

Lorri Coody

From: Austin Bleess
Sent: Tuesday, December 10, 2019 9:23 PM
To: Travis Clay
Subject: RE: Culture/Morale Concerns

Good evening,

Thank you for reaching out and letting me know your concerns. I appreciate it.

Austin Bleess
Jersey Village City Manager
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From: Travis Clay <TClay@jerseyvillagetx.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 10, 2019 1:56 AM
To: Austin Bleess <ableess@jerseyvillagetx.com>
Subject: Culture/Morale Concerns

Mr. Bleess,

I wanted to speak with you regarding some concerns I've developed over the past few weeks. In light of the circumstances I felt somewhat uncomfortable speaking with Chief Riggs so I wanted to reach out to you.

Over the past few months this organization has gone through some tough challenges. We have seen our Chief of many years leave under somewhat difficult circumstances. We have had turnover from some talented and tenured officers. But most worrisome is the cultural shift we have experienced in the last few weeks.

I first began my tenure with the city of Jersey Village Emergency Services (JVFD) in 2006. I had moved here in 2004 from rural central Texas under the advice of a close friends of mine who lived here for many years. Quickly I fell in love with the city and it's charm of being a small town nestled outside a large urban area. I continued my service for the city in 2010 joining the Jersey Village Police Department as a reserve police officer.

When I joined JVPD our Chief was Charlie Wedemeyer but very soon after I started, Chief Foerester was hired. Looking back, it was one of the best things the city probably ever did. At the time the police department was riddled with issues. There were accusations of officers stealing, questions surrounding evidence collection/storage, and criminal investigation follow-up was almost non-existent.

Over the years Chief Foerster elevated the standards immensely. Officers with performance issues left, training became a priority, criminal investigation follow-up increased ten-fold, new equipment and resources increased but most importantly service to the citizens of this city improved exponentially. It was not an overnight process but it was one that was desperately needed. Accountability became a pillar within our culture - and rightfully so. Our investigations, service, and overall product became something to be proud of and on many occasions the Harris County Dist. Attorney's office would remark at the quality of our work.

After the initial shock of Chief Foerester leaving wore off we soon found our "stride". Officers began to bring forth ideas about recruiting, training, crime suppression, and other law enforcement functions to provide even better service to the

community. During all of this Chief Bitz remained very supportive to other command staff (Lt. Dooley and Lt. Ferguson) and we pressed on. I felt like we were growing closer as an organization but that all would change.

In the first week of November I took off and traveled out of state and when I returned I learned that Chief Riggs had been brought in to guide the organization on an interim basis. Soon thereafter I began to feel a palpable sense of uncertainty around the department.

In my "other" career I am a Captain for a well respected, large EMS agency (approximately 300 personnel). In my EMS career I have experienced many changes involving similar command leadership turnover and cultural shifts in policy and practices. As such, I recognize that many times organizational leadership changes bring about issues that can be divisive at times. But it has been my experience that those changes should bring an organization together - not tear it apart.

The event that occurred last week involving Chief Riggs and Lt. Dooley was one of the worst days of my professional life. I did not know how to respond or what to do. To call it uncomfortable would be an understatement. Since then I have felt an enormous amount of concern and stress to say the least.

I have always tried to perform and serve with the idea of a higher loyalty. Which is to say that no agency is beholden to a singular person. That our values are such that no person is above the integrity of the organization. For the first time in my professional career I felt like that has been called into question.

Over the past couple of weeks, and more specifically the past few days, there has been a palpable level of uncertainty around the department. Numerous co-workers have confided in me that they feel worried and several officers are actively seeking employment elsewhere.

Each day this trend continues I worry our officer's morale will suffer, productivity will suffer, and eventually as a result service to our citizens will suffer. A police officers job is already stressful without concerns of job security or workplace instability looming over ones head.

I do not want this email to seem like an indictment of Chief Riggs. I haven't gotten an opportunity to get to know him yet, but I have no doubt that he is an experienced Police Chief with thoughtful ideas and vision.

However, what I have learned over the last 8+ years is that Lt. Dooley is a cornerstone of this organization and his dedication to serving the community is unparalleled. He has always acted with the highest level of integrity, loyalty, and professionalism. His leadership and guidance has been one of the main reasons for our agency's professional growth. He is an asset that can not be easily replaced.

I recognize that often there is confidential information, policy, and privacy rights that make it difficult to discuss these matters. I am not asking for any specific information, I just want to relay my concerns. I feel a lot of people, myself included, aren't really sure what to expect next and are bothered.

In my 17 years of public service I have never reached out a member of leadership in an email like this but I felt compelled to under these circumstances. It was uncomfortable to write but I felt it necessary because I don't think many people feel comfortable expressing their concerns.

In closing, I know that many times emails can lack tone and inflection which may cause the end message to be misconstrued or misunderstood. I would be happy to meet with you in person to discuss further.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Det. Travis Clay

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