

THE ETHICAL MIND

**Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
Quality Assurance Conference**

**Monday, October 1, 2007
10:45 a.m.
Ottawa**

Inspector Tom Cameron
Durham Regional Police Service

I would like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to come here and speak today. I hope that you will find me worthy of the honour that you've given me.

So what *do* ethics and integrity have to do with your work in quality assurance?

The fact that you have included ethics and integrity in your agenda indicates that the conference organizers recognize that these issues are important. But, just how important are they?

Many people believe that there has been an erosion of values in our society and that there is an absence of the principled behaviour that, at one time, was not only considered to be important, it was considered to be *the* most important thing. Ethics and integrity are basically values that an adult has or does not have. They come from within the self, but they are not inherent or instinctive – they are not there at birth. They are developed mainly through the early influence of culture and socialization, or like Robert Fulghum says in his book, *All I Really need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, “All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.”

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people.
- Put things back where you found them.

- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Wash your hands before you eat.
- When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
- And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned to read - the biggest word of all - LOOK.

If you look closely at what quality assurance is all about, you would agree that ethics and integrity are not just important, you would agree that there is nothing *more* important in your line of work because they are at the foundation of what quality assurance is all about.

Quality assurance is about providing confidence. Confidence among all concerned that quality-related activities are being performed effectively. Quality assurance assures the existence and effectiveness of procedures that attempt to make sure – in advance – that expected levels of quality will be reached. Quality assurance professionals provide the evidence that people need, to have confidence that things are being done correctly.

That means that folks whose primary role is quality assurance are on the front line of the battle between good and evil, right and wrong, success and disaster,

because it is they who protect the integrity of our organizations and, in the law enforcement organization, help us to maintain the public trust.

In a May 2007 opinion survey conducted by Leger Marketing, Canadians were asked to rate the extent to which they trusted the people in particular professions. Police officers were among the top professions that Canadians trusted most, with a rating of 84%. Politicians were second from the bottom with a rating of only 15%. The only profession rated lower than politicians was used car salespeople. Even lawyers got a 52% rating.

So people trust us. And they will go on trusting us as long as they have confidence that we are doing things correctly. Who makes sure that we are doing things correctly? You do.

I read an article in the March 2007 issue of Harvard Business Review about, "The Ethical Mind," which was described by Howard Gardner, a psychologist and professor at Harvard University, as a mind-set that broadens respect for others into something more abstract.

Given the ethical failures at Enron, WorldCom, and Hewlett-Packard, and the public animosity toward corporate executives that these examples have led to, Professor Gardner believes that it is now, more than ever, incumbent on

business leaders to repair relations with customers and employees by behaving ethically.

It is evident that the same climate that has affected business leadership, which has become synonymous with unethical behaviour, is affecting us in policing also. Police leaders too have to stand up to ethical pressures and set a good example.

Professor Gardner thinks that the world really has become a battle between good and evil, right and wrong, success and disaster. He thinks that the only way to win the battle – to restore confidence - is for business leaders to have an ethical mind.

What he refers to as an ethical mind used to be known as “character.” People of integrity – people with a strong moral force – were said to have “strength of character.”

The U.S. Air Force Academy defines character as, “the sum of those qualities of moral excellence that stimulates a person to do the right thing, which is manifested through right and proper actions despite internal or external pressures to the contrary.”

Professor Gardner says that a person with an ethical mind asks herself, “What kind of person, worker, and citizen do I want to be? If all workers in my

profession adopted the mind-set I have, or if everyone did what I do, what would the world be like?"

He also says that it is important that we do "good work" - work that he describes as work of high quality that matters to society, enhances the lives of others, and is conducted in an ethical manner. And there are a lot of things that can erode good work. Perhaps the most significant, is failing to keep honesty central in all aspects of business. Achieving the "good work" that Gardner talks about is impossible in an organization culture where honesty is secondary.

Honesty, integrity, one's "North Star" or "moral compass" all refer to the same thing. They refer to uprightness of character, truthfulness, sincerity, and trustworthiness. An environment in which ethics and integrity are considered to be important should be absent of lying, cheating, and stealing. It sounds pretty simple, but we all know that it's not.

What about an organization that espouses ethics and integrity but which tolerates, or even encourages, falsehood in reporting with the deliberate intent to mislead? Some of you may readily identify that sort of thing as unethical. Others may be thinking, "Well, that depends."

I would like your help to conduct an experiment. I'd like everybody to stand up and point your finger out in front of you. Now close your eyes and point *North*. Watch you don't bash the person next to you. Keep your eyes closed and keep

pointing in the direction that you think *North* is. Keep pointing, but now you can open your eyes. As you can see, we've got people pointing in all directions. Thank you very much; we can all sit down now.

Which direction was the right one? Where is *North*? Well I have a compass here and it says that North is that way (pointing.)

A moral compass is somewhat similar. We can talk about having a strong moral compass but people won't always agree about which direction is the right one. The lack of common agreement, or hair-splitting to justify one's own deviation from the correct path as in, "Oh, you meant *magnetic* North, I was pointing to *true* North," can put us in the ethical danger zone.

One of the oldest jokes in the book is about George Bernard Shaw (some say Winston Churchill) who, during a cocktail party discussion about ethics and integrity, asks a young socialite if she would sleep with him for a million pounds. She thinks about it for a moment and says, "Yes," she probably would. He says, "Well then, would sleep with me for *one* pound?" Indignant, she asks, "What do you think I am?" He replies, "We've already established what you are, madam. Now we're just haggling over the price."

It is worth considering that if a person has to rationalize, justify, or excuse some ethical compromise they have made, it's too late. People will have already established what they are.

There are a number of pressures on police organizations today that have us hovering in the ethical danger zone all the time. One of them is the establishment of standards against which the performance of police organizations is measured.

As you know, most of these standards resulted from calls for higher levels of performance from the police and the need for greater accountability to the public. Few people would disagree with the notion that both were necessary.

The problem with some standards, most of which have been translated into internal directives, policy, procedure, rules, and regulations is that compliance with them can be difficult. This is especially true if they include conflicting and competing objectives or were written in the rarefied atmosphere of a Headquarters office (in our Service we call it, The "Adminisphere") by people who either have little appreciation for the real-world reality of policing or who are not constrained by the practical impossibility of actually complying with some of the standards they have written.

I once pointed out such an inconsistency to a superior who told me not to worry about it because nobody really expected me to comply with the standard - given the limitations imposed by our scant resources. I suggested that the standard should be re-written then to reflect that reality and he looked at me as though I had two heads.

The standards, he told me, were established by politicians who, everyone knew, weren't so much interested in what they *actually* did as they were in what they said they were going to do – (These would be the same politicians, I suppose, who Canadians trust just slightly ahead of used car salespeople.)

I understood from my boss that the standards had to be written to reflect an ideal state – the way we would want the world to look if everything ran perfectly. This wasn't the first time that my perception of reality was different from my superiors. Evidently he felt that establishing lower, but achievable, standards were the refuge of lazy subordinates who, given a chance, would try get away with as little work as possible.

I consoled myself with his reassurance that nobody really expected me to meet the standard but the idea that the Quality Assurance and Audit Unit might show up and take a different view, filled me with a cold dread.

Nobody would disagree that it is important to set high standards. When you set the bar high, you improve the performance of the organization as you approach the ideal. Nobody has a problem with that idea. But standards in policing are intended to be achieved. They are not optional. Getting really, really, close to achieving them is not acceptable. We measure the extent to which they are achieved, and we hold people accountable if they don't meet them. That raises

the question of whether there is pressure on the ethics and integrity of the people responsible for establishing the standards. How could a person with an ethical mind establish standards that they know, or ought to know, have no possibility whatever of being achieved?

The fact is that you can set the bar as high as you like, and you can expect the standards to be met, provided you supply sufficient training and resources to meet them. The problem arises when leaders espouse high standards but fail to provide what is necessary for them to be accomplished. For example, some domestic violence investigation policies require that victims be interviewed on video and only by trained domestic violence investigators of the gender requested by the victim. To be able to do this, police organizations have to spend time and money on staffing, training, scheduling, and video cameras. The standards don't say that you only need to comply with them if you are not busy on the road, have a domestic-violence-trained female officer available, and access to a video camera.

What pressures on your ethics and integrity arise when you, as quality assurance professionals, are called upon to report on compliance with standards? Perhaps minor shortcomings can be overlooked or explained but what happens when you spot something seriously wrong? Is there anything preventing you from blowing the whistle?

Political point-scoring and media criticism may have undermined public confidence in the police to some degree, but the public knows the difference between elected politicians and professional police services. That is evidenced by the differing levels of trust that they have in each.

But public expectations and accountability have risen dramatically over the past few decades. Now, more than ever, police chiefs are under enormous pressure to get it right every time – to comply with standards. Some would tell you that their jobs may depend on it. Police chiefs in Canada are primarily accountable to a civilian governing authority – in Ontario they are called Police Services Boards - made up mainly of politicians and political appointees. They hire and fire police chiefs. The chiefs are also accountable to municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials. In the municipal context, they not only have to keep the police services board happy, they have to keep the mayor and council happy as well. That is not a bad thing. Civilian oversight of the police is one of the pillars of democracy, but so is the independence of the police from political interference. This issue became a central one at the Ipperwash inquiry. The lines between politics and the police have always been a bit blurry but it seems to me that they have, in recent years, become even less distinct.

This is a problem because politicians are known for making promises that they can't, or won't, deliver on. The politicians in power frequently exaggerate their accomplishments, painting a rosy picture of how great things are. The politicians

in opposition exaggerate how bad things are and are always alert for anything that can be described as a screw-up by the government. The media watch this excitement with great interest, perched like vultures waiting to dine on the casualties of these battles. Not infrequently the fodder for the media is provided by some activity the police are engaged in – activity that can embarrass the government – racial profiling, high speed pursuits, victims of domestic violence, aboriginal rights protests, deporting terrorist suspects, and so on.

Politicians and police chiefs both know that even the smallest mistake can have dire consequences. In this climate, does anyone really think that chiefs of police can be truly independent, or are immune from political influence?

Still, Police Services Boards, Police Commissions, or whatever they are called where you're from, are accountable – as are chiefs of police. To monitor the compliance of their organizations they employ people like you. That doesn't mean, however, that they will be jumping for joy if you find something seriously wrong. No. In the pressure-filled environment that they operate in, with their political enemies and the media waiting to pounce, that is the last thing they want. The ethical ones – and I believe they are in the majority - will admit the mistake, apologize, discipline those responsible, and move to correct the problem. The unethical ones will attempt to hide the mistake.

What does all this have to do with you? Well, you may be faced with a choice between covering something up - by falsifying a report, for example, or becoming, in effect, a whistle blower.

Whistle-blowers display ethical minds. Many people might see a top manager doing something unethical but they won't do anything about it because they want to keep their jobs. A true whistle blower, on the other hand, believes that principles of ethics and integrity are more important than keeping their jobs. In quality assurance, I would argue, whistle blowing *is* your job - and in some places it may not be an easy one.

There is a reason why Canadians give police officers such high ratings for trust every time a survey is conducted. It is because people regard us as people of integrity - folks who say what they mean and do what they say. The mottos of the York Regional Police Service, "Deeds Speak," and the London Police Service, "Deeds Not Words," come to mind as overt declarations of this principle.

That is not to say that there have not been scandals in Canadian policing that have eroded the public trust - there have. And if we are not careful there will be more of them. I am concerned that some of the ethical pressures affecting police chiefs may be transmitted throughout police organizations and especially onto those members whose responsibilities include monitoring the organization's performance - such as senior officers and quality assurance and audit people.

I said earlier that the same climate that has affected business leadership, which has become synonymous with unethical behaviour, is affecting us also. We feel pressured to win at all costs. We have set high standards and we don't always meet them. We don't want to admit our mistakes because we fear dire consequences. If we can help it, we don't want to give the media anything to be twisted around and used to take another poke at us. All this has led to some police leaders acting like politicians - saying one thing and doing something else. And if those guys don't change their behaviour, we can expect widespread scandals to destroy our reputation in the community too.

According to Professor Gardiner, there are three things that we need to do if we wish to have an ethical mind and avoid going down the same path that many business leaders have:

- First, we must believe that retaining an ethical compass is essential to the health of our organizations,
- Second, we must state our beliefs and stick to them, and,
- Third, we must confront egregious behaviour as soon as it arises.

So what *do* ethics and integrity have to do with your work in quality assurance?

It would not be overstating the case to say, "Everything." If we are going to live up to public expectations, it is not enough to espouse high standards. To live up

to them – and help others do the same – requires an ethical cast of mind. Because it is you that protect the integrity of our organizations, and help us to maintain the public trust, there is nothing more important than ethics and integrity.

Thank you again for inviting me to participate in the conference with you. If there are any questions, I would be happy to take them.