

## Iowa City Police Chief Supplemental Questionnaire

Jason Lando - Candidate

### **1. Describe the ethics and values that are most important for a Police Chief to consistently demonstrate. Provide an example illustrating how you have practiced these personal characteristics in your current or most recent position.**

A police chief must always be ethical, fair, and transparent. These three qualities are non-negotiable and are equally important both internally (in dealings with officers and staff) as well as externally (when working with community members). As a leader in law enforcement, I have found that the ethical, fair, and transparent decision is rarely the easy one. Police chiefs must constantly challenge themselves to do what is right, no matter how difficult that decision may be. Too often, those in leadership roles compromise their integrity by making the wrong decision because it is the easy thing to do. A few examples include promoting the wrong people, failing to discipline popular employees, overly disciplining employees who they do not like, and failing to have difficult conversations with those who desperately need them.

I recall an incident where two officers made an honest mistake on a traffic stop. These officers were checking license plates in an area where we had been experiencing an uptick in stolen vehicles. They pulled one car over after their computer showed that the license plate belonged to a different car. The driver was a young black female and both officers are white males. During the encounter, the officers could not figure out why the license plate was assigned to another car. The driver had a valid license and all of the paperwork was in order. The officers explained to the driver that they were not going to give her a ticket or tow her car. Instead, they explained that she needed to go to the DMV the following day to sort out the error. The officers then told the driver to leave her car parked (in lieu of having it towed) and to walk home or call for a ride.

What the officers did not realize at the time is that they juxtaposed two of the digits when they checked the license plate. There was, in fact, no problem with the license plate. The officers were too inexperienced to consider this as one of the problems. *Rookie mistake.*

In their minds, the officers did the young lady a favor by not issuing a citation or towing her car. In the driver's mind, however, she was pulled over for no reason, by two white cops, then forced to walk home in the dark. She was humiliated and confused, and relayed the story to her father when she arrived home, carless.

After speaking with the driver's father and investigating the matter, I realized the problem. I explained to the officers that it was a mistake and they would surely make many more in their career, but **we had to make it right**. I setup a meeting in my office between the driver and both of my officers. The young lady broke down in tears as she explained her fears that night. As she explained how it made her feel to be stopped for no reason and asked to walk home in the dark, it became apparent to the officers that they could have at least offered her a ride. The officers apologized, explained that they were new, and assured her it was an honest mistake. We then went one step further and showed the driver a printout of the actual license plate number that the officers ran on their computer so she could see they were being honest.

In the end, the officers left with a new appreciation of how their actions affect others. The driver left knowing that cops are people too and they make mistakes.

By being completely transparent, fair to everyone, and willing to have an uncomfortable conversation, a negative experience was turned into something positive for two young officers and a citizen.

## **2. Summarize the first conversation you have with a newly hired officer. What are the most important things new officers must understand to have a safe, healthy and productive career in law enforcement?**

Whenever I meet with new officers, I first ask them to tell me about their families, their goals, and the reason why they wanted to become a police officer. It is important to understand what motivates and drives our officers. I then explain how I have seen policing change over the past 20+ years and how important it is that they keep an open mind, be willing to challenge the status quo, and keep the needle moving in the right direction. I tell new officers that they are going to face very difficult decisions over the course of their careers, sometimes on a daily basis. And I remind them that they aren't going to remember every rule or policy, and that's okay, but they must always keep the idea of the "community bank" in mind.

The community bank is the idea that every encounter a police officer has with a citizen will be viewed as either a positive encounter (a "deposit") or a negative encounter (a "withdrawal"). Sometimes a deposit or a withdrawal is small and seemingly insignificant to the officer, but it always leaves a lasting impression on the citizen. I tell all of my new officers that they should strive to make every encounter a deposit. When a department's community bank is full, citizens will support them, officers will be viewed as trustworthy, and they will ultimately be safer and experience less stress during their career. I tell these young officers to watch news stories from around the country. You can tell which departments have full community banks and which ones are empty. When a police

department's bank is empty, there is no trust. There are protests, and sometimes violence, against police officers. It takes countless deposits to make up for this. I explain that they are going to be the future of the law enforcement profession and they have a duty to ensure that we earn and maintain the trust of the community by always making ethical decisions and striving to make deposits whenever possible.

My last piece of advice is to tell the officers that they should conduct themselves at all times as though the person they are dealing with is a close family member. If they would treat their mother, father, grandparent the exact same way *in that same situation*, then they will never make the wrong decision.

### **3. What does procedural justice mean to you and how specifically have you demonstrated leadership in this area as a law enforcement professional?**

Procedural Justice deals with the importance of process over outcomes. Often in policing, we focus on outcomes but do not give much thought to how we arrive there. For example, an officer pulls over a motorist and is rude, insulting, maybe uses foul language towards the citizen. In the end, they release the citizen with a warning, but no ticket. In this case, the outcome is desirable (no ticket) but the citizen still leaves the encounter upset and humiliated, ultimately filing a complaint. In this case, the outcome was what any motorist would hope for during a traffic stop. However, the outcome is not what mattered the most.

A study of 1600 California traffic stops showed that citizens would much prefer a negative outcome (a ticket) as long as they were treated respectfully by the officer. This study shows that procedural justice is what really matters. Along those same lines, I have witnessed officers arrest violent people who have committed heinous crimes, but treated that suspect like a member of their own family during the arrest and questioning. Because of their commitment to procedural justice, the officers/detectives established themselves as trustworthy in the eyes of the suspect, built rapport, and obtained a confession that landed the person in jail for 20 years. Procedural Justice simply means treating people with the respect and dignity they are due as fellow human beings.

In 2014, I was selected by the Chief of Police to serve as one of the Police Bureau's representatives in the National Initiative for Building Community Trust & Justice. As part of Pittsburgh's involvement in this initiative, my team designed and implemented training in procedural justice, de-escalation, and implicit bias for all 1,000 Pittsburgh police officers. The training was relevant to everyday police work and challenged officers to think outside the box. We examined ways that officers could use PJ to de-escalate tense situations and avoid using force.

To be transparent about what we were teaching our officers, our team also designed a community version of the Procedural Justice and Implicit Bias training. The community

training continues today and brings officers and citizens together for daylong workshops that help break down the barriers that often exist between cops and community. The transformations that take place in attitudes between cops and citizens during the course of these training sessions is unbelievably impactful. I recall one training at a local university where we had 100 community members in attendance. We assigned two uniformed police officers to every table to facilitate group conversation. As residents entered the ballroom, they had a look of shock and discomfort on their faces. Four hours later, one community activist was noticeably teary-eyed. She stood and told them room “When I walked in here today, I had a very negative view of police. I was uncomfortable just being in the room with all of you. But I have been transformed. I see you as people... you are just regular people... and I would recommend this training to anyone.”

#### **4. The City Council has worked hard to improve social justice and racial equity throughout the entire community. How will you further this effort as Police Chief.**

In 2015, I assumed command of Pittsburgh’s Zone 5 police station. With a population of 55,000 residents and 100 sworn officers, Zone 5 was a fast-paced district with a disproportionately high number of homicides, an absence of community engagement, and a history of high-profile incidents and anti-police protests. There was a palpable “Us vs them” mentality between residents and officers that desperately needed to change.

On day one, I convened a team of officers and supervisors and we started to explore ways to repair the fractured relationship we had with the community. We immediately began working to change how officers and residents interacted with each other. We focused less on traditional policing practices and more on engaging residents in positive, collaborative ways. We crafted our engagement and enforcement efforts around the wants and needs of the community through the use of listening sessions and a weekly e-mail report to the community, soliciting input. We started a comprehensive teen engagement program that paired at-risk youth with officers for one-on-one conversations and role-reversal scenarios. This program fostered trust building between police officers and youth who previously held a negative view of law enforcement. Officers were empowered to work with residents to help them creatively solve problems and were recognized for going above and beyond. Officers who engaged in misconduct or other unacceptable behavior were held accountable. We were transparent about all of our outreach and enforcement efforts via social media so the community could see that we were being responsive to their concerns. Community stakeholders noticed the shift in culture and showed their appreciation by offering resources and support. Cooperation went up and complaints dropped 40% in one year. We also saw a drop in crime (to varying degrees) across all categories.

[Related links:](#)

<https://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/2017/07/13/pittsburgh-police-community-relations/>  
<https://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2019/03/15/Hands-down-lets-talk-Pittsburgh-police-Homewood-tensions-engagement-sessions/stories/201903150096>

Specifically as it relates to racial equity, I am the city's representative on a Disproportionate Minority Contact working group. Known as the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA), the group is a partnership among several public and private social service and criminal justice agencies where we explore the underlying causes resulting in young men and women of color experiencing a much higher percentage of contacts with the criminal justice system than that of their white counterparts. This is important work that merits an ongoing commitment on behalf of law enforcement irrespective of location. It is work which has been deeply meaningful to me, and work I would commit to continue in Iowa City.

**5. What about the Iowa City community attracted you to apply for this position?**

I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had in Pittsburgh, but I am ready for a new leadership challenge. In searching for a police chief position, it is my goal to work for a department that values integrity, teamwork, transparency and innovation. I was excited to see some of the great things already happening in Iowa City, to include strong community partnerships, data-driven policing, a commitment to racial equity, and the use of technology to promote transparency. Further, the work I have done in Pittsburgh surrounding Procedural Justice and Implicit Bias matches perfectly with some of the initiatives currently underway in Iowa City. I was also impressed to learn that Iowa City was ranked as # 4 in the top 100 places to live in the United States. Iowa City sounds like an amazing place to call home and it would be an honor to lead the Iowa City Police Department and help develop future generations of police officers.