

Module 5:  
Crisis Communication-Case Study

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Dikran Melkonian

Law Enforcement nationwide took an incredible and punishing gut-punch a few months ago as the result of the emotional backlash of the infamous incident in Minneapolis. The resulting death of George Floyd, held under the knee of an inept and criminally negligent officer, erupted many cities with numerous violent protests and demands for defunding and dismantling of organized policing. The Los Angeles Police Department was quickly attacked by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in this matter. After just a few days of violent protesting, the cries of defunding the LAPD was approved by the city leadership, as the Mayor and City Council rapidly voted for a \$150 million dollar defund of the department.

“A \$150 million budget cut will compel the Los Angeles Police Department, over the coming months, to move a total of 234 officers back into patrol, reduce desk hours at its stations, cut special deployments and stop staffing teams that cover homelessness issues” (Service, 2020). The defund will make a significant impact upon the staffing, call response, and specialized enforcement in critical areas in need of police engagement. “The city spends roughly \$3 billion annually on the LAPD. In recent months, progressive activists have called on city leaders to slash that funding and redirect the proceeds to other needs, demanding cuts ranging from 90% to outright abolition of the LAPD” (Zahniser, Smith, & Reyes, 2020).

Almost overnight, the perception of the LAPD turned from a nation wide leader in 21st century community policing and positive engagement, to one that centered on biased policing and systematic racism, negatively impacting its minority neighborhoods. The City Council stated that, “Two-thirds of the savings would

ultimately be funneled into services for Black, Latino and disenfranchised communities, such as hiring programs and summer youth jobs” (Zahniser, Smith, & Reyes, 2020).

The LAPD has been very active with direct communication along with social media, in relation to its relationship with the community it serves. The LAPD did not ignore nor hide from the distrust and negativity, resulting from the infamous Floyd incident. “Where today, ‘no comment,’ is no longer acceptable. I don't think it ever was acceptable, but today especially, it is no longer acceptable. ‘No comment,’ results in what we've been seeing” (Agnes, 2016). The LAPD, led by Chief Michael Moore, apologized publicly for stating that looters were capitalizing on Floyd’s death. The use of social media, as well the Chief holding press conferences discussing the plight of looting and civil unrest were also prevalent. The officers in the front line were advised to continue to engage with our community and reassure our dedication for their safety.

“Trust is built over time. Your community absolutely needs to be able to trust you in a crisis, but they won't trust you in a crisis if they don't trust you today. We need to start focusing every single day, small little steps every single day, to build trust within our community” (Agnes, 2016). After the Rodney King incident in 1992, the LAPD strived to be a national leader in community engagement and neighborhood policing efforts. This has assisted in the the reduction of violent crime, as Chief Moore reported in January 2020, that the city had its the lowest homicide rate since 1962. “Officials attributed the decline in crimes to a variety of strategies, including gang intervention, community outreach efforts and more hours of patrols” (Yu, 2020). Nearly two-decades of policing efforts and community engagement had bridged the trusting relationship. Use of Town Halls and Public Forums contributed to this endeavor.

“I heard some chiefs say this once that, 'You need to invest in the bank of public trust because you're going to withdraw from it at times’” (Dudley, 2020). The LAPD has been focused on affective communication and investing in its diverse community.

“Community unrest is sparked by a particular incident, and a history of distrust between the community and local law enforcement fans the flames. This is why proactive community outreach is critical within periods of peace as well as crisis. Public sentiment towards law enforcement has undergone a dramatic shift in recent years due to high profile cases and related protests” (University of San Diego, 2020). The LAPD provides transparency of its officer-involved shootings by providing body-worn video footage of these incidents on YouTube. This proactive act provides the public with communicative channels that fosters and enhances trust of policing.

“When these types of incidents happen...It's really guided by emotion. It's not guided by facts...We're more likely to read a headline and make up our mind about an incident” (Dudley, 2020). The Command staff continued to communicate with the community during this crisis. The direct dialogue between protestors and police were prevalent. Social media channels were utilized for engagement, and officers were present in the field discussing these issues with stakeholders and members of their respective communities, including continual virtual meetings due to Covid-19.

“Controversy is going to spark segregation...Be thoughtful, be decisive, and have a clear and concise statement” (Agnes, 2018). The LAPD empathizes with people effected by police misconduct, promotes a professional, un-biased policing effort, and continues essential communication through social media, virtual meetings, and direct contacts in these unprecedented and highly emotional times in our communities.

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