

Public Safety Insights: What's YOUR Business?

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

What do you say when asked what you do? Do you respond by identifying the agency you work for, or stating your rank/title, or describing the tasks you perform? Or do you tell people what you do for your community? How do your employees reply to inquiries about what they do?

In order to impress your community and rally key support, you must recognize the significance of the value that you and your agency provide. This requires you to see the “big picture” – i.e., the agency’s ultimate reason for being. My observation, however, is that many public service agency leaders either have not clearly defined the value they provide to their communities, or they have failed to communicate that value to their employees and the public. Instead, people at every level focus on what the organization *does* or *is* rather than the *value* it provides. The difference is more than semantics: how an agency defines itself communicates its value to its stakeholders. Further, this definition shapes the way employees approach their jobs, affects the agency’s potential for success, and ultimately sets boundaries on the community’s level of public safety.

To illustrate the significant disparities that result from viewing an organization in terms of what it is or what its employees do, versus the value it provides, consider the following examples, which are based on various organizations’ websites:

A major international airline:

“We are a full-service global airline that provides service from centrally located airports.” (What it *is* and *does*)

“We offer customers an effortless journey.” (*Value* it provides)

The fundraising division of a charitable organization:

“We are the first, best, and largest charity sports training program that offers a full complement of exciting sports training options.” (What it *is* and *does*)

“We save lives one mile at a time.” (*Value* it provides)

A fire and rescue agency:

“We provide fire protection and life safety services.” (What it *is* and *does*)

“We create safe communities.” (*Value* it provides)

Now answer these questions:

- As a stakeholder, which of the two perspectives grabs your attention immediately?
- As an employee, which perspective would inspire you?
- How does each perspective affect the way employees approach their work?
- Which perspective allows the organization to communicate its value?

Defining and communicating clearly the value your agency provides are critical success factors to impressing your community and rallying key support. So what do you say? What’s *your* business? ➔

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