

**Choosing the Right Medium for the Message:**

**A Memo for the Chief of Police**

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The coming days will present an opportunity to promote transparency and authenticity on behalf of the department. As the Public Information Officer, below are my recommendations regarding the messaging, talking points, and suggested mediums to address the four main events over the past two weeks. Above all, I would advise, as the University of San Diego (2020) writes, that you “Always be honest and use your best judgment in all situations.” In addition, it would be wise to aggressively leverage our social media and local broadcast media to position the department in front of these developing situations as follows.

Officer Samuel Rosario was arrested and charged after assaulting a 19-year-old man while on duty during a domestic disturbance call. Local media outlets have requested bodycam footage of the incident. Without clear, immediate messaging, this incident could incite violence and widespread mistrust in the department in the current political environment. I would suggest you address this situation immediately and “seize the opportunity to be transparent and explain laws and procedures with the public” (Dudley, 2018).

First, I would advise contacting the victim and his family by phone to arrange a follow-up in-person meeting. It would be best to ask the family to join you in calling for calm as Rosario’s case proceeds through the criminal justice system. Also, request that they appear with you at the neighborhood board meeting (NBM) scheduled for this Wednesday evening. With their blessing, we will invite local media to observe the NBM.

At the NBM, address the issue head-on. You and I must commit to being the last people to leave the meeting and listen to all comments as long as it takes. We will likely face solid emotional responses; be prepared to listen actively, paraphrase, and let the community members vent, as Fitch (2016) suggested. It will be essential to remain authentic and open-minded as we begin the healing process of rebuilding trust with the community. The department and our community expected Rosario to act appropriately, and he broke that trust. You should speak from the heart about how this incident has affected you personally, how inexcusable

Rosario's behavior was, and what the legal process will be in this case. After NMB, we will set up a live media interview regarding our plans to prevent similar actions in the future and the efforts the department will take to begin rebuilding trust collaboratively with our community.

As important as it is to face potentially negative news head-on, it is also essential that we highlight the heroic actions of our officers. Last week, facing rapidly oncoming flames from a massive wildfire, Officer Carly Stone risked her life to help rescue over 60 animals from the local animal shelter. Officer Stone led by example and exemplified the best of what the department has to offer the community.

It is essential to highlight the good work that officers do in our community every day publicly. The video unit will immediately begin the production of a story to highlight Officer Stone and her actions, using her bodycam footage and interviews with the grateful animal shelter staff. At the Wednesday morning command meeting this week, I recommend sharing the video with the command staff before posting it on the department's social media channels. The meeting would be an excellent opportunity to honor Officer Stone with the department's Bronze Medal of Valor. Thursday morning, after the NBM, we should ask to appear with Officer Stone for a 5-minute live in-studio interview on the morning news broadcast.

Another topic trending over the weekend is the presentation that Police Union President Ken Casaday gave at the city council meeting on Friday. Because of the confidential nature of contract negotiations, rather than offer live public comment, I recommend we address the issue with a press release and comment, if at all, solely through email correspondence. As you are aware, "Communications about these cases should be conveyed on a need-to-know basis in a format designed to protect confidentiality" (University of San Diego, 2020). I have drafted some brief comments for your review below.

*“The police department and the city are currently undergoing contract negotiations with the police officers’ union. The parties involved strive to find the best balance between providing a competitive compensation package for our hardworking police officers and being fiscally responsible with taxpayer money. While we acknowledge and appreciate the POA president’s dedication, because of the ongoing nature of these confidential negotiations, the department is unable to comment further at this time besides to say that we want to quickly come to a fair, equitable, and mutually beneficial solution for everyone involved.”*

The last significant event of the past week involved Officer Chris Swanson. Officer Swanson, faced with a crowd intending to march in protest of the death of George Floyd, removed his helmet and riot gear and addressed the group as a fellow community member. In a recent webinar, world-renowned police leader and former DC Metropolitan Police Chief Charles Ramsey said, “policing should be focused on protecting every person’s constitutional rights rather than enforcing the law” (personal communication, August 25, 2020). Officer Swanson’s actions, as shown by videos taken at the event, exemplified this belief.

As suggested by Patrick (2020), we should use the footage and create a professionally produced 30-second public service announcement to be aired on local broadcast media and our social media profiles, reminding our local community that our department is here to serve and protect them. This action would highlight not only Officer Swanson for his extraordinary servant leadership but the department’s commitment to “Serving and Protecting with Aloha.”

In the wake of Officer Rosario’s arrest, we have the chance to build collaborative trust by demonstrating transparency and a steadfast commitment to justice, regardless of the circumstances. We can tell the amazing stories of Officers Stone and Swanson this week while remaining respectfully upbeat about the ongoing contract negotiations. In response to this past week’s events, careful navigation will lead to open and honest communication with the community and demonstrate the department’s vision, “Leading by Example.”

## References

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