent a lot of time thinking about the potential scenarios, training the officers and so I had complete confidence that the officers would've reacted appropriately. They've been very well-trained, we had really clear guidance about what was required. When you compare the UK to other global north countries like the USA and Canada, and I'm very pleased about, I think it's one of the great strengths of British policing that we fatally shoot very few citizens.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I think I saw something on average over the last decade, the Metropolitan Police, one of the largest police services in the world, policing one of the largest cities in the world, discharge firearms about twice a year.

Peter Neyroud:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which is incredibly low.

Peter Neyroud:

The only little blips on that were the London Bridge shooting, the terrorism cases. Those are the only blips for very important reasons.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, that's one of the things that I think people struggle to understand is there's all this talk about changing language to it's all police violence. No, sometimes police use of force is proportionate and it's necessary and fatal.

Peter Neyroud:

Correct. But come back to the kind of bigger picture of there's a dialogue going around policing and particularly police use of force and the use of powers like stop and search, that it is impossible to change the police, that some people's advocacy, I mean, take Vitale's book, *End of Policing*.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I prefer not to, but yeah.

Peter Neyroud:

I absolutely prefer not to, but actually he's posed the question.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's well-meaning but it's shockingly naive.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, it's not just that, it's not informed by the evidence and where it does quote evidence, it quotes it without proper consideration of either method or the full range of outcomes. But however, his solution to the problem of the backfire and impact of disproportionate stop and search, disproportionate arrest, disproportionate representation of certain communities in the criminal justice system is to abolish the police and potentially further down the track the criminal justice system itself. I mean, apart from the fact, I don't think I will ever be fortunate enough to live in the nirvana that requires no policing, I just think it's an inconceivable-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's preposterous.

Peter Neyroud:

It's an inconceivable situation. It's an inconceivable idea with modern huge metropolises and the requirement of some form of regulation of public space. And by the way, reflect back into the COVID-19 world that I've been doing research on, whom did every single country in the United Nations turn to in order to secure public space and to protect other citizens from potential infectious contact. It was the police without hesitation everywhere. Now, you can have a debate about how well did each individual police force do in that, but universally governments realized that the only organization that's in a position to do that and potentially have to use force in order to carry that out was the police, end of. Not the military, didn't turn to the military, they turned to the police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's the research you're doing right now but let's roll the story back. You've had a storied career in policing, you end up being Chief Constable of Thames Valley. I mean, you did everything in policing, you did firearms. You met the Queen on a regular basis, you and her were on first-name terms.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, not quite that, I didn't do her first name. But yeah, no, I was the Chief Constable of a large, by UK standards and certainly by American standards, a huge police force, 2.2 million people and 9,000 staff. It's a big organization. And then I ran, not just ran, but created the National Policing Improvement Agency and ran that for three, four years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So we'll come back to the NPIA in a moment, but did you always want to join the police? You went to school, to Winchester College.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, I went to Winchester College. I went to the same school as Rishi Sunak.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And have you anything positive to say about it? I'll probably cut that bit out.

Peter Neyroud:

No, look, I think, right, no, quite an interesting common thread between Rishi and me and my school-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I should just say for the purposes of anybody listening in years to come, this is Rishi Sunak is the current British Prime Minister.

Peter Neyroud:

Prime Minister, indeed, just for a little while yet. But I think even he would accept that. The one theme that runs through Winchester, and I think it's a contrast of some of the other well-known British public schools, is that our motto is all framed around the trusty servant, which is the idea that you're being educated for public service in one form or another, whether that be in the private realm or the public realm. Our motto is, "Manners maketh man," and manners in that sense is treating people properly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you're a Kingsman?

Peter Neyroud:

I don't know about that, but I-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I want to see your umbrella.

Peter Neyroud:

It's more Morse I think was the thing that eventually got threaded around me, and I'm a massive fan of Morse code.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But this wasn't the path that I think you said your family were expecting you to take?

Peter Neyroud:

No, but when I got to that point of trying to choose a career, this was 1979, and also I was born in London as a British citizen, my first nationality has always been Swiss, my father Swiss, and my name is very obviously Swiss, it's certainly not British. So I'm French Swiss. In 1979 a great deal of the sort of careers that students from Winchester College would've headed to were in the public realm were barred to me because of nationality. So I had a look around, I did the milk round, which is the careers fairs and all the rest of it, and I was offered a job with British Leyland, the then car firm, which is now... Well, it's now nothing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To be fair back in the day it was hardly a car firm.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, yeah. It did produce the Mini, okay? So the Mini was still a decent car, the Metro and the Allegro less, but let's not go there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It was only slightly better than anything produced by East Germany, but that's about it.

Peter Neyroud:

Yes, it was better than a Trabant. And I thought, "I don't want to work for this company. This is not where I want to be." So I came back to Oriel, I was looking after a fresher first year, he was an inspector from Thames Valley, and he said after we downed the first pint, "Well, you could become a police officer." And I said, "What on Earth do I want to do that for?" So he took me down to St Aldgate's police station and introduced me to the custody officer and left me with the custody officer, and that was probably about 10:00 at night. I was still there at 4:00 in the morning, I thought it was fascinating.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Seeing the world as it really is?

Peter Neyroud:

I thought it was fascinating. So I then did the-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The greatest show on it.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah. I then did a little four-day vacation program with Thames Valley, and I went out on patrol. I did all sorts of things to get a better picture of what the organization was about, and I signed up to go on the graduate entry scheme, which I didn't get by the way, and subsequently discovered, because I was in a position to have a look at the records later on,

they'd liked me and they thought I was a good prospect, but they said, and I quote, "He was much too nice. He'll be trampled to death on the road of life."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm sorry, but that is a great line. That's almost Shakespearean eloquence.

Peter Neyroud:

Indeed. So, well, anyway, as I got through the sergeant's exam, I came top of the country and it was literally just as I'd finished my probation, got an automatic pass to go and apply for the accelerated motion scheme again. So I went up and I didn't even get through the first hurdle.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you really did get trampled, yeah.

Peter Neyroud:

By that stage I was Temporary Detective Constable, I was enjoying being a detective constable. I was enjoying doing the kind of basics, I was at Aldershot, which is quite a tough place to police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it's good, honest police work.

Peter Neyroud:

It was good mostly, no, it was very honest actually was North Hampshire. It was a good force actually. It was in the middle of the miners strike and the superintendent said, "Have one more go, for God's sake, have one more go." Anyway, I went up thinking, "It doesn't matter, I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing," and of course I got it. And the comment on the paperwork, "Well, he seems to have learnt to dodge the traffic."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's wonderful, that's wonderful. So let me roll this forward again because we could talk about your policing career for the whole podcast, but after a storied career, you moved into the National Policing Improvement Agency. Was that where you first got interested in academia and research?

Peter Neyroud:

No, no. I was doing that right from the start.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it was the academic interest that drew you to NPPIA?

Peter Neyroud:

No. Along the way, I'd done a masters at Portsmouth, I'd published the master thesis in a peer-reviewed journal. When I was Assistant Chief Constable, I wrote *Policing, Ethics and Human Rights*, which is a book obviously on ethics, but a very practical take on policing ethics. So I had quite a long in-career publication list, so that was always there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So taking over NPIA made sense?

Peter Neyroud:

So I was very heavily involved with the Blair government and right from day one, literally I found myself in the bunker in number 10.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tony Blair was the prime minister of a Labour Party that was one of the few that seemed enthusiastic about tackling crime.

Peter Neyroud:

They were very enthusiastic about tackling crime, and they were very enthusiastic about and continuing to reform the police and public services. But the challenge of trying to reform the police at that stage was having no instrument, no entity to be able to do that. At the first attempt, they'd gone down the track of performance frameworks and it was manifestly obvious. So particularly by the time Dennis O'Connor and one or two others had recognized that the push to performance had not produced a measurable increase in public confidence, hadn't advanced the positive impact to the police of the public, hadn't made people more confident or feeling safer. So one aspect of that was to drive forward neighborhood policing, introduce a national program, evaluated by the way, for neighborhood policing.

But as myself and Dennis and one or two others said what we were missing was something that could pull together the threads that needed to be pulled together in order to have a much more coherent impact on the development and improvement of the police. And that's the concept that came out as the National Policing Improvement Agency. And it was never my intention to be the chief. I was quite happy in Thames Valley, but the day before the deadline for the applications, I got a phone call from the Home Secretary to say, "You haven't applied and we rather thought you were going to." And so I applied. I mean, you do when you get phoned up by the Home Sec.

And then I found myself confronted with the challenges of making change. It was very obvious how difficult the field was. We had a thing called the Police Information Technology Organisation, which was kind of colloquially known as poor implementation, terrible operation. We had a training and leadership body, which was called Centrex, which is nominally the Centre of Excellence, but actually Centrex, when you Googled it turned out to be a failed company from Saudi Arabia. And that kind of said all we needed to know about Centrex.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, I remember Centrex and it feels like a triggering word. I'm starting to shake a little bit now.

Peter Neyroud:

It was not good. It was led by HR and I don't think I need to go much further than that. It had a kind of whole human resources feel to it, not police leading police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, it just had lost its way. Then there was a whole chunk, I inherited about 250 civil servants in bits of the Home Office that were doing things that were palpably important to policing improvement, but were never coherently brought together.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How long did NPIA survive for?

Peter Neyroud:

It went live on the 1st of April 2007, and then was finally timed out in 2012. Frankly, by the time 2010 when the government changed, so it changed from the Labour government to the coalition government with Cameron.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the country lurched a chunk to the right.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah. I mean, right of center.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, right of center, as much as it did.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, it was Conservative-Liberal coalition was substantially a different agenda. Started out with a billion quid and I'd managed to get the budget down to half a billion and actually frankly was capable of delivering more with half a billion than I was with the billion I'd inherited.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's not about how much money you have, it's about how you use it?

Peter Neyroud:

Well, it's about honesty of what on the earth thing was producing. I mean, I inherited programs, one in particular, the program called the Schengen Information System, which was supposed to join us up with Europe where, I don't know, about 40 million had been spent and I didn't even have a plug to say for it. There was just nothing, just hundreds of consultants and no product.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When we think about reforming and improving policing, which I think everybody recognizes the need for because I say cops are generally optimistic, there's only two things they hate, how we are doing it right now and change.

Peter Neyroud:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So everybody recognizes the need for change, but everybody grumbles about change. When you look at policing writ large, was NPIA ever going to succeed given that the remit is almost too big?

Peter Neyroud:

There was a big debate as we started out between myself and the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke over the scale, and I kept saying to him, "We need to have pretty much everything in the tent."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Because things are interconnected?

Peter Neyroud:

Exactly. So I kept saying to him, "The design has to be that I have to have sufficient ability to influence the key approaches to people, processes, and technology in the same organization."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Doesn't that make it so big it's unmanageable?

Peter Neyroud:

It was a hell of a job managing this thing. It was a hell of a job setting it up. But we for the first time actually set out an improvement strategy for British policing, and I still think it was one of the best things we did because it did get us a bit more focused because we were in danger of being like a Christmas tree, people would just keep hurling their baubles onto the tree until eventually it fell over. And what we were trying to do was to only keep the pieces that we could use-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Bauble management.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, yeah, I suppose you could put it that way, but what we were after was keeping it into some sort of coherent shape.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Peter Neyroud:

I mean, managing the 43, it's nearer 50 actually when you put all of it in, but managing my colleagues was one of the toughest bits of the whole equation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, because there are 43 geographic police forces in England and Wales, and then there's one in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, but there's also some other police departments like Transport Police and Atomic Energy Authority.

Peter Neyroud:

Correct, correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which still makes it a small number of colleagues compared to policing in America.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, you can fit them all in one room and that doesn't make it any easier, I've got say, 50 is still an awful lot of people. Having been a chief, being still a chief, most were pretty supportive and depending on what the question was, some were less supportive.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People are people.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah. I mean the chiefs are very properly protective of their organizations and when you're in charge, you're accountable for everything, you want to be fully under control.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

B.J. Harrington said to me once, who's the Chief Constable of Essex Police right now, said to me over a dinner that you put together at Cambridge that he never anticipated how lonely the position was.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You are the buck stop for everything and there's nobody else that you can speak to in your force.

Peter Neyroud:

No good starting out with the attitude of trying to find someone else to blame. You have no one else to blame, it's you. If you ever thought that you were going to try that one and it doesn't work, yeah, you get asked to resign quite a number of times if you're a chief and it's never a good moment.

You kind of pose the question, "Could it work?" I think the easiest way to demonstrate that it was necessary is to look at what happened after we were abolished. There were several big programs that were well underway, one of which was the replacement for the Police National Computer, which had been devised and designed using Siemens technology in the early 1970s. I mean, you remember it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I remember being at Hendon and walking past the building. I mean, it was a monolith of sort of brutal architecture.

Peter Neyroud:

It's still there, still in the same place.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's unbelievable.

Peter Neyroud:

And it will celebrate 50 years next year.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's probably being held together by some bearded geezer with a Rubik's Cube who lives in his mum's basement and he's the linchpin holding the whole thing together now.

Peter Neyroud:

It's had so many near misses as well. With any big computer like that, you have a mirror dark side, the one mirror dark side was some idiot had put it next to an oil terminal in Hertfordshire, which blew up, there was a fire and it blew up. So that destroyed the dark side. So when I took the thing over, they were still busing hard media tapes to a police station on the other side of London to make sure we had a dark side.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the backup was just some dude in a bus?

Peter Neyroud:

Well, the backup was a police motorcyclist every evening taking hard media tapes of the day's transactions to it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For the one computer holding all the police information?

Peter Neyroud:

All the data. All the data of all the convictions of all of that stuff. And the other one was we had the largest DNA database in the world at the time that I inherited, had been partly responsible for its creation, and I turned up at the site to see the DNA database to discover that the system had a dark side, but it was in the next room. Now bear in mind, we are now standing in a building on the end of the runway of Birmingham Airport. There's absolutely no risk at all of that calamity.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why didn't you put it at the end of Brighton Pier or something?

Peter Neyroud:

And worse, there was a dark side or was supposed to be, there was a server. It wasn't even switched on.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What happened when NPIA was abolished?

Peter Neyroud:

The key thing that happened was nothing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reform just died?

Peter Neyroud:

Placement for the PNC went into abeyance. There were people nominally involved in the program, but there was no staff to support it. No progress is made, we still haven't replaced it. The radio system needed to be replaced but the contract ran out in 2020 and it hasn't been replaced, it's still staggering on with a large program to replace it with 4G technology. I mean, who the hell now replaces a digital radio system with a 4G system when we're already doing 5G and we've got 7G is being developed at the moment? Who the hell does that?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People who appreciate sending stuff by carrier pigeon.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, yeah, I mean I think a couple of baked bean cans and a piece of string would probably work better. But the really serious thing about that is that nobody's solved the problems of using 4G, and that's a really serious for a frontline cop because try going to a football match in the United Kingdom and trying to use your phone at the football match, you won't get a signal, it'll be so slow. This is the situation for a cop trying to raise an emergency. It's just crazy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've done field work with the Transit Police in Philadelphia right in the heart of the city, and the radio system doesn't work in the subway system. There's just no excuse for that in 2023 or anything like that anywhere.

Peter Neyroud:

No, none.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Police communications are the most important communications.

Peter Neyroud:

Putting the system in the subway is really not that difficult. We managed to do it in the entire London Underground. It's not completely perfect, but it's pretty good. I know far too much about leaky feeders.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, we're all getting a bit older.

Peter Neyroud:

Indeed, thank you. We piggyback the system onto the talus system that they were putting in for the tube drivers. And the critical thing is it's absolutely crucial. If you want officers to be safe, the public to be safe, these are critical investments for any country. So when the NPIA, the proposal came to abolish it, Theresa May was the Home Secretary, she never even bothered to come and see what the organization was about. I thought it was really pretty low really. And I put up a number of objections in the meeting in which I was told we were going to be abolished, I actually announced that I was leaving the police service and that I'd just sent all my staff a Blackberry message in the middle of the meeting and then told the Home Secretary with the assembled folk that I was leaving on the 31st of December and that I was now free to speak because I felt the need to be free to speak. I wanted to protect my staff, but I also wanted to protect the police service's future by giving some pretty robust messages about what had to be preserved if they were going ahead with this foolhardy and ludicrous decision. I don't feel at all strongly about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I know, I'm feeling that. But here's the thing about it, which is that must be hugely frustrating because you often see people complaining that when chief constables, when police commissioners leave office, then they start telling us what the situation is. But I don't think people understand the constraints that you are under those circumstances when you are working in those environments. It's a very constrained environment to be able to speak.

Peter Neyroud:

It was not my plan to leave policing at that stage, but your plans change. And in those circumstances, I felt I had to put myself second and the interests of my staff and the service first, and that the only way to do that was to give notice of retirement, free myself from the constraints of a situation and be able to speak truth to power. And I spent a summer in a very awkward place. It was a very, very uncomfortable summer. I can't tell you how uncomfortable it was. The Home Secretary was planning even to get rid of the national training and could all be devolved in the model that she was pushing forward with police and crime commissioners and a range of other things. And crime is down, our reforms are working, it just became like a parrot had gone on the opioids and I kept saying, "Yeah, but you actually have to pay attention to the national infrastructure if you really want to keep that going."

And it culminated in me doing what's known as the Accounting Officer's Letter to Parliament. I was just about to go on leave, I'd had enough. I wrote the Accounting Officer's Letter to Parliament saying, "I do not regard this as wise and as an Accounting Officer, I have to tell Parliament that I don't agree with this." And then the Police Minister wanted to speak to me and the Home Secretary wanted to speak to me, and I didn't take the calls from either of the ministers because we were going on holiday in Switzerland, didn't answer the phone for two days, got to Grindelwald in Switzerland, I'm sat in a deck chair facing the north face of the Eiger, glass of Swiss wine in my hands, and my wife said, "You're going to have to take this one because it's from number 10." And it was David Cameron. And he said, "Obviously there's been a bit of a falling out here and I just wonder whether you would do a job for us spending the last months of your contract reviewing police leadership and training." And eventually I agreed to do that.

So I spent three months reviewing police leadership and training and published a report to Parliament. Effectively what I was saying is, first of all, the first key thread that has to run through this is a clear idea of what the mission is. Secondly, it has to have a clear thread in terms of the values that are required. Thirdly, it needs to be firmly based on evidence, and we need to have clear input on what the best evidence is available on policing running through from initial recruit training to the training of the most senior leadership, and that we would have a single police education qualification for entry into the service. And that qualification needed to embed a set of series of things, including the evidence base. We needed a professional body to be responsible for that, subsequently became the College of Policing, and that we needed to have... I didn't actually use the D word. You all know very well the D word, degree, is like dynamite in policing. It excites all sorts of-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Passions. Passions and enthusiasm from the audience.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, I mean, there's a reason for that. There's an awful lot of people that join policing without a degree, as I did, most people join without a degree, and also quite a lot of join later in career, etc, they haven't got college qualifications. It's perceived as a criticism and a very personal criticism to say, "Actually, you need a degree to do the job." So I didn't phrase it that way. What I said was you need the right qualification at the appropriate level. And I don't think many cops would disagree in any part of the world that that qualification is at a higher level than it would've been in the 1980s. The job has become more complicated, there are far more requirements. And to do the job properly, you need a proper policing education at the entry point.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think you'd be hard-pressed if you've spent time around policing not to recognize that. COVID aside, but where policing has gone now, it bears no relationship to what policing looked like 40 years ago when I joined.

Peter Neyroud:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The core of it, there are still people who need to be squared away and have a little bit of justice brought to them. There are some serious repeat offenders that deserve our love and attention and we need to give it to them. But very much how society has changed in the social service side of the job, which was always a big part of it, continues to move and evolve. You need smart people to help an organization keep changing and learning what's best practice. And I think people have an expectation that we should be trying to continually develop good practice. You need an education for that. Evidence-based policing is the kind of core of it.

Peter Neyroud:

Even before Cambridge, I'd put a million dollars into systematic reviews on policing on a basis of the key thing for NPIA, if you're going to try and develop policing, it's crucial to know what you know. And the best way to do that is systematic reviews.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not just systematic reviews, a lot of people in policing don't have much idea about what works and what doesn't. If this had been 20, 30 years ago, that was understandable, there wasn't a good knowledge base, but the last 20, 30 years has drastically improved the knowledge base around policing.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah. So when I leave, after submitting the leadership review, I went to Cambridge to do something I'd wanted to do for a long time, which was to do a PhD.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I went to Cambridge simply to drink in the Eagle Pub.

Peter Neyroud:

No, I went to Cambridge to do some serious work. And I set up and ran together with great colleague Molly Slothower, who you will know well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Of course.

Peter Neyroud:

We ran the Turning Point Diversion Programme, which was a deferred prosecution diversion program in Birmingham, big ambitious RCT. But originally that was going to be my PhD. And then during the middle of it, I discovered that there was no manual, there was no help on how to do RCTs. We didn't even know how many RCTs had ever been done, you couldn't find them. So I actually turned out my PhD was on the RCTs that had ever been done in policing, how good were they and how to do a successful RCT.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When you pre-register randomized trials and studies in health, there's an NIH, National Institute of Health in the US, they have about 30,000 entries per year/ in the whole history of policing, how many randomized trials, experiments have there been?

Peter Neyroud:

Well, when I did my search for my PhD, which would've been 2016 I updated it, I think I missed a small number because they're quite difficult to find, so let's just say about 130 by 2016.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

130 in the whole history of policing?

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

National Institutes of Health are registering 30,000 a year.

Peter Neyroud:

Now the good news, and it is good news only in the sense, not by comparison to health, but the good news is that using the Global Policing Database with Lorraine Mazerolle and other colleagues, we are hoping to do a piece which will say

where we are now, we think we're about 1000. Now, 2016 to 2023 is not a great big gap. We think we've gone from let's say 150 because I've probably missed a few to about 1000 in the space of less than 10 years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's an incredible explosion of research in policing. I'm glad to have contributed a few.

Peter Neyroud:

Well, you have contributed a few. Some of them are quite decent.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One or two.

Peter Neyroud:

One or two. But actually there's a serious point. 10 years ago in the light of Larry Sherman's 1998 Evidence-Based Policing Police Foundation paper, we were still having the debate. I was being cast along with others as a randomista, and that was not in a good way, it was people criticizing us for daring to do RCTs in policing. Now it's much more common currency. You still get a bit of pushback, but actually there's much more acceptance. If you want to do an evaluation of an intervention and you want to know whether it works, if it's possible to do an RCT, that's what you should be doing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not the only way to do things.

Peter Neyroud:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But if you can, that's what you should do.

Peter Neyroud:

Yes. It's the method most likely to produce, provided that you don't just think all you're doing is counting figures and you remember that you've got to look at what's the mechanisms, you have to do the qualitative as well as the quantitative. Provided you do that, it's the right way to go.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I would use the phrase internal validity, but at that point, nobody's going to continue listening.

Peter Neyroud:

You could use that phrase, but doing an RCT is no different in many respects than doing really good implementation in policing, which we rarely do. And the real lessons out of RCTs is how to implement something tightly and properly to actually have an impact and know whether that impact resulted from the intervention.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the places where it seems to be just an incubation pool for randomized trials and really good studies is the program that you now run at the University of Cambridge and through the Institute of Criminology, which is the Police Executive Programme for which you are the director. That is a fantastic program. I've never seen such a collection of smart, great leaders, current and future leaders in policing drawn to that program from mainly the UK but from other countries. That must be fascinating to be part of that.

Peter Neyroud:

It is, and it's a massive credit to not just to current team, but to Larry Sherman and Heather Strang as the leaders who've handed on to us, but also people like Professor Tony Bottoms, who's been an enormously important scholar in policing, who was the person who worked with the then National Police Training to actually set this program. It was set up to deliver what we deliver, which is the improvement of individuals with the best evidence available in the world about policing and criminology. It's called Applied Criminology and Police Management for a reason. We're bringing together all of the disciplines of criminology in a way to help police managers make better decisions.

You don't very often get a chance of a second career, and this is my second career as an academic, but as much of a hybrid academic. And being involved with the Police Executive Programme, which has a 27, 28 year history going back to Professor Tony Bottoms talking to the National Police Training. And in the last 15 years, in particular with Larry Sherman and Heather Strang's leadership-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've got a great team.

Peter Neyroud:

It's a fantastic team, but we're doing things that just are different to as far as I can see anywhere else. We get senior police leaders from all over the world come to this program, not always just senior as well, I mean, good analysts and good players from a range of different roles.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it's current leaders and future leaders,

Peter Neyroud:

They come, what we do is we spend the first year bringing them up on the page on the best evidence on policing, places policing, victims and offenders, and taking whole system approaches to reforming particular areas of policing like

cyber or whatever. So we spend a first year front loading, and the second year they do a piece of serious applied research, including, as you will well know, a really significant number of randomized control trials. I mean, there's not many programs where master students, particularly part-time master students, do field RCTs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And some of them have been ground-breaking and really quite fascinating.

Peter Neyroud:

And published. That's the other critical thing that I fervently believe in is that there's absolutely no point... Well, there is a point in doing them if you just do them for your own organization, but there's far more point in doing them if you publish them, and then that becomes knowledge for the field.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think one of the key seems to be these people have on the have support of their organizations, which is huge because that is an indication, and you would never have seen this 20, 30 years ago, which is organizations actually supporting people to come for higher education and learning and how to improve policing.

Peter Neyroud:

Yeah, I mean, I've just had that conversation about half an hour ago before we started with a chief of a force in the UK that's got an improvement notice on it because the HMIC has found flaws.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that's the Inspectorate of Constabulary.

Peter Neyroud:

The Inspectorate of Constabulary found flaws. And the chief is saying to me, "I want to send you a couple of people, I want them to be the people that help me to take the organization into good improvement, good performance in particular. And I've got some ideas of the areas they want to do. And probably in the next couple of days, we will agree that these are the areas those individuals will do as their thesis." And when we come to that moment, we create an abstract, which becomes the contract with the force, which in particular allows those two leaders to access sensitive data. So I mean, I've got one of the students I'm supervising at the moment is using the terrorism database. Mainline researchers simply will not get access to that data. My students can get access to data because that's the stuff they use day in, day out.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you are coming up on, I don't want to make you feel old, mate, but you're coming up on 45 years involved in this field, and you sound like you're still figuring out all the problems that need to be fixed. Has the journey been worth it?

Peter Neyroud:

I'm definitely someone who would say I'll do it again. I'm passionate about my field, I wouldn't still be involved in if I wasn't. I really want to have left a legacy of improvement, and also I'd like to improve the way that the politics treats policing as in help politicians to be better at managing and governing the police, because that's a part of the equation we often miss. Governance is critical. If politics simply means we seesaw between different solutions, then all that does is it ends up with policing like a shantytown waiting for the next hurricane. And that's not a great place to be, you're sheltering not improving. And politicians need to understand that short-term solutions can be deeply damaging. Thinking with a little bit of long-headedness about how to develop and improve policing would make a fantastic difference. So getting a little bit more of an opportunity to improve performance of politicians in this territory would be great. I've been advising the opposition for quite some time in one form or another, and I would hope that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The political opposition.

Peter Neyroud:

Political opposition here in the UK, and I would hope that some of that would play in. And I did have a role, I was an advisor in one form or another to seven home secretaries, and I think I played a small part in helping to guide some of the decisions that they made, decisions that had longer resonance than the immediacy of the popular party territory.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it's not public-facing work, but it's important. It's really appreciated. Thanks for spending some time with me. Cheers, Peter.

Peter Neyroud:

It's my pleasure too. Thanks.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 71 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Philadelphia in November 2023. Subscribe to Reducing Crime at Spotify, Soundcloud, Apple, or wherever you pod, because more marvelous episodes are on the way. Transcripts and multiple choice questions for every episode are available for instructors. Just email Jerry Ratcliffe, or send a DM to @_reducingcrime on Twitter for details.

Be safe and best of luck.