

The Justice Academy Journal

Law and Justice Executive Series
January 2017 - Volume 2



The Face of Arrogance

Throughout a lifetime of public service you meet all types of people, in all kinds of situations. Some are true team players who provide insightful contributions, while others are so self-centered you wonder how they are allowed to survive in the profession, and it is obvious that they are of little or no value to the organization whatsoever. These arrogant few cut a wide swath through an agency leaving colleagues in their wake who are damaged because of their encounter and there is almost no appreciable positive benefit to the mission of the department because of their presence.

We have all seen these types of people come and go. Their aspirations are obvious. Their individual style is visible from a mile away and their professional ambition leaves little to the imagination. And yet, these people are allowed to thrive within the organization and to prosper at the expenses of those around them.

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The Face of Arrogance - Page 2

It is almost as though the people who they work for have hope that the sheer force of will of these types of people will overcome the challenges of the organization and that somewhere deep within the imaginations of these arrogant few lurks the right answer to the very complex problems facing us all. Regrettably, nothing could be further from the truth.

It is normally only after these people are gone that the truth becomes apparent that they didn't have a clue what they were doing. It was all an act. They substituted arrogance and personal agenda ahead of the welfare of the organization, the well-being of those they worked with, and the needs of the people they served. Unfortunately, the damage they caused will take years to repair, if it can be repaired at all.

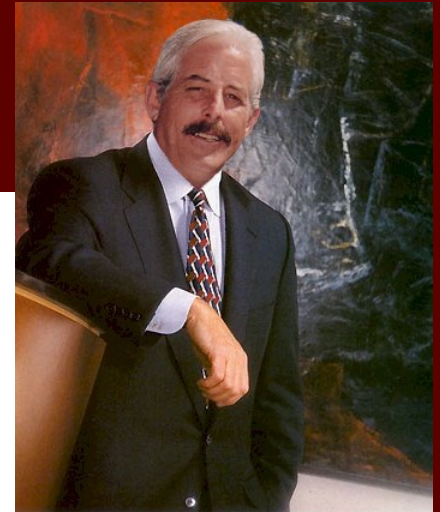
Essentially, these people should have been ousted long before they could have caused harm and shown the door before they could create havoc and disenchantment among the rest of the people in the organization who actually shoulder the day to day burden of providing exemplary service to the people they are sworn to serve. Instead, somehow these arrogant few survived to irritate the rest of the people who dutifully accomplish the mission of the organization and who unselfishly perform the tasks necessary to the success of their charge.

Public safety leadership isn't a game. It's not to be trifled with,

nor is it to be taken for granted. People have entrusted their very lives and well-being to our profession and they have a right to expect that we know what we are doing. We owe it to them to make sure that we treat their trust with the respect it deserves. We see almost every day, someone in our profession who has given the last full measure of devotion to protecting the welfare of those they served. Yet, all too often, we see the emergence of the blindly ambitious within our ranks, who are there expressly to further their own success and who masquerade as knowledgeable. They assert that they know the answer, when in fact, they haven't a clue about the complexity of the issues they pretend to understand.

Instead they speculate, intimidate, and postulate in a variety of directions simultaneously, never once isolating the actual premises that support the argument that eventually leads to the right conclusion. During the show they put on, we are astonished and amazed by the energy they demonstrate, but which more often than not, fails to provide an articulation of the real issues and a tangible answer to the real questions. Instead we are left with an unsubstantiated opinion that was offered at a decibel level that was higher than any other, but which was no more valid

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Hal Campbell currently serves as the Executive Director of JusticeAcademy.org. He also serves as a member of the teaching faculty for the University of Maryland concentrating in the areas of public policy strategy, criminal law, constitutional law, justice administration, empirical analyses, and higher education.

Judge Campbell recently concluded a term of service as a member of the judiciary in the State of Montana. His appointment to the bench was bestowed by the Montana Supreme Court, Commission on Courts of Limited Jurisdiction. Prior to this appointment to the bench, he served for over twenty-five years as a tenured professor and department chair with the California State University. His public policy and law enforcement experience includes a variety of senior management positions with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. From 1978 to 1989 he held positions in the department including Law Enforcement Planning Coordinator, Chief Analyst, and began his career as a Deputy Sheriff.

The Face of Arrogance - Page 3

than anyone else's opinion about the factors relevant to the discussion at hand.

The hard part of distinguishing arrogance from confidence isn't just based on the personality of the people involved, nor is it predicated upon the passion of their arguments. It's much more subtle than that and it involves the logic of the arguments themselves. As a young man I was told once by a person that I respected greatly that it's okay to be passionate about your assertions, but never before you have fully thought through the issues in order to attain the right answer. He was correct. Passion is a good thing and it sometimes is indicative of our conviction that we discovered the right answer. All too often however passion is used by those who don't understand the situation as a mask to hide behind and a method of distracting everyone from the complexity of the task at hand. In fact, despite their passion, they don't have a clue what the right answer is, nor do they care. Nothing in this world is simple. Everything is complex. Logic and answers reside on multiple axes of interrelation with only proportional levels of influence readily visible to those who take the time to examine the complexity of the factors involved. We choose to make things simple because it is difficult to devote the time and brain power necessary to think through all of the possible interrelations that could be involved and then through deduction and inference, isolate only those factors that really matter to the outcome.

The arrogant few among us don't bother with such details. Instead they grab hold of the first few things they can conjure in their limited view of the world and then endeavor to convince the rest of us that they somehow understand the complexities of the universe better than we do. They also imply we are all somehow remiss for failing to intuitively understand exactly what relationships exist between those variables that truly matter to the outcome. They say things like "trust me" or "I know" in order to get us to lower our guard.

They didn't formulate hypotheses. They didn't construct an argument that included relevant premises and conclusions in support of an aggregate logic equation. There is no theoretical postulate put forward by them in support of their assertions and they didn't do the math necessary to rule out supposition and speculation. Instead, they grabbed ahold of something that sounded plausible and through sheer force of will and an adlib dance of deception that was based on interpersonal dynamics, they did us all a significant disservice by clinging to their assertion as though it were a reflection of their value as a human being in order to gain the upper hand and place themselves and their ambitions ahead of those thoughtful members of the organization that actually took the time to be correct.

Sound familiar?

Arrogance is perhaps the most dangerous human trait to any organization that endeavors to serve the needs of humanity. When its combined with ignorance it can be debilitating to the welfare of the organization and stand as an insurmountable obstacle to success. Arrogance isn't just confined to individuals however. It also manifests itself in organizations that are convinced that they are better than all other organizations, but with no criteria for such an assertion. We can probably all cite examples of agencies that routinely proclaimed their superiority over their contemporaries, not based on the strength of their arguments or predicated upon their achievements, but rather because of who they are relative to all others providing similar service.

The Face of Arrogance - Page 4

We even discover arrogance in exchanges between jurisdictions, such as county governments that endeavor to exert their power over individual cities. We find it when state agencies seek to dominate counties by sheer force of will, instead of the merits of their argument. It is present between states which seek to dominate one another and it is frequently an omnipresent condition when the federal government endeavors to use its size and strength to exert its will over the thoughtful deliberations and policies brought forward by sovereign state leaders. It even happens when foreign governments interact with one another over matters of international importance. Arrogance is all around us and it takes on many forms.

I have spent a lifetime trying to teach young people about the dangers of underestimating the complexity of those things that are inherently dynamic and multifaceted. I have created multidimensional logic arrays that seek to provide a visual basis for assessment of the interrelations of factors upon one another and the aggregate impact these factors have upon the outcome. I routinely tell people that I am only certain of two things in life. The first thing that I know for certain is that I am not certain about most things. The second and most important thing that I know is that you don't know the correct answer either, despite your self-confidence. An opinion doesn't guarantee being correct. Being right takes time. It takes patience, insight, logic, precision, and thoughtful deliberation over the findings before rendering a judgment. It requires each of us to pause and reflect upon all of the possible things that could combine to influence the situation, and then to examine the logic of their interrelation upon each other and their aggregate influence over the outcome.

Being right demands conformance to the scientific method that asserts hypotheses, collects data, facilitates comparative analysis in order to uncover statistically significant differences and correlations. It's okay not to know the answer to a complex issue. It's never okay however to suggest an answer when you know you haven't done the work required to be certain. The arrogant among us don't bother to engage in any of these critical aspects of reasoning. Instead they routinely engage in the fallacies of generalization, argument by force, arguments from authority, appeals to pity, begging the question, and circular arguments.

Even for the most perceptively simplistic decision to be correctly judged we must account for all the aggregated influences contributing to the outcome and withhold judgment until all the data and statements of fact are analyzed and collated. Arguments are the mechanism that we use to fashion this deconstructive process in order to isolate the variables responsible for exerting influence over the outcome. The arrogant don't bother to create arguments that exactly specify the contentions and variables contained within scientific equations, nor do they articulate the hypothesized relations that might exist between the individual variables. Argument decomposition is a standard approach used in our profession to "get to the truth" and it serves as an effective mechanism in order to avoid falling victim to fallacies of critical thinking and reasoning. I recommend to my colleagues and students alike that they not only use this form of differential diagnosis to break apart an argument or claim into its manageable elements, but do so from a multivariate perspective. From a multivariate deliberation, a decomposition diagram of the logic of an argument can be sketched out that specifies hypothesized interrelations for the many variables and factors involved in any problem. There are several steps in the process, but the end goals are to (1) visualize all of the possible influences ahead of the analysis,

The Face of Arrogance - Page 5

(2) to formulate hypotheses [i.e., premises] that support the inclusion of each factor within the equation, and (3) which is followed by the testing of each premise to discern its relative degree of influence. The arrogant don't bother to engage in such practices.

Once the truth of each individual premise is tested and confirmed, the final step is to discern the proportional influence of each factor in the aggregated logic equation and then derive a conclusion, keeping in mind the importance of sequential logic principals. This approach isn't expedient, it can be painful, and it certainly isn't commonly employed by those in everyday life. Those arrogant few who elect to make decisions or who recommend a course of action without the benefit of such an exhaustive analysis, become immediately visible and obvious when they are challenged by such methodological strategies. They are forced to rely on their force of will, argument by authority, or ad hominem challenges in support of their positions on the issues. After their recommendations are dismissed, the person rejecting their advice is often seen (by them) as deficient or inferior. They rarely ever accept that the world is a complex place and that all decisions have layers of interrelation that need to be evaluated.

One of the principle tenants of critical thinking is that the ideas, arguments, and conclusions being offered are critiqued and not the person making them. As you can tell from the public discourse going on these days, this strategy of reasoning isn't a widely embraced approach amongst politicians, pundits, reporters, or even the general public. It is however perfectly acceptable to come to a conclusion about the person making the argument, but that comes much later, and it is based upon the positions they took on the issue and the rationale they used, or failed to use, to argue their point. It is also a measure of how often they are perceived as inaccurate, uninformed, or simply incorrect about an issue that they postulate, and what strategies they use routinely to manipulate the people that they are endeavoring to persuade to their point of view. These are the truly arrogant that exist within our political offices and public service organizations and although arrogance might win out during the short term, it has been my observation that it cannot stand the test of time. Hopefully not too much damage is done before they are expelled from office.



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