

Inside policing podcast season two – leadership skills from day one

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Join special constable and head of media and external affairs Antony Bushfield as he talks to the people behind today's top stories and hot topics

News 25 mins listen

Officers and staff need to show leadership from the first day of their career to the last, often in extreme and pressurised situations. It's a topic that's always relevant in policing, particularly as we launch [our new leadership programme](#).

Antony Bushfield talks to former Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney QPM, who recently completed her term as chief constable of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Constabulary after 31 years of service. Olivia led our strategic command course (SCC), developing and supporting the next generation of aspiring chief officers.

Podcast transcript

Antony Bushfield

Olivia, let's start with a fairly simple – or maybe not so simple – question. What's the difference between a manager and a leader?

Olivia Pinkney

It's one of those questions that's often asked, and you're right to ask it. So a manager is someone who ensures that everything that needs to be done is being done, whether that's the task in terms of our service or, you know, making sure internal things are done and kind of processes are stuck to. So it's that and that's important and you do need to do both.

A leader, though, does that and more. And what they do, in my view very much, is focus on both what we are doing but also how we are doing it. And that means creating an environment that those who are actually doing the job can flourish, can give it their best, can contribute, can have a voice,

can show initiative, all those kind of things. And that requires the right environment, as well as the right level of interest in the individual.

Antony Bushfield

And why is that second element, the leadership part, so important in policing, do you think?

Olivia Pinkney

It's essential in policing. I think it's essential in all public services, but the unique nature of policing means that it's ever more so, because we must take responsibility and be very thoughtful about what we do, but also what we don't do. But as importantly, in terms of our legitimacy – which means, you know, as important in terms of the public giving us their trust to do what we do for them and with them – means that how we do it must be viewed as equally important as what we do, because that's the only way we can maintain that public trust.

And trust, I know, is a really hot topic of the moment, but it was always so. And if you look around the globe as to how UK policing is undertaken, it is undertaken with people, not to them. And that means that the public trust us and ask us to do stuff for them. And that's a really unique and really precious model. So that's why how we do stuff, as well as what we do, from a leadership perspective, both need attention.

Antony Bushfield

And so what does that look like, in practice, in policing then? What would a good leader look like? How would they be operating?

Olivia Pinkney

So they need to know the business for a start. You know, we do have to be good at policing. We do have to be good at preventing crime happening. We have to be good at protecting people who need our help. We need to be really good at finding those people and making sure that we're policing for all, not just for those with the loudest voices, so that people do need to be very good at policing.

It's kind of obvious to state, but sometimes it gets overlooked. And then beyond that, the leadership role is to be forever ensuring, at every moment of every day, that we are setting the right culture, that we are allowing everyone to flourish, that we are ensuring that the service we give is thoughtfully done, not just kind of a blunt instrument.

And it absolutely requires constant vigilance, because as soon as we stop looking at that stuff, we slip behind and it's something that needs an awful lot of effort.

Antony Bushfield

Do you think there's a gap in that space at the moment?

Olivia Pinkney

I don't think it's a gap. Where I go – both in Hampshire Constabulary, of course, but also I've just come back from leading the strategic command course, where I was blown away by the ability of everybody to operate in that space and to be very deliberate about doing so, you know, I have lots of national responsibilities, wherever I go – I see great people in policing, officers, staff, volunteers doing exactly that.

Doesn't mean to say we don't want to do more, doesn't mean to say we shouldn't all take on our own responsibility for our own continual development. But no, I don't see a gap. I see massive talent, massive, thoughtful, measured, creative, really compassionate leadership going on. But of course, we want more.

Antony Bushfield

You mentioned the strategic command course. I'm interested, do you think you can learn to be a leader? Do you think you have to be a certain type of person to start with and then you can improve your leadership? Or can you learn from scratch how to be a good leader?

Olivia Pinkney

I think it's some and some. Every single person on the strategic command course this autumn just gone deserved to be there. There were some light bulbs that came on later than others for some in

terms of what the role – particularly of the leader at that very, very, very senior level – is all about, when you become an assistant chief constable or commander or assistant chief officer, because, you know, it is an enduring accountability.

It's making sure that you're leading your organisation for many years hence. You can be in the moment and be busy. And that's where the light bulb came on a bit later for some. But you've also got to do that. But then you've also, your job is to think organisation-wide and think some years hence, because we run monopoly risk-based public organisations.

That's a huge undertaking and it needs people to think that far – and to an absolute person, they did. It was a real privilege and wonderful to be with them on that journey.

Antony Bushfield

And most people came away from that feeling that they've really sort of got lots of insight and experience from the other leaders who were presenting, including yourself. Do you look back on your career and think, 'I've always been a good leader'? or can you remember when maybe you yourself the light bulb came on?

Olivia Pinkney

I wouldn't ever dream of saying I'd always been a good leader, because we all grow. I mean, I joined policing straight from university. I would say I've always been very values-based and that is right at the heart of great leadership, for sure, so I've always been very values-based. I think as I matured in my profession, got older in years, I kind of understood that better, practised stuff, made some mistakes, learned lots and lots from people who I wanted to copy, and also some things from people I would absolutely not go down that path ever that I saw.

Antony Bushfield

Like what? What kind of things?

Olivia Pinkney

You know, over the years – and I'm going back into the nineties now, you know – really kind of, like I was saying before, sticking with the process, but not being remotely interested in the context in which you're operating, you know, that's just hopeless in terms of policing. We need to be good at what we do and understand the environment we're operating in.

So there was that, you know. On occasion, I've been in bullying cultures, which I haven't seen for years and years and years, certainly in any of the forces I've been working in in recent years. But I know it went on and I saw it certainly in those early days. And you make a choice. I certainly made a choice very early on about: 'Okay, my sergeant behaves like that, I'm not going to do that. If I ever get, you know, in that position, I'm not going to do that.'

You know, it does work both ways. And also having fantastic mentors over the years. I've always, always had a mentor. I kind of joke that they can be for Christmas, not for life. You know, they can be for a period of time and a period in your professional life.

And so kind of learning from them, and hearing and asking questions of them about how they've gone about stuff, has helped me learn enormously from people around me. So I think you do learn, you do evolve, you develop. There are lots of great programmes the College does now, you know, similar ones when I was growing up – obviously they've evolved since then – but you know, they've really helped me kind of get confident in my leadership as well, because that can be a thing too. It's kind of really understanding your own voice and your own capability.

Antony Bushfield

Is there someone throughout your career that you can look back on and say, 'That is the person that I really learned everything I needed to about leadership from, that is who I remember'? Because a lot of people will look back and go, 'Oh, it was the sergeant that really taught me what a good leader was'. Do you have someone like that?

Olivia Pinkney

I don't have one person. I do have a couple. So when I was a PC, I was very fortunate in that I had a superintendent down in Somerset, where I was working, who I describe as a gardener boss, so he saw more potential in me than I, you know, recognised in myself. And he, you know, encouraged

to kind of push me out of my comfort zone, but not so far that it was too scary. But there was some element of scariness there. That was great. And I also look back and in fact, I was talking with Andy Marsh, chief executive of the College, only a couple of weeks ago. And I've written to our then Chief Constable Steve Pilkington, because I realise – Andy and I were talking – how many of us, Andy and my peer group now, how many deputy chief constables as you look around the country, were all together sergeants and inspectors under Steve Pilkington.

And we kind of recognise that he created an environment, he took an interest, he nurtured us in a brilliant way and I'm very grateful for that.

Antony Bushfield

That's interesting. Do you look back on that and do you think he knew what he was doing there, as in, he was nurturing that talent? Or was he just being a great leader?

Olivia Pinkney

I think both. I think one is the other, one is a subset of the other. So I think a leader has many roles and a very senior leader, as he was – and I now am, you know – has many roles and one of which is absolutely spotting talent for upwards development. But equally, it's spotting talent for lateral development, and that's not just on an individual basis.

It's about systemising that, industrialising that, creating different pathways that people can accept and take and be excited by. You can have all of that, though, but if you haven't got people who think, 'I can see myself in that place and I know how to access that and I want to access that', then it stands for nothing. So you need to have all of those things and you need to pay a lot of attention to it. It doesn't just happen.

Antony Bushfield

How important is that accessibility element of leadership, so that young in-service people can get access to those who are higher up in leadership to see what that is and have their talent recognised? Because accessibility is difficult in policing when it's so rank-based.

Olivia Pinkney

Yeah, I think it is. And I think accessibility is essential. And one of the things that one sees – not in policing, interestingly, but lots of other industries – where people starting out in their professional lives are working entirely from their laptops. I worry about that in terms of almost the elevator conversation, literally sometimes that somebody can have or being around, you know, watching someone do something, hearing their voice, seeing how they operate – that stuff, which is that kind of soft, almost subliminal influence, is really important.

And of course, in policing, because it is a participatory sport, you know, we are largely around one another still. So I think that's great and that's massively to our credit. I think one of the things, though, that we must continually work harder at is that it's not just people who are in our line of sight who get opportunities.

There's a really good piece of research in the health system. And what they found was minoritised ethnic colleagues who only worked nights – which was a certain socioeconomic background in a particular hospital – they were not getting the mentoring, they were not getting the project work, they were not getting the short-term opportunities to do this, that and the other, because they weren't in line of sight of the managers, who were working Monday to Friday in the daytime. So that was something that I think we all need to be really alive to, but it doesn't happen in policing in that way. It's not the way we're set up.

But equally, you know, one of the big changes, which I massively welcome developing on from the strategic command course that's just finished, is to make it much more accessible to people with caring responsibilities, to people who haven't in the past seen themselves there.

Because as I say, whilst it was great, every single person on this last course deserved to be there, but it looked like my course in 2008. That's not okay and that's not their fault, but it's not okay. And as a service, we're not getting that right. So I really welcome the changes and I'm confident they will massively increase participation.

Antony Bushfield

Because I suppose that difference of life experience is really crucial in a leadership team, to have people there who have different experiences for the rest of the organisation to look up to.

Olivia Pinkney

Exactly, and I think it's something that here in Hampshire we're really kind of purposeful about. So we do really good analysis of preferences, and in terms of character and experience and tone. And we actively try – not just at the chief officer group, but also with the other leadership teams running business areas – to make sure we have a blend.

We are very deliberate about it and we're very open about it, very explicit about it, but we all know that's the way we deliver the best service and we all know that's the way that we get the best from our workforce. You know, we know that stuff. That's not news. So we need to do that and be thoughtful about who we bring in, how we get teams developed and make sure that we're getting as much perspective as we can.

Interestingly, on the strategic command course, there was a really good reflection from a colleague, because obviously most people on it are in policing – a substantial number come from other services. And one person from another service said, 'My goodness, you look at the academic diversity, you look at the life experience diversity, you look at the geographical diversity of the UK policing delegates on that course.' They said the Civil Service would chew their own arm off for that, and it hadn't occurred to me.

But what they were seeing was: 'Wow, look where everyone comes from. Look how they've got here, look what they've done along the way.' And it's a really, really broad view. It's not broad in terms of visible difference at all. We know that's a massive issue for us in policing, but in lots of other areas of difference, it was very, very broad and I found that very helpful, actually. It was a good challenge.

Antony Bushfield

In terms of – well, we spoke about a lot about the senior leadership, but if we come down a few ranks to sergeant level, because they are running this day-to-day and it goes back to the difference between a manager and a leader. And with the time constraints, it can often be quite easy to fall into just managing because there's so much going on.

What would your advice to them be, to sort of try and keep that leadership element in as well?

Olivia Pinkney

So my advice is, because I do this here with my sergeants and police staff leaders, of course, too. They absolutely set the tone and set up every single person in that team for success in that moment, but also in the long term. And there's been some really good research that we did with Portsmouth University, which shows that. It shows, you know, the real influence on someone's career, what they think is important – in terms of what policing does and how it does it – is set by their tutor or coach constable and their sergeant. End of. It's not set by me. It's not set by the chief inspector. It's not set by their chief superintendent. It's set there. And therefore, you know, my job is to ensure that the sergeants – and often the acting and temporary sergeants too, because there's lots of people we ask to do this and we don't necessarily give them all the development we should and I regret that – is that they understand that tone setting and that role modelling and that interest and that focus for their people at their most formative times. And I was over on the Isle of Wight only yesterday talking with sergeants there. And of course, the wonderful thing about this replacement programme – uplift, if you will, but for us in Hampshire, it's not even quite a replacement, it's very welcome – is how many new officers sergeants are leading. And that's a huge ask right now because of the inexperience. It's a great ask. My goodness, it's wonderful having all these new people. But it's such a different ask for them than it was three years ago, four years ago, five years ago. And of course, as time goes by, that will settle down in a different way again.

But it is making sure that they're thoughtful about explaining the why, being interested in the why, as well as just the what. But I do get that time constraint. It's a very busy world they're all operating in.

Antony Bushfield

Yeah, and difficult I suppose, for the sergeants to identify who could be the next, sort of them, for example, when they're dealing with so many new people, fresh people who are still just getting to grips with how to deal with basic crime and to help them do that, but also sort of encourage them on their own path. Is that a big challenge, but that is kind of what we need to happen, isn't it?

Olivia Pinkney

It is, but I think that can happen at different times for people. It can happen at different times in their careers for people too, so it doesn't have to be an urgent rush. I mean, one of the joys of policing, if you stay in it a long time, is the breadth of roles we do, the breadth of mission we have seen and unseen.

It's an absolutely fantastic career to start on. You don't know what you don't know when you join and how much there is that we do is just mind-blowing. It's brilliant. It's one of the things I absolutely love – and there are many – about working in policing.

So I think letting people learn their trade – going back to what I said – actually, you've got to be good at policing. You've got to know how to do it. You've got to understand why we do it. So actually focusing on that in the early stage is sufficient, actually. But people will very naturally, of course, start to demonstrate different talents, different interests, whether that's moving into dog handling or wanting to be the commissioner of the Met. And there's so many different paths that people can take.

So I think kind of allowing that curiosity to flourish is important. Trying to create time. And I know it's difficult on busy shifts, particularly when people are in those worlds, to have that kind of time to think and reflect together. But I think that kind of starts to bubble up, frankly. And certainly, you know, what I see is huge, huge numbers. A quarter of my constables are students right now. I see enormous talent. I see enormous passion, I see enormous energy, creativity. That's brilliant, wherever someone chooses to put that. And also I say farewell to people at the end of their career who spent their entire time on 24/7 response policing. And they've loved it. I mean, that's hard graft being on shifts, you know, when you get a bit older. But they loved it.

Antony Bushfield

I suppose there's another element there of whilst they may not be in a traditional leadership role, every sort of response PC will probably have to be a leader at some point in the day or the week – if they're first on scene at something, they're going to have to take control and run it.

Olivia Pinkney

As are PCSOs, as are call handlers, as are special constables – it's absolutely all of policing. And that's kind of going back to what I said at the beginning. Everyone in policing who has some contact with the public is in a leadership authority role. We are held in that. Nobody knows if someone's fresh out of the box or they've been at it for 20 years.

You know, they have that authority. It comes not just, though, with the powers that they have by law, but by their presence, their demeanour, the way they hold themselves, the way they operate, the way they communicate, that has enormous authority and is a leadership role per se. No question.

Antony Bushfield

And do you think they get enough training to do that?

Olivia Pinkney

I think they get a lot of training to do that. And I think an awful lot of that development. It starts, of course, in the classroom element, but actually it's developed within the teaching coaching environment, within the experience alongside their colleagues. I remember it when I started – it's really hard. The old classic, you look at yourself in a shop window in uniform and saying, 'Oh goodness, who's that?' and you realise it's you.

We all have that moment. And I talk to PCSOs today who have that moment. It's very normal. And I think you grow into it, you grow into that skin. And I think one of the things about having so many new people – whether they're new constables, whether they're new PCSOs, new call handlers – is actually people are learning their trade and that's okay. We all learn our trade.

Antony Bushfield

Policing right now is going through a very difficult time with the public, but also I think internally and let's talk about internally for a minute, because officers are feeling very angry, some feeling shame, some we know are sort of choosing carefully whether to tell people that they're police officers. How can good leadership turn that around?

Olivia Pinkney

So you're right, We have had a catalogue of just the most shameful things come to light. They just seem to keep on coming. I think as a leader, wherever you are leading within the service, making sure you talk about it with your people matters. Ask them, you know, ask them 'How does it feel?', as you say, both at home with your friends and family, also at work.

You know, 'Are you being accused of stuff?', you know, 'How do you operate? What does it feel like to be in this environment right now?' So the most important thing we can do is talk about it. And I see good leaders at every level doing exactly that. So that's the first thing, to kind of name it, if you like.

The other thing to remind colleagues of is the vast, vast, vast majority of people, certainly across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, trust their police, love their police, value their police. And that is really important to remember, because it isn't what some of the other voices can sometimes drown out. So that's really important to remember. And that's not just me saying it in my ivory tower, it's what I know from huge amounts of soft and hard data.

And then the other bit is to be actually really proud. When I look, particularly in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, it is colleagues who are calling out things that worry them. You know, they trust their managers to do stuff when they see something that's not right and that's something to be fiercely proud of. That is a healthy culture. That is a challenging culture. That is a culture that is upholding the standards that we all know are important and are entrusted to us.

And I think there are lots of professions where that doesn't happen. I know there are lots of professions where there is still fear, where there is still bullying, where things are still stuck under the carpet. And therefore, when we see – not of the recent horrors, I mean, they are of a scale that is so, so abhorrent – but when we see things being called out, actually that's a good culture.

And I remember once getting a call from a very senior colleague, who said – I'm going back a few years now, I was here, so probably about five years ago. He said, 'You can tell a character of an organisation when it deals with some of its darkest days'. And I take a lot of personal comfort from that. But I also think we need to recognise that it is colleagues calling, you know, behaviour out. And that's healthy. It doesn't happen in most other professions.

Antony Bushfield

What's the most important rank that needs good leaders in policing?

Olivia Pinkney

No question, it's the sergeant and the first-line supervisor in police staff, because of that long-term tone setting that they have the wonderful opportunity to mould.

Antony Bushfield

What would your advice be, then, to sergeants right now on the response desk?

Olivia Pinkney

Carve out some headspace for the important as well as the urgent, because the urgent will always fill the in-tray. There is always more work to do than we can possibly do, and that relies on people like me to kind of do that filtering and process and things, of course. But to just carve out some time for the important conversation, the important thinking, the important quiet intervention sometimes for someone or for a team, and make sure that that's having your focus as much as doing the doing of the task that feels really important.

And the second thing is get yourself a mentor. I've always had mentors. They are absolutely worth their weight in gold.

Antony Bushfield

And then finally, you're leaving the service soon and retiring. I'm sure you have been reflecting back on your time, but what would you say to those quarter of your PCs right now who are still learning and if they look at you and think, 'That's going to be me in 20 years' time'?

Olivia Pinkney

So first of all, I'm not retiring. I'm not using the 'R' word. I'm leaving policing for sure. But I actually feel on top of my game. And you know what a privilege to be able to do that and to use the skills and experiences I've had for other public service in the fullness of time. So what would my advice to them be? It's just to know how wonderful policing is at the heart of a healthy society. And when we

look around the globe, how safe and how stable our democracy, how the trust that we as public servants have in us, is just such a wonderful privilege and to just do their best. And if they do give their best, they can't go far wrong.

Antony Bushfield

Three words that would sum up a good leader for you?

Olivia Pinkney

Energy, kindness and wisdom.

- [See the show notes for episode three](#)

Antony and Olivia talk about the difference between leadership and management. Olivia believes that a manager focuses on ensuring that everything is done, with processes in place. A leader builds in time to focus on how things are done, and creates an environment where those doing the job can flourish. In other words, a leader considers the hows and whys, as well as the whats.

UK policing ... is undertaken with people, not to them. And that means that the public trust us, and ask us to do stuff for them. And that's a really unique and really precious model.

Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney QPM

A leader needs to know the business of policing first and foremost, in order to protect the public. But they are also responsible for setting and maintaining a positive culture, nurturing talent and understanding the context in which policing operates.

I see great people in policing, officers, staff, volunteers doing exactly that.

Olivia shares our ambition to make leadership training more accessible.

[Read more about the new police leadership programme – stage 5](#)

For Olivia, values are at the heart of great leadership. It's an evolving process, where you gain confidence and understand your own capabilities. **Mentors are important** to this process. The 'soft, almost subliminal influence' of being around colleagues face-to-face as a positive, as long as 'it's not just people in our line of sight who get opportunities'.

Sergeants, first line supervisors and police staff are in key positions to lead on tone setting.

Everyone in policing who has some contact with the public is in a leadership authority role. Nobody knows if someone's fresh out of the box or they've been at it for 20 years.

It comes not just with the powers that they have by law, but by their presence, that demeanour, the way they hold themselves, the way they operate, the way they communicate. No question.

Antony and Olivia discuss the challenge presented by public opinion of the police. Olivia thinks it's important to be open within the service about how it feels to operate in the current climate, but also to remind people of the trust and value that persist. She says she is proud to be part of a culture that can challenge itself.

Finally, three words that sum up a good leader?

Energy, kindness and wisdom ... if they give their best, they can't go far wrong.

As part of our **commitment to change the future of police leadership**, we've been working with forces to develop and deliver our new **police leadership programme**. We recently released revised leadership standards, and we're planning the launch of our **National Centre for Police Leadership**.

Find information on mentoring, coaching, CPD events, leadership support, guidance and information on the training available to officers and staff of all ranks

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Show notes – season two, episode three

Guest

- Olivia Pinkney, former chief constable of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Constabulary, shares her insight on the importance of leadership throughout a career in policing.

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