14. Ten Lessons from Changing Policing Organisations

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In this chapter I will share my learnings from the past 40 years working with change in the New South Wales Police Service, Victoria Police and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. In 2011 Melbourne University Press published my memoir *Fair cop*, with Jo Chandler. Writing this book allowed me time to contemplate my life and perhaps sharpen my reflections on a range of issues and experiences.

All of us have personal experience of change, or have driven change in our lives, organisations, departments or businesses. These are my lessons.

1. The environment for change is critical

I often start my leadership workshops with a clarification about the way we should treat each other during our time working together. Setting the ground rules or guiding principles helps those involved to focus and hopefully begins to create an environment of trust.

Hugh Mackay (2011), in *What makes us tick*, gives great guidance on the way Australians are driven. Mackay suggests there are ten desires that drive us— desires such as to be taken seriously, to belong, for control, for something to happen, for love, for our place, for something to believe in, to connect and to be useful. Looking at employees through these 10 desires allows a more inclusive view and a recognition and respect for their contributions. If leaders have a framework of seeing all employees as difficult and not interested in change then that sometimes means we misjudge our colleagues and employees and do not give them the opportunity to contribute.

Becoming the 19th Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police in April 2001 gave me the opportunity to draw on all my experience gained in the previous 30 years. I also knew that the most important thing to do was to draw on the long experience of the organisation, on its history, its failures and successes, and the willingness of many people to think about the way the future could be better. I knew there were many people in the organisation who believed we could be much better than we were.

2. Why the reasons for change are important

There are many reasons for organisations to consider change: a new appointment like my own, a major crisis, a push for renewal, budget cutbacks, new research findings, new challenges, change of direction or simply that there are better ways that things could be done.

One of the things to remember is that people need a good reason to get involved in change. They might not like the reason, but by at least articulating it, or better still, by them articulating the need, they will have a base to understand what they might be facing and more importantly why.

Over my time in policing, a number of issues caused change: corruption, budgetary constraints, human resource issues, introduction of new technology, a series of underworld murders, terrorism issues, rising crime rates and a recognition that members of the organisation needed to be better managed and led.

The 2009 Victorian bushfires massively affected many people's lives. They lost loved ones, their homes, businesses, their communities. Many took years to come to terms with their losses, many were unwilling to change, but in this case they had no options available to them to avoid radical changes to their lives.

I remember once trying to convince a group of senior police in New South Wales to consider a new way of working with communities. At the end of the presentation one very senior police officer said that according to what I had just presented, all of his career had been a waste of time. I told him that is not what I said, but his response was, 'That's what I heard'. A lesson learned from this short conversation was to be careful about treading on the past to get to the future. A recognition that we are all of our own time helps both the initiator of change and those involved to understand each other's perspectives.

3. Get to know the people in the organisation and your stakeholders—they must be involved

When you take up a new appointment or move to a new organisation, you need to take time to get to know the people you are working with. When I joined Victoria Police I made arrangements to visit as many members as I could in the first six months. I wanted to meet them for them to get to know me and what I stood for, and for me to understand from them what they saw as the most important issues facing the organisation. By the conclusion I had met over 6,000 members in their workplaces. We met in small one-person police stations,

in groups of 300 or 400 people in the crime and traffic departments or in large police stations such as Frankston. More than 500 separate issues were raised during these discussions. I am sure my colleagues and I all wondered how we would meet the expectations of so many people within the organisation. I will say more later about how this task was to be accomplished.

I also needed to meet all of the senior team. They are a powerful group and can make or break a change program. We talked about the challenges facing us, about our organisation's history, what we did well and what we did poorly, the strengths and capacity we should build on, and what they would have done if they had been appointed to the top job. I met with over 40 of the senior team in one-on-one interviews. I learned a lot about the history of the organisation, about many of the team's experiences, goals and aspirations and perhaps on some occasions where bodies were buried, metaphorically speaking.

At the time we also determined that all of us would go out into the workplace, spend time in offices, police stations, police cars and with the specialists and professional support staff. Listen to them, give them a chance to tell us what we needed to do to make Victoria Police the best it could be.

I and my colleagues also accepted many invitations from groups all over Victoria to speak at breakfast, luncheon and tea, so we could hear what the community had to say about Victoria Police and what they wanted from us. We met with many members of local government, religious organisations, disparate service organisations and members of the business community.

All of these discussions and many more went to guiding our directions for the future and to providing Victoria with better policing.

Professor Mark Moore from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government suggests we need to create public value in the public sector. To do this you need legitimacy or authority from the authorising environment to bring about a change, a clear problem to be solved or a goal to be achieved, a demonstrated capacity and skills from within the organisation or outside it, to be able to achieve the goals. By this stage in the change process I knew we had clear goals to reduce crime, make people safer, reduce the road toll and fix the problems identified by the members. We had legitimacy from the government and the community. Now we had to find the capacity from within and without to achieve our goals.

4. Look for leverage

An opportunity arose when I learned that I would be required to report the previous year's crime statistics to the community and government. Crime rates had been climbing for some years and figures looked pretty appalling. I had found leverage to get the organisation to focus on the issue of crime. I called upon some of my colleagues to take responsibility for a particular issue of concern. They joined me at a press conference the following day when I announced to the media and community that these four senior police officers would be taking responsibility on behalf of Victoria Police for reducing crime and working out how to improve our response. The categories chosen were stolen motor vehicles, breaking into premises, robberies, and family violence.

We amalgamated the other 500 issues raised by the members into 80 key projects; leaders for each were chosen, and people from all the different parts of the organisation volunteered or were assigned to work on them and come back with a viable way forward within three months.

Other opportunities came along that helped or required us to focus: counterterrorism, which occurred as a result of the terrible attacks of 9/11 in the United States; criminal investigation, because of the growing death toll in underworld murders; corruption prevention, resulting from uncovering problems within the drug squad.

5. Understand the signals and culture

Proponents of strategic planning talk about a model sometimes called the 'iceberg model of change'. It suggests that when we are thinking about organisational change, we mostly pay attention to the top 10 per cent of the iceberg—the strategies and structures and systems. The proponents argue that we pay less attention to the remaining 90 per cent. The view held by many is that success or failure depends on whether or not you pay attention to the 90 per cent that is unseen. This portion can be the home of real power structures, the history of successes and failures, the 'this is the way we do things around here' approach, the beliefs and values, the fears and unwritten control mechanisms. It can also be the language and signals that those in the organisation take from what you are trying to do or what you are saying.

In the early stages of my time in Victoria Police I was asked by police members of the gay and lesbian community to march with them in the gay pride march to be held the following year. I accepted without hesitation, given that I knew members needed support, were doing a good job and that they invited me to

participate. I did not quite understand the implications of this decision until some time after. I received over 800 emails from members of the organisation, in the main expressing their anger and regret that I had decided to march. Various media outlets were either enraged or baffled. I did march in what turned out to be a relatively small community event which received a significant amount of publicity. A powerful signal was sent that I would support members of Victoria Police no matter their race or sexual preference as long as they were doing a good job. To the community it came to mean that I was my own person and I was a strong supporter of diversity.

The Labor government had committed to an additional 1600 police officers in early 2001. A great advertising campaign was put in place that inspired people from a range of different backgrounds to join Victoria Police. It also became an inspiration to many within Victoria Police. It signalled a new force for a new century and signalled that women and people of minority backgrounds were very capable of carrying out the diverse roles available in policing. It destroyed the myth of a stereotypical police officer. We also commenced plans for a significant number of police stations to be built or revamped. By the time I left Victoria Police, more than 200 police stations had been rebuilt or built. This $300 million program conducted over 10 years made an enormous difference to the environment in which police officers worked and in which the community visits, willingly or not.

6. Set goals and accountabilities

Setting out clear directions, breaking the work into manageable chunks, dealing with simple issues first, can make the change process more efficient. I remember a piece of research done in the 1990s by Telstra that suggested what people want when they go to work is for someone to know where the organisation is going, and to know what their role is, and for there to be good management to help them get the job done. Having people clearly understand the goals and accountabilities requires an enormous amount of communication. Today technology can assist in that process but nothing beats sharing the data, presentations and openness.

Clearly articulated goals such as, in our case, reducing crime and death and serious injury on the road, and holding people accountable for delivering against those goals is very important. Telling people what needed to be done but not micromanaging allows empowered people to try new ways of working.

The 80 task forces that were set problems to solve all reported back with ways to solve or mitigate issues. Some were adopted straight away, others became part of a five-year strategic plan. Of the four key crime areas that were identified, three

saw significant reduction in crime rates and in the fourth, a much better response to family violence was implemented across Victoria and across a number of government departments. Crime dropped overall by nearly 30 per cent between 2001 and 2010.

We also introduced a process called Compstat, a model of accountability which had previously been used in New York City and other parts of the United States. Various statistical indicators were adopted to compare the performance of different divisions or departments against previous performance and against each other. This method of accountability took some time to settle in but once we finally agreed on what could be measured and why, it gave us an important tool to drive the reform process. Personal performance review, particularly by people at senior levels, became part of the regular processes of the organisation.

7. Understand the research, what works and what does not

As part of a continuous improvement focus we commissioned a significant amount of research on topics ranging from family violence to organised crime, sexual assault, traffic management, juvenile justice, organisational reform, financial management and a number of other areas. The results of this research and our participation in it meant we were up to date with best practice in policing around the world. At one point we had over 20 different research grants with universities throughout Australia and in some parts of the United States. We tried to ensure that our policy formulation was underpinned by the research, the experience of the members involved and the input from the community. For instance, in working on counterterrorism we formed a multi-faith advisory committee, a broader community advisory group and collaborated with academics involved in writing about terrorism issues to help us formulate the best way forward. When we became aware of the major psychological issues facing members, we trained over 600 civilians and police officers as peer support councillors. The evidence that this was the way forward came from a range of psychologists and from the experience of other police organisations.

8. Good management is critical

I remember asking my then boss in New South Wales, Inspector John Avery, what he thought good management was. He suggested I could go read books or I could think about the good managers that I had worked with, who I would

walk over hot coals for. It was a pretty good answer and I remember at that point in my career I could think of two managers I had had who had made an enormous difference to my life.

I have since asked many groups both inside and outside policing the same question. You might be surprised that the number of good managers people remember is not as many as you might think. But Inspector Avery went on to say that I might think about the characteristics of these managers and I might follow their lead in the way that I managed people.

Managers can make an enormous difference in people's lives and bad managers can damage people; I have certainly seen my share of the latter. Although business and government organisations spend an enormous amount of time and money on teaching people how to manage, it is really not that complicated. Simply put, it is how you would like to be treated yourself.

In Victoria Police we developed a range of programs designed to improve managers' skill and leadership capacities. We moved people to various positions to expand their skills and on some occasions took people out of management positions when they were best suited for other, perhaps more technical, roles. We also provided personal mentors so that managers might be assisted in developing their capacities, to reflect on their own behaviour and how they might be affecting those they managed.

9. Resilience

Change is hard and will challenge us all. Once the process of change begins, you might be in for a rough ride. You just have to persevere and remain committed without wavering. I am often asked how I stay so resilient under the various pressures I have faced as a senior manager, involved in so many change projects over so many years. I have undertaken a range of courses and studies over the years and have developed a checklist that helps me when things get tough:

- Have a focus, a goal, something you believe in, and take pleasure and consolation from your achievements.
- Develop a capacity to reflect on your own behaviour and that of others—this will determine whether you are part of the problem or part of the solution.
- Have a network of people you can call on and ask their advice. Know that you do not have all the answers.
- Do not always been in a rush to find the answer. Leave the space open to let an answer evolve.

- Make the group do the work. I am often known for saying 'So what do you think?' I might know the answer but it is far better that people are offered the opportunity to contribute and perhaps come up with a better answer than you may ever have found.

- Ensure the goal you are trying to achieve is worthwhile and worth the risk.

- Live a balanced life and know that you have coped and will again.

- Have a sense of humour and try not to take yourself too seriously.

- Know when it is time to go—we can occasionally go too early, but we can often stay too long. We only have a finite amount of energy. Recognise it might be time to move on.

10. Overcoming fear and finding courage

Both organisations and individuals often limit themselves in what they might achieve. The limits can come from previous experiences, personal and organisational history, fear of failure or of ridicule. Leading change requires recognition of these limits and a belief in people's ability to overcome these barriers.

Challenging the status quo and forcing change carries varying degrees of risk for all involved. People may lose power and influence, may perceive loss of face, may lose confidence and feel their contribution is devalued.

It has been suggested to me that I would have had a much easier time in policing if I had just left things alone and gone with the flow. This was not my way nor do I believe that it is good leadership. Leadership is not about personal popularity, it is about good results.

Organisations and individuals today are in a continuous state of change. Leaders need to take up their responsibility to lead. Professor John Kotter recently suggested in a blog that 'Leadership is about vision, about people buying in, about empowerment and, most of all, about producing useful change'.[1]

For me, if I see the difference in people's lives when crime is reduced, lives are saved on the road, less violence occurs and when people feel happy and rewarded at work, then I am rewarded too.

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1   blogs.hbr.org/2013/01/management-is-still-not-leadership/ accessed 28 May 2014.

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