

Leaders & Legends - John Perez

JON: My name is Jon Becker. For the past 4 decades, I've dedicated my life to protecting tactical operators. During this time, I've worked with many of the world's top law enforcement and military units. As a result, I've had the privilege of working with the amazing leaders who take teams in the world's most dangerous situations.

The goal of this Podcast is to share their stories in hopes of making us all better leaders, better thinkers, and better people. Welcome to The Debrief.

JON: My guest today is John Perez. John recently retired as the chief of police for the Pasadena Police Department in California. In his nearly 37 years of service to Pasadena, John served at literally all ranks in the department. During his career, John worked patrol, narcotics, counterterrorism, as a SWAT sergeant, lieutenant, and commander. John helped for the first generation of Pasadena's tactical team which had the challenge of deploying as a full-time gang enforcement team, and as a SWAT team for many years. John was twice awarded the chief's medal of excellence and received several commendations for his service over the years. John, thank you for joining me on The Debrief.

JOHN: I appreciate being here, John. Hopefully, I have something to contribute on leadership.

JON: I'm sure you do. Tell me- Let's start with kind of your history and background. Where'd you grow up? You know, what was the decision that led you becoming a police officer?

JOHN: Absolutely, I've been an LA kid my whole life. I was born in East LA in Belvedere Heights, which now refers to East LA. A large family, first generation Americans. Had brothers that were born in Mexico and parents born as well. And so, they migrated here and from East LA, we generally made the migration east over to La Puente. And then from La Puente after about 12, 13 years old, 14, we went over to West Covina which was a dynamic change in lifestyles.

We were moving with a father who really worked hard all week long, and a mother who raised us and worked part-time. And we were also raised by a woman from Mississippi, who was my mom's best friend. So, I have the best of both cultures and culturally as a Latino. Then moving into a mostly white area of town and going to high school in West Covina really produced a

view of the world and life. And with one incident that occurred really pushed me into policing and prepared me better than I thought.

JON: Would you talk about that for me?

JOHN: At 14 years old, I had a- I was probably 12, 13, my cousin was 14. And he was stabbed in an incident outside of a liquor store, where he was just buying candy, and he wasn't in fact, a gang member. And a good kid, a good natured and kid, and a family. And he was stabbed and later died in the hospital. And that was just- And we grew up in this gang area where, we really couldn't use the parks if the police or the gang members were in the parks. So, you learn to have a way of life where, it really gets in the way, you know, as a kid to really go out there and grow and be in a safer place. When I became of age to move around about 14 years old and finding a group of friends in West Covina, it changed dramatically. I was able to move around and enjoy life. But I never forgot the experiences as a family going through the death and the reminder that there are bad people out there. And since that point at about 12, 13 years old, all I wanted to do was to be a police officer and serve. Nothing else, not the military, not the firefighting. Just serving as a police officer was my goal.

JON: And was Pasadena the first agency, you went to work for?

JOHN: It was the very first agency that I applied for.

JON: And the last?

JOHN: And the last. It was. I applied for the sheriff's department and Pasadena at the same time. As a police cadet, I was able to take the entry police officer test. In those days in 1984, just the beginning of '85, I took the test. So, when I became a police officer, I didn't have to take a test again. It was more of just updating my background and sending me to the academy at 20 and a half. Being not only the youngest person in the academy but the youngest person, the youngest police officer in the department for a while, until somebody else was hired at 21. The average age back then was 24, 25. Now it's closer to 30. So, you can imagine at 20 and a half, you really got to make sure you're mature and trying to move into an area of making good decisions.

JON: I have a 20-and-a-half-year-old son. I don't think I'd arm him.

JOHN: My parents probably said the same thing.

JON: Yeah, that's a fair point. So, talk to me then- Like, through kind of the early parts of your career. I know you worked a variety of assignments. Kind of walk me through the big periods of your early career.

JOHN: Well, you know, it was dynamic. In the '80s, it was about the violence, right. We saw the crack cocaine and gang epidemic kind of crashed into each other. And being a young officer out in the field, I think it was only about 4 weeks into it, there was a shooting where I was responding to a street there in Pasadena with a lot of gang activity. As I make a turn, my training officer on to the street, you could see the smoke coming from casings. I'm 21 years old thinking, they're paying me 12 bucks an hour for this.

So, I get into the street, I get out of the car. And the person shot, as we're talking to him, was somebody I had stopped prior and knew him a little bit, and kind of connected. About the same age, you know. And then to see him taking his last words as he dies, he's talking to me. And you're going through these emotions. But you also have your field training officer yelling at you to get a statement from him, who did it. So, you know, it's a really odd place to be from an emotional standpoint as a young man and having care for people that you're right in the midst of this event where somebody's dying on you that you remembered. That a week earlier, you had a pretty good conversation with, and you knew he was a gang member. I knew he was a gang member but nevertheless, life went. It was gone right there in front of me.

JON: And that was how far into the job?

JOHN: That was about 3, 4 weeks. Two to 3 weeks, less than a month, for sure. And my training officer walked me through all that. Much shortly after that, we had somebody jump off our Colorado Bridge. And as soon as the body almost hit, my training officer was yelling at me to look the other way because that thumping of a body hitting the ground. These are things you experience along with a high level of calls for service and the murder rate that we're experiencing in California, especially in Pasadena. One neighborhood was way too much. Give an example, back then we had 13,000 part 1 crimes, major crimes.

And most of it was in one neighborhood. Today, Pasadena probably has about 3600 and was the lowest period we've ever had. During the '90s-

JON: So, it's 80 percent reduction.

JOHN: Without a doubt, in violent crime even more. And so, during the '90s was by far the best decade of policing. After the LA Riots, I haven't experienced that. It was a very unusual period of the smelling sensation of buildings and the amount of people we arrested out of Pasadena. Rodney King was from Pasadena in Altadena area. So, when you knew him from ped stops and you're familiar with him. But it was a terrible period of time to go through that purpose at that time. And then move into the '90s with the best research we've ever seen in policing. Federal grants, problem-oriented policing, community-oriented policing.

We really were becoming skilled at what we're doing during the '90s. But then came the advent of other things, bike patrols, SWAT teams for many other agencies. Many of these departments started to hire more officers. The crime bill was written in '94. And in '96 through 97, we had the hundred thousand dollars. A hundred thousand more officers added across the country. So, all these things were occurring and we're all moving to a place where we were- didn't know we were finding so many opportunities for equipment, tactical training, police vehicles. It really was setting us up for failure into the future without knowing that because at some point it was not managed as well as it could've been.

JON: Yeah, you had this period of time where it kind of started with the '84 Olympics. And the development of SWAT starts in '71 at LA, full-time SWAT. In '84, everybody's prepping for the Olympics. We have this massive expansion and in tactical teams all over the country. You know, and then Rodney King, 9/11- Like there's you know, Columbine. There's this series of events, North Hollywood Shootout where the patrol side almost followed at that point, the tactical side that began to professionalize, and increased equipment, and all that. When did your team start?

JOHN: Our team started in 1997. And I arrived to the team late in '97, as the team was just taking off. And one of the concerns, Chief Melikian at the time as this team was developing, was to create it into a neighborhood policing team equally as much a tactical team. Now if you look today at out specialized units, SWAT teams and neighborhood policing teams, and even gang units all function differently. A mindset is different. SWAT teams are trying to slow it down, control it, you know, the tempo of the event.

Neighborhood-oriented policing has to do with creating relationships in neighborhoods. Having people call us as often as possible to try to find long-term solutions to neighborhood problems. Then you have gang enforcement teams. Their effort is, open up that car door, often. Make the arrest, look for some that might be a crime to stop the next violent incident

from happening. And now you're taking all these 3 and putting them into a blender and just sit and go. It could be a train wreck.

JON: It's going to go sideways. What are the 3 areas that's going to a little steady at some point.

JOHN: At some point it will. And we were creating that group of officers who were all hand-picked. And we were careful as to who we brought into the unit under lieutenant Darryl Qualls and our commander which was Wayne Hills, who would end up becoming the deputy chief. The minds that they had were excellent for what we were trying to create. We were looking for the right police officers to come into that unit. Reviewing police reports, see who everybody wanted, did they have the mindset. To follow good directives, to be part of the community, to want to engage the community.

At times, we didn't get it right. And we had personnel issues and problems. And during that time, we also had Rampart. And so, I read the entire Rampart report. I was talking to some of the personnel from Rampart that transferred out to learn the lessons, the top 10 lessons of how to run these types of units. So, we ensured the most basic of approaches on leadership were there, but much of it was management. It was about making sure we read the reports, the arrest information. We went out to see what kind of arrests were being made. We look at the quality of the arrest. We had conversations, debriefs, and on everything. So, really it was an unusual period of time to create such a big team but realizing there was a dynamic out there that reminded you of cautionary tales. What could go wrong?

JON: So, at that point it was a neighborhood crime task force?

JOHN: It was a neighborhood crime task force from 19. They were developed on August 28, 1985. I remember that memorandum that was written. And we just went to this fantastic technology, which was called Collating Copies, where you could make more than one copy on a machine. And so, I remember making one extra copy of that memo for myself. And I still have it today. It is something that I glean on and there was a lot of good information from that report. And it basically stated that the amount of violent crime. And what was referred to as Northwest Pasadena was just outrageous and something had to be done.

And they broke it down by area codes, and some of the violent crime, and the races and the cultures. And then decided that we needed a 24-person team to go out there every day and make arrests. And they did. Top end, they made thousands of arrests. And we look now 30 years later and the criticisms that we get as well as the damage of that. Well ok, we probably

put a lot of people who deserve to go to jail. But we also took a lot of people and put them into jail that maybe could have had diversion, or just needed something more than a 10-year or 5-year prison sentence for your fourth arrest for rock cocaine. Right? So, there was a better way to have done it back then, and we just went all hard and all heavy with the war on drugs. And we're not talking about those that needed to go to prison and should never come out. The wide majority should have the opportunity to relive their lives, and I think we destroyed a lot of lives. Not in Pasadena but in general form across the country. And I'm very careful about that for somebody to have a federal charge of one rock cocaine, and to go to jail for 10 years from that. And you see an 18-year-old kid tearing up like, I got no life no more.

JON: Yeah, it's interesting because retrospectively, I think, history has not been overwhelmingly kind to the war on drugs. Especially the federal sentencing guidelines. I remember the article that I wrote to get onto law review in law school, was about federal sentencing guidelines. And it was contrasting a guy who had an ounce of cocaine that was laminated into a suitcase, and an ounce of cocaine in the suitcase. One guy goes to prison for 30 years, one guy goes to prison for 10 because the container counts. So, I think that retrospectively there was that moment where it was like, "Ok, that might not have worked."

JOHN: Yeah, we have enough science now and data to make better decisions. And that's why I'm hoping here in post-retirement to be able to run around and help that education. Not from a place of thinking, we know it all but provide the cautionary tales and the study of what we need from a police officer today and the prototypes we're looking for.

JON: When did NCTF move into being a SWAT team? Like, when did that- When did you stop the neighborhood crime-

JOHN: In 1985, about '92, '93 became a special enforcement team. And then by '95 the idea started to come out about the- A team that was really more tactically inclined and SWAT-trained. And so, by '96 we went to the special enforcement team, SES.

JON: And at that point, you were a sergeant?

JOHN: I was a sergeant moving into the unit at that point and brand-new officers, all brand new. Really, the age difference between me as a sergeant and the average officer was maybe 2 years or 3 years. Same with my lieutenant, that he was the youngest lieutenant with Darryl Qualls. And he was probably 34, 33, 34. So, we had this perfect team being set up

culturally with a leader that was African American and Latinos, 2 Latino sergeants. And then a team that was made up of everybody, Asians, blacks, whites. It was really a team you could be proud of. And it was by far a period of time we learned how to be better leaders with each other with the community, and really manage all the work that was coming through. At times we were deployed 7, 14, 21 straight days. And not only were we the gang unit for the shootings to try to stop more shootings, we were also the SWAT team. Then we became the fugitive team. And at the time we had Janitors for Justice. So, we became the dignitary protection and the protest team. So, we were doing it all. And it was rough on families, it was rough on people's personal lives where their personal lives were in fact a professional life. You couldn't escape it. And so that's just the way it was. You worked out together. You spent the night in the locker room sleeping on the floor together, in the offices, standing by waiting for hours for events to happen. If the president visited or some high dignitary came to town. So, it really was an extraordinary period of time when I look back and all the work these officers did.

JON: So, and at that point, the primary focus is criminal. With 9/11, that changes. Right? When did you promote- You promoted to lieutenant around that time. Right?

JOHN: Right before 9/11. A month or two before 9/11, I was a patrol watch commander. Very unusual period of time when 9/11 struck that morning. And my wife was a dispatcher at the police department, called me and woke me up and- It was just a very- I mean the feelings we all had that day. You know, it was this depression was sitting in. The world seemed smaller like you couldn't breathe. And you're wondering what's going to happen next, and all the potentials for another attack. And start to think out the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl Games, and thing that we host. And the next thing I know, they created a counterterrorism unit of 2 people. And I was the lieutenant of that section. So, literally they walked me to a closet, called me and says, "This room with all these boxes needs to be done and you have- "It was September, obviously. So, we're getting into late September. By the time I get up there, "We need you to move all this and get ready for new plans and security plans for the New Year's. So, hurry up."

JON: So, clean out this closet in the next 2 months. Secure the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl from a terrorist act. Two tier one events-

JOHN: Absolutely.

JON: In 2 months.

JOHN: Absolutely.

JON: Seems reasonable.

JOHN: Yeah, you know, and at that time we really didn't have a lot of federal support. We had some support, but it wasn't the system that we create as a result of it. And I was sent off to New York to work with their counterterrorism team, and work on the Macy's Day Parade through the neighborhoods and the rurals that they have. So, I learned a lot from that experience going up there. Greg Avsharian, who was the corporal in the room, incredible. Always owned so much for what he did during that period. We worked 7 days a week, sometimes 20 hours a day for all those months. There was no rest. Rewriting policy, protocols, engaging people, and were responsible for the potential investigations that came up. And it wasn't about proving that you had yourself a possible terrorist event. You were disproving, was the approach we took because that was a much better and healthier way to try to prove something. You could rationalize as to why.

Not proving something puts you right automatically on the opposite side. Here you become your own critic on these things. And we had some very interesting calls of Middle Easterners for example, using plastic bags to block all their windows out at night. And they only come in after one in the morning, have a cigarette outside in an apartment complex. And they go back in and we're a month off or less than that from New Year's. How do you handle that? You know, getting our bicycle team. We were all set up on surveillances. Each one that came out for a cigarette to smoke, what do we do? We bleep them. Good old police tactics. Each one that came out one by one. Finally, the last one came out like, "Where's everybody at?" We bleeped him as well. We get in there, we hold the place, we call the FBI, they come out, and we do an investigation. We got nothing, these are just Saudi Arabian kids, students with money from their parents who are going to school at PCC, and they just need some direction. And so, you know- I remember the FBI agent leaving as we all left after 4 hours of an investigation, they said, "Just don't embarrass us." You know, and it's like, "Wow, we have a lot of learning to do in terms of culture."

And so, we went out and really, we were taught by the mosques about the culture and building our relationships around those communities in Altadena and Pasadena was hugely important. So, that incident kind of drove that, "Ok, we need some training here." And we can't just use our instincts in policing every time we think we're right, which is the hardest part about

police work, right? Figuring out whether a crime is actually occurring, not chasing the guy with the money bag, with the mask and the money sign on the bag. That's simple. It's thinking there might be a crime. That's the most difficult part of policing forever.

JON: That's an interesting way to put that. Yeah, it's interesting how like, you think about 9/11 and the effect it had on the country, but the effect it had on Pasadena. It was pretty profound because I'm sure that prior- Well, talk to me about prior to 9/11, what was securing the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl? Like, maybe give us some perspective on the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl.

JOHN: Well, you're talking about the parade itself. That is a month planning just for the actual operation. But it starts months in advance if not at the beginning of the year. As each event goes on and UCLA season begins, our planners which are amazing people, they're assigned a lieutenant, the sergeant, a corporal, a couple of officers. And that's it, nothing more than that. And they would go out and plan every event taking every type of precaution and try to reduce the cost. We could make everything as safe as you would want at a high cost. The freedoms are going to be restricted and it'd be unaffordable. We'll end up being like, today's soccer games in Europe, right? Fully fenced off and so many, it becomes a man's game. Families don't go. And it's getting better these days. But so, we were in the same predicament as after 9/11 to see how we're going to approach this. But before that, a lot of planning, a lot of effort. You depend on mutual aid; you depend on relationships. Cost was always a factor. That was more of a dynamic as law enforcement began to increase, the cost with salaries and retirements and these things made it more difficult. So, before that it was tough, but we had fantastic people from Roger Kelly, who planned the World Cup. The people we had that were known across the country by their name and what they did like Alex Uribe, and Bruce George, and people that just knew how to do this work. And Randy Taylor was a well-known name. But these are people that traveled the country to other stadiums.

JON: What was the primary fear for the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl pre-9/11?

JOHN: It was managing the crowds. It was an event happening of violence on the parade. The parade's a million people, they thought. It was probably closer today as the Caltech did their numbers, maybe between 7 and 8 hundred thousand people.

JON: Actually, on the physical parade. Right? Standing outside.

JOHN: That we know of anywhere, globally. But definitely in the country at 5 and a quarter miles from the last float to where we park, that is 7 and 7 and a half miles. This is a lot of space and it's easy to maneuver as you pass TV Corner which is like a stadium. TV Corner runs about 4 or 5 blocks around Colorado and Fair Oaks. It fits about 40, 50 thousand people and is the most secure place in the country at that time. And in fact, we have so much security there, we start 48 hours in advance. As the stands are going up, we are making sure we have complete security with bomb dogs, and searches, and turnstiles, and who's coming in. We've always had that to make sure we didn't have somebody taking over a float or some kind of attack of any type that we made sure that happened. And so that was always a concern before 9/11, but it's also managing the crowds into old Pasadena with 80 drinking establishments in a small area of less than a mile square. That's a lot of restaurant and bars even if you haven't been there.

JON: Seven hundred thousand people and a bunch of alcohol. What could go wrong?

JOHN: And now you move into the next morning, you're dropping into the Rose Bowl. At the time, they almost had a hundred thousand people that fit prior to the Bowl being redeveloped from a hundred thousand down to about 85 thousand. Not to mention people working the outside events. So, you're always looking at about 100,000 people there.

JON: So, when 9/11 happens, the switch flips and it goes from "we're concerned about demonstrators, we're concerned about street crime" to "we're concerned about the Rose Parade or of the Rose Bowl" being used as a stage. How does that change- At that point, you're running counterterrorism, right? So, how did that change your preparation and your relationship with your partner agencies?

JOHN: And so, you have to look at the reason why, right? Simon Sinek, what's the why behind it. The why is that we care about the fact that this is the number one TV event in the morning on New Year's across the globe. You know, with a lot of people. Hundreds and hundreds of millions of people watching this event.

So, it matters that the bang for the buck right there and then, would make a difference about America if you wanted to attack it. And so, the why was clear as day. And so, the way we went about it, Wayne Hills again, he was the deputy chief and loved his leadership. And he says, "Get that phone and start calling agencies, and start getting federal resources." So, you basically

have a phone, and you start making phone calls and work your way up the ladder to people. And you know, these days all those relationships paid off over the years. But I was finding frontline people like myself that would say, "Hey, we'll be there. We're coming." They say, "We don't have any overtime. We don't have money to pay you." And they would in fact say, "Don't worry about it. We're coming from all portions of this country and this globe will be there." And so, we had to make sure we had hotels, hotel rooms set up. We had all the resources again.

Greg Avsharian was running most of the investigations. At the same time, we're trying to coordinate flights and hotel stays, and this and that. So, it was a lot of work. Not to mention, looking at every part of the parade, we walked it. We were underneath the street with public works looking at the waterways. We were looking at newspaper stands, trash cans. Moving everything you can think of was being redone. And I remember, I recall Wayne Hill's walking and saying, "Hey, I need a name. We're doing a press release. This new federal team that you're going to work with us. What's going to be that name? And we're doing it in the next couple of hours, you need to hurry up. So, I'm sitting in the room, and Greg's busy. I'm sitting in there at the threat assessment response team we finally got to. And so, "How's that sound?" Greg, "Sounds really good." I wasn't smart enough to think it out when I have him that name. That from 2001, 2002, all the way forward, it's known by our street name, Tart.

JON: Tart. Yeah.

JOHN: So, I wish I'd been more creative. The name itself was- made sense to me. The threat assessment response team brought every level of tactical response from bombs dogs, and tactical teams, and chemical sniffers, planes, and military, set up all over the region. But the name Tart really didn't reflect the effort.

JON: Might not have been your best branding moment.

JOHN: Not at all. Then the long name was good. So, over the years it stuck. The planning was redeveloped and changed. And you know, as we went forward it was adjusted when needed. And so, it still continues on. And these federal partners really make it work for us.

JON: So, you're a lieutenant now. We go post 9/11. What happens, you know- You then become a commander? If I remember correctly?

JOHN: Nope. If I recall, there was an opening in the special enforcement section now for a lieutenant. I thought they're going to send me over there.

I know they area. And so, I started packing my boxes. I remember Wayne Hiltz was telling me, "Hey, you know what? Don't worry about it, we're going to keep you here. You're not going to move." But we've set up all our plans, everything was already moving. Once you get to that point, you'd love to work it, but it now has its own life. And we as leaders have to realize that it's set up well. No longer needs me. New leadership could take me to another direction. And sure enough, the chief made the decision to move me to the special enforcement section. So, I spent another 3 years going back to that unit with a new generation of officers and different dynamics. And we had seen our violent crime rate drop with all the work that was being done. With the prior team, in fact, they dropped it to maybe one or two gang homicides from the double digits. Incredible work, but then we saw that the leadership changed a bit.

By 2006, 2007, I became a commander in 2006. And as the leadership started to change, the officers were as great as hey ever were. But some of the directions, some of the emphasis changed. And again, you've got those 3 dynamics. If you mess with one and it's not balanced the right way, you're going to get something different out of it. And sure enough, we saw gang violence skyrocket back up to double digits. And we had a couple of homicides in the street and thinking, "Oh my gosh, we need to really do something about this." So, the team was again reformatted, rebranded. We created a fugitive apprehension team to really go after many of the gang members that had warrants, that needed to be arrested. And that was the facet we used in the late '90s, to go after people with just simple warrants to incarcerate you. And so, those broken window type of approaches does make a difference. And it does incarcerate the more violent. And you throw off the planning because the leaders are now incarcerated, or people don't know who's running what from a gang level. So, it was helpful to bring it back down again.

JON: And when you came back to the team as a lieutenant, now having been post 9/11, going to New York, going to Boston. Seeing the experience, having the experience that you had, did the emphasis of the team change?

JOHN: It did in a perspective that my lenses- I had multiple lens to look through. And the things that I worried about grew. And I was worried about how much work the team was able to really focus on.

The team had shrunk in terms of a number of officers. It was hard to get to all the training. The SWAT component as important as it was, was a huge restraint on the neighborhood policing and the gang enforcement. Because we got to a point with the blue-ribbon report and some others, that it was

about having at least 2 days of training. And now with court time and special operations, we may lose the visible, preventable part of policing to be out there. Our cars were known, and they had no lights on top, no police lights. They were slicked top. And whenever anyone saw the slick tops, the street just got quiet. So, we used all kinds of shock and awe over the years on somebody who was, you know, on their wedding, or their birthday, or an event, or we just needed to rest. Or we would have patrol guys drive those cars for the shock and awe of it.

We'd have people call the station and want to know if John Perez was working, or John Baker. So that, we could make sure that the SES is not out there. So, there we had everything they tried to do from a criminal standpoint to know if they could run freely or not. And so, these were challenges that we had. So- The SWAT component was the largest of trying to control how quick it was now growing with weaponry, bearcats, and the need for more training, more training, more training. We were getting away from neighborhood policing and the gang enforcement.

JON: So, at some point, you promoted to captain, or was it commander.

JOHN: It's commander, straight from the special enforcement section which at the time was unheard of for- Usually they want you to go through administration, have some other type of staff level jobs. And the chief Melekian again, had confidence in me to take me straight from that type of unit. From a strip mall all the way north of the city in some little building and bring you all the way downtown to the upper levels of the department and the command staff. It was a daunting feeling of this overwhelming thing like, oh my gosh. At first, they opened up that key to that office. It was like, "Man, I am not ready for this." I don't think you're ever ready for an assignment, but it was like, "Holy smokes."

JON: So, how did you cope with that feeling?

JOHN: I was fortunate. I learned it was a learning growth. And I ensured for people that I was learning. I had a reputation of running hard. The world to me was SES. So, in that unit tactically planning things, you always made room for discussion before a big decision. And the team kind of understood one another.

And where we were going, we all knew the why to it, and we all bought in. As a commander, the world changed. Suddenly, I had a hundred and something people of civilians, professional staff working. And so, I had this reputation for coming from there. I had to adjust myself, that I get used to who I was. And many of the administrators that we had that were a level

equal to a lieutenant were far more skilled than most of our lieutenants. When it came to technical work within the department, the systems that we had from computers to Excels, to whatever we were doing. They were far advanced compared to the average lieutenant. And so, I learned a lot during my 2 years as a commander of the civilian division of dispatch, records, much of our technology that was going on, our jail systems. And it really was important to learn that avenue of work for me and was a great foundation much as was a police cadet.

My first 2 years, where all the administrative work of working on the computer systems was the foundation for me all the way through my career. So, it really was an amazing period of time for people who are in law enforcement. Pay attention to those types of assignments that you think are not, what I call, the meat-eating assignment. That's the vegetables on the plate and it's good for your health, right? We have to learn to go after the vegetables on the plate. I would never replace those years as a police cadet and knowing how the systems work. By the time I was a trainee with an FTO, I was teaching people how to pull information out of the computer, they never thought was possible. And working with the administrators, they taught me so much, was another growth to understand that dynamic. And to understand the mindset of a professional staff civilian workforce compared to the again, meat-eating workforce of police officers. So, it was the best growth I ever had as an executive, was that period of time.

JON: So, you were admin commander for 2 years?

JOHN: For almost 2 years, I was in that assignment before moving on to the field operations division, which was in fact our patrol division. And that was a frontline position where you are really, really trying to manage lieutenants, and senior lieutenants at that, with the way of doing business. So, the directive that come in from a police chief whether they're that police chief's directives or they come from the city manager, or they're given by a council in terms of guidance. Many times, it's the commander that's got to go down and sell those directives. And you can't say the chief told me. You really got to help people understand, this is where we're trying to go with this directive. And try to expand people's vision.

So, I don't think my skill sets then were developed enough as an executive to walk in and help people understand some of the changes, we're trying to make to gain the trust of the public for that type of police work we had to do. And it's quite the challenge. So, I spent 3 years in the patrol division really trying to manage many of the obstacles. Every 10 years or so, we were losing a large part of our workforce due to the amount of overtime that

we have forced overtime. It was a problem that we were dealing with all the way up until I made interim chief. And there was a way we found, a way out of that. But it was a constant problem with officers leaving us and having to rebuild the system again.

JON: So, it's interesting, you know. You see guys that are promoting to chiefs of police. A lot of times they'll come in one of 2 ways. They come in through an admin route where they have a lot of admin experience. Or they come in through, what you described, as the mediating route, which I think knowing you as long as I've known you is a very accurate description of sergeant John Perez. How did you synthesize though? Because knowing you as long as I've known you, you always had a reputation of being like a hard-charging, go-getter, mediating cop. All of a sudden, you're thrust into a very political environment. Right? I guess it's probably when you become the patrol commander that you're introduced to the politics of the city. Right?

JOHN: Oh, absolutely. You're at the whim of who the police chief and the senior people of the organization are. And people jockeying for positions, people looking to show they got control over something. You have to live in that environment. And for the goodness of it all, keep focused on neighborhood policing, and doing this job for the people that need it. You know, not everybody in the block gets to vacation in Hawaii or the Cabo. For them, the best it gets their kids to play out front, man. That's the best it gets. And our police officers sometimes forget that everywhere across this country. We forget that basic tenant. We're here to make your life better. It may be the deputies in my town would've done that more. I could've used the park without them being in their gang members. So, everything I did later on was a lot to do with how I grew up in the first half of my life, to say that's how we should police. I was policing from a 13-year-old eyes of John Perez, thinking, "This is all I want from you." You know, it's like a young John Perez talking to the older John Perez. Don't forget about that. Nobody's going to like it. People are going to push back at you, people are going to think you're weird about that, and maybe not going to like you over that.

But I had to stay true to my approach to policing that it was about prevention making- developing relationships and really trying to make it safer for people by prevention first, being visible, and then by intervention. And if we have to enforce, well who knows where that's going to go, right? It usually goes very well but when it doesn't, we see the video of that. So,

that's why prevention and intervention are hugely important today more than ever before.

JON: It's interesting, because as you come into higher, higher leadership positions, the politics of the world begin to get you. And as a chief of police, there's a lot of political pressure for you to act a certain way, or to try and appease certain groups. And you know a lot of friends, now that I'm an old man and we're all old men, a lot of friends that have come into those jobs. And you see it change them. I didn't see that with you. I never saw you kind of undergo that transformation. You were still a mediator but somehow you learn to speak fluent vegan.

JOHN: Well, you know, I'll tell you. That's great to put it. Furthering my education as a lieutenant, getting my master's degree. You know, I went for my bachelor's as a sergeant. Then as a lieutenant, my master's. I started working on my PhD as a lieutenant- I mean as a commander. And I think that learning how to do peer review reading, was a game-changer. And picking up great books over the years from the early '90s all the way through to where we're today with the leaders and what they're using from previous history, really changed the format on using science into policing. Really using science like, "Ok, how can I take that and use it. There are some ideas I held for 10 years. I write a memo to myself and hold it on a flash drive or the computer drive, wherever it was at, and bring it back up. Or print it out and put it into a book. And I have a ton of memos from the 1990s I wrote myself.

It's like I was almost talking to myself into the future. And so, I used much of that from when we reorganized the entire department. I used much of that documentation and reading peer-reviewed stuff that was out there on the science. And it really was the nerd part of us coming out and willing to try new things and being progressive. A really difficult place to take a piece of equipment. I mean, we visited your place on occasion. I always remember the Janitors for Justice and saying, "Hey man, we need stuff. We don't have money to buy any of the ammunitions. We may need- "He said, "Take what you need. But you use anything, you have to pay me for what you use."

JON: You wreck my stuff, you got to buy it.

JOHN: He basically said that. That was- We're talking the 1990s. And that's before the period where I knew you selling your leather from the trunk of your car for handcuffs. So, we all made this progression over the 3, 4 decades now from where we're at today. So, I think that was- And spending

time with smart people around me and people are respected, you're a big part of my own growth because you are well accepted by law enforcement, and you're not in law enforcement. I think most people, the younger generation would probably think you were at one time.

JON: Yes, that a frequent assumption.

JOHN: You are well respected and accepted because of your mindset, what you provide. And you know, you put away the ego. You put all that stuff away and you deal with us, but you're a big reader. You use science and you use everyday rational thinking. And I believe that's what connects you to many of the leaders in law enforcement today. That's why you're so well accepted.

JON: It's one of the things that I think. And I think we share this- The more people I command, the bigger the business, is the more responsibilities I find. The more terrified I am of being wrong. And I see that same thing with you where it's kind of driven you. You know, it's like they say that- You know, they talk about Kobe Bryant, he like to win but he really hated to lose. And successful people that strikes me are people that- They want to win. Like, I like to win. When I win, I'm over winning so fast, because I'm worried about the next fight and how I might lose that.

JOHN: There's not a lot of learning lessons from winning.

JON: Yeah, that's true.

JOHN: When you lose, unfortunately, that set up you're winning for later. And I had a lot of learning to do. And losing, you lose credibility. It's how you lose credibility in an organization as a leader. You are going to lose it. You have to gain it back. You deliver directives. You're taking a chance. You know, many of the leaders of today, you have to be actuarials. You're reading tea leaves. And you have to have the confidence in yourself to say, "I think- First of all, we're heading this way, and this is why?" You may be wrong at the end of the day. And for a while, you lose credibility from that. You could be an NFL coach. And third and one, you decided to do a set of plays for awhile that aren't working. The growth from that is amazing, but in the meantime, you are well hated. I'm a big Ted Lasso fan. For the leadership lessons that are in there, right?

And these things are huge when we look at where we lose in life, and the credibility we lose on a given day.

The next day, you get to wake up and get it back. It takes a little bit longer but there were times I tried to do things, or my ideas were way off, and I

had to deal with it. And you have to fall forward, right? You have to. As you say, by Maxwell, "You got to fail forward, you have to be able to get yourself back up. Stand back up and keep going forward." You can't just give up and say, "Hey man, I'm no good at this." And that's part of the learning lessons for the for the greater growth of it all.

JON: The thing I think that ultimately, what is at the root of a lot of that, and a lot of what I hear you say is kind of 2 things. The first is authenticity. Right? It's being who you are and manifesting your principles.

JOHN: When do you find out who you are? You know I mean; you always are who you are, and you're confident. First argument in the morning is yourself in the mirror, right? Then you move on with your day. But who you are, and you believe in yourself when you start to find out who you might be as a leader. It really does start to change. True North: Authentic Leadership was a book written 30 years ago that is still one of the lead top books about true north, about being yourself. And in the beginning when you're developing yourself, it is a bumpy road. It is a bumpy road to trip and fall as you find out who you are to get to a place. And you adjust along the way because you might fall into a circle that maybe they like to criticize every directive from command staff. And you're in that circle for a while and you're like, "Man, you know what? This is not my circle. That's not me." So, you learn to circle yourself in with over a lifetime of people that are good for you. And in an organization, you may lose touch with them once in a while because you're in different parts of the department. So, much of the people I made command staff were with me when they were young officers. And you might call them yes men or yes people, but they're yes people to the point they support you. But they're the first to get in your face and tell you when you're wrong. You know-

JON: Yeah, which to me should be really- I said for a long time, like- You know, somebody on your staff who agrees with you serves almost no value. I want an argument. And I go hunt an argument.

JOHN: But you know what? You don't want people just say they don't like something either. I've seen those people on command staff, "That's a bad idea. We shouldn't do that?" You're ready to fall forward, right? "You give me something." I'd rather go with the yes person because they're on board to work that directive.

JON: That's a good point.

JOHN: And we're like, "Well, we don't know where this is going to go." But I'm with you. "Hey, I'm not sure that's a good idea." "I'm with you, let's

go.” And we’re good with that perspective as opposed to saying, “I don’t like where you’re going. I got to go.” You know, that doesn't work.

JON: Yeah, no it's- I want you to argue with me. I wanted to be creative in the end. We're on the same team. So, we can debate the play. And I want to hear your thoughts on the play. And I want us to argue on what the best play is. At the point we go to the huddle, the play's called. We're all on the same team. We got to move.

JOHN: My staff knew that our discussions are more important than our decisions. Discussions are more important than the decisions. Now there are times you can't have that discussion. But you have to make time for it. Big part of our early planning with the city hall occupation was a pre-planning and having these discussions. I always recall a quick story as a chief with Lieutenant Bill Grisafe, our chief of staff. I wrote an email and fired off the council and the city manager, and Bill happened to walk in. I said, Hey LT, take a look at this thing. And tell me what you think of it.” I'm relaxing, stretching from writing and I'm smiling. Like, I feel good, right? I just wrote something good.

JON: Feels pretty good about it.

JOHN: He's at my desk, reading the computer and he says, “Hell no. F no.” He says, “You can't send this.” He goes, “I'm erasing it.” And he deleted it. He right there, he deleted everything I had worked on. Now granted you get it back from the. But he went through the effort of deleting it. And those are the people you want around-

JON: So, you're saying Chief John Perez was chief John Perez because of a deleted email.

JOHN: Yeah, absolutely. Or you look to a great commander like Art Chute, who's an NFL coach of command staffs. And Art has this ability to argue with you. But in the beginning when he was new commander, he didn't have that. I actually kicked him out of the command staff office twice. But yet, by far he was the strongest leader that we have today in policing along the San Gabriel Valley. On the event planning experience his leadership, his willingness to tell you he did wrong would give you a hug. But in the beginning, he had to figure that out as I did. So, I tried to give him the leadership I wish I would've had more, when I was coming up to the organization.

JON: So, you mentioned the Occupy Pasadena Movement. And I think it's an interesting topic in authenticity and in placing yourself in peril. Will you kind of walk us through that.

JOHN: Well, the pandemic really put us off, right? It changed everything we were doing, and that's part of this evolution that we had staff meetings every single day. Our lunch was in our office in what we call our department operations center up on the top floor of the police department. And it was important for us to review every division we had, every protocol. We must have adjusted at the end of the day over 100 protocols in the organization based on the pandemic.

From how we're doing investigations, how we were going to deploy people, if there were people being infected, and we're positive with COVID. How do we respond to that? How do we put you off from work? How do we notify everybody in the department without notifying them? Why did some things our human resources division or our legal department didn't like for the city? If somebody was positive for the COVID, we put your name out and said Jon Becker has his home waiting testing. Now HR and the legal department like, "What are you doing? You can't- That's a HIPAA violation." We're in a world global pandemic and you're worried about that? That [inaudible 46:35] a tactical- Some organizational policy in a matter of war when you're being shot at, right? No, no it doesn't work that way. But what we were able to do is we had very few work-related contacts. Much of it was coming from outside of work. So, we were able to control it and people understood what was happening and say, "Well, I think I need to get tested as well. And so, more people get tested and we have more negatives coming back or you were put off early. So, that type of approach up and staff worked. Then you go through what was happening with social justice. The cabin fever, right?

People were coming out of their homes. Vehicle pursuits, driving fast, shooting their weapons, people were stuck with the pandemic. And what I call that moment in the shining where, you know, his head comes through the door, "Here's Johnny." You know, the Nicholson incident. And so, people lost it, and people were doing dumb things. And this was creating this environment. And then you had the incidents that happened in Atlanta. You had these shootings that were going on that were driving the George Floyd incident from May into June. More shootings were happening, and everyone now was under the spotlight. And so, we're thinking, "Man, we got to get ready for something like this and having the discussions."

And then came August 15th. We had our own officer-involved shooting with a young man from our community who had a gun. The rumor after the

shooting was, he had none. And it was very difficult. We had the gun recovered with DNA on it. And people said, "Well, how do you know that wasn't planted by you guys? We think you guys went to the hospital and did all that stuff as well. The rumors were flying. Even the council members said, "How do we know that gun wasn't there beforehand with his DNA on it? Isn't that possible?"

JON: Could've just been laying there. You might have parked on that street. Happened to run by.

JOHN: I get the emotions. I get where everybody was at. I know the difficulty of all this, it was tough. But it led to a place after that shooting where people were upset, and they actually received emails. Threatening to kill me, kill my family, kidnap my kids, and the officers were going- The officer involved was going through a lot. We had a right to protect him. And so, a very difficult period of time. I did meet with the family. I discussed it with the family the incident. They hired an attorney, a civil rights attorney. And another one that represented George Floyd. And so, these were very difficult times. And so, within a week of that incident, and this is where it matters to work intel early and put yourself in a position to grab that information. I learned that from the science of reading, whether the old books of *The Seven Habits*, and *The Courageous Follower*, and *The Good Degree*. All these great books were the start of our leadership reading, right? Then you forward it today to YouTube and where we're at, and the great writing is going on with Simon Sinek. And you got Jocko Willink, the retired Navy SEAL that was a lieutenant commander. And what I like about his videos, and his books, and his writing, is that he's a study of leadership. He'll read for hours and hours to come out with 30 seconds of stuff, and we could respect that.

JON: Oh yeah, totally.

JOHN: And he applies his experience to it. And I really appreciate his approach to that. And it's the fact that he wasn't the most decorated warrior out there. He led the most decorated unit in the military. Now that's leadership. That's where you have something to say, "I am listening and I'm going to go back and study what you're saying." So, we're in a place where we really used that for our future thinking. So, we had a place and a time in the morning where we had a BLM activist who had a restraining order to stay out of the city of LA. And she had occupied their city hall.

And as Michael Moore told me, it was hundreds of thousand dollars in damage in overtime and blah, blah, blah. It's problematic for all of us in our

community. She shows up at our city hall. Now she's from Pasadena. She lives in our town, and we dealt with her in every shooting. She was out there on Facebook live saying, "Hey, you know what? We're going to occupy city hall." And I'm in my workout gear which is probably wearing stuff from eighth grade or something, I don't know how I look. But I'm getting to go down to the weight room and my staff is in their office about 7:30 in the morning. I say, "Hey chief, she's going to occupy." "She's not going to occupy." We're not going to become Portland; we're not going to become all those places. City hall has way too many important services in a much lower level, it's much like occupying the capital of a state or a country. You stop all services, it's the wrong form and the wrong view for us to make the real change we need. No way, I can't allow that to happen.

JON: Yeah, the symbolic nature of occupying the city hall is-

JOHN: I went across the street. I left the station, went across the street and talked to her right there on Facebook. And she gave us everything we needed to be able to understand what was going to happen. And at that point as I left, there were people driving by that saw the live Facebook that drove to city hall and engaged me out there in a positive conversation. So, it was pretty good that we were able to talk to one another for people in our community based on that interaction. That led out day, though, in planning. Our intelligence, we acted early, we had tabletops. We set everybody up making sure we were ready, knew in advanced by 10 o'clock in the morning. Who's going to be held over at night, who was going to be ordered overtime, tactical teams, all this department operations center up above. All the team leaders, and the debriefing, and the confliction that went on really saved us.

That early planning of having unique things in place and being able to gap up and allowing front-line supervisors to question our approach say, "Wait a second. We're not sure that's a good idea." "Ok, why?" Back to the why, and they have that discussion. It wasn't that you had people that were in disagreement with the idea, they also provided their experience. And that's the difference right there is that you're not just saying, "I don't like something." But you're saying, "I don't like something. But let me offer you a different route or why I don't. Or we adjusted this." And we were able to work all those kinks out during the day non-stop, that we secured some of our areas early. So, they couldn't occupy those areas. And we used mutual aid the equipment we needed.

We brought in tow trucks, was very, very unique and something we trained to after that day, to other local police chiefs and police department to be well prepared, well situated, and placed, but unseen by the public. Hugely

important to allow the public to demonstrate and protest. That's their constitutional right, we should support. Offer them the traffic units they need for traffic control and the safety. But you don't need to see 500 tactically dressed officers 20 feet from you when you're protesting. It really jacks up everybody's emotions.

So, if you would have opened any closet door, 20 officers would have fallen out. But we were well prepared with equipment, a lot of debriefs and brief backs. The brief backs were hugely important. The rehearsals of what we were doing, this was all led after the ideas were formatted with the command staff. Commander Art Chute and Lieutenant Johnny Mercado were enormously important to this whole growth. Now they go back years decades before to the SES. The learning curve back then about neighborhood policing, and gang enforcement, and SWAT team, and balancing all that. So, their mindsets understood those different directives and wasn't just tactically planned. We opened up our eyes and ears to the leadership. Look, people don't often say they are over led and under managed, right? It's the other way around.

That's what people say that we're over managed or we're under managed, over managed. And we're under led is usually the issue that we're in. We try to make sure it's the other way around. Everything we do, we manage. We absolutely manage most of our lives, everything about it. But there are opportunities for us to identify a point to be a leader. You can't be a leader 24 hours a day, it's impossible. But you look for the opportunities to make change, to lead in the right direction, or change culture. That's really the learning lesson that came out of that, was to look and ensure that you are taking the opportunity to lead when it presents itself. When it presents right there you have to have the ability to say, "That's the moment. I need to do something right here." And that's the importance of it all.

JON: So, in that Occupy Pasadena, you had obviously the tension of a city council that's divided and has different views. And a community that's divided has different views. You know, Pasadena although a small city does have a relatively activist mindset in some of the critics and within the council. What made you make the decision to deny, "No, you're not taking city hall."

JOHN: It was a decision I had made early on. Looking at Portland and looking at what happened in Minneapolis, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles at their city hall. And I realized if we allowed occupation, many people wouldn't get services.

JON: I'm guessing that was not necessarily a popular decision with some of the members of the community, and some of the members of the city staff.

JOHN: Absolutely, our city manager, we had a long discussion, very supportive. And he had mentioned that there wasn't support for this entirely. In fact, we had one council member said, "Just let them occupy. Let them have it. You shouldn't stop them." He said the following week. And so, that's problematic for me to have that type of loss of government and what could happen and trying to clean that up later could be difficult. And so, we had that discussion, we talked about the following morning.

Maybe I would be released as a police chief, basically terminated. So, I called my wife, let her know that that might happen. She just wanted to make sure that we were doing the right thing and I was doing the right thing, and she was fully in support. So, I knew I was in a good place at home. And so, a few hours later, when Antifa started to show up and we started to see the name changing on the street signs, to Freedom Way, Pigway, this that, this. You know, they had duct tape, and they had the spears, and they had shields they were putting on. Very scary stuff when you're that close. City manager, after we talked, he says, "Ok well, we'll talk later." He shows up at about 4 or 5 o'clock and in police work, we have what's we call a go-bag. And so, he raises his bags and says, "I've got my go-bag with me. I'm here with you guys." And often times, thereafter during the protest, we invited everybody to our department operations center. Council members, city people, city managers, he was almost always there with us throughout the night just to listen to provide his guidance and what we needed to do, and full support. And it was really good for him to be out there, but our situational awareness is the key.

The situational awareness for people for a council, and the city manager, and the legal department for the city attorney's office, it would have been delayed because of the usual processes of policing. In this case, we worked and gave him immediate information because he was on the scene with us. He was seeing it himself firsthand, and I'd walk up and it's like having the general right next to the battle scene and give them what we were doing. He was then able to relay that to the council quickly and give his assumptions, his assessment of what was happening. So, the situational awareness was a big factor in all of this.

But having that support from the council and keeping the city attorneys up to date and everything we were doing with phone calls, every less than an hour, was tremendous in making sure everybody supported our direction.

JON: But it was almost a suicide pact between you and the city manager then. Because him showing up knowing that there's at least one council member that thinks it's time to turn over city hall. And he has a chief of police that has already expressed that that's not going to happen. I realized that you obviously, had done the calculus that you were willing to lose your job.

JOHN: The risk, the risk assessment. And that's why I think he's one of the best city managers in the country. He'll put me in check in a moment if he had to, not a problem. He'll shut me down, he's the boss. You know, but the structure of- I'm not an elected official as a sheriff, right? So, there's a lot more decision-making processes going on between a group of people that's got to be collective and best for our community. So, it worked.

JON: But it's interesting. Because one of the things- When I teach leadership one of the things, I talk about is the difference between leaders and managers. And one of those differences in my brain is the willingness to place yourself in peril for principle. The willingness to go, "You're not taking city council." "Well, they may fire me." "Ok." Like, you already made a decision that you were willing to lose your job and not give up city council.

JOHN: We kept that quiet. We didn't want the officers to have to deal with that emotion. Whether they supported me or not was, you know- We have a new chief in the morning during this whole episode of an officer-involved shooting that just occurred. And by the end of the night, it worked out extremely well in that nobody went to jail, and only one car was impounded that wouldn't start. And it was a careful approach that we had having hundreds and hundreds with the potential for thousands to having less than 100 and then dealing with a group of 20 or 30 walking around marching and doing things. And our tactical officers having the discipline to handle it correctly. At the end of the day, we learned a lesson. One of the lessons was, as command staff members, if you're not part of the planning process, you're not allowed to make last-minute adjustments. You can imagine a coach coming out of the locker room with 20 seconds left in the game, and the head coach picks a play. And all of a sudden, the coach comes running out of the locker room criticizing the head coach, "That's a bad idea right now." "Oh, wait a second, we've had 3 and a half quarters to figure out their weaknesses. We think this is their best decision."

So, we learned some lessons coming out of there. But at the end of the night, the officers were really satisfied. They did something right for the community. And coming out and talking to the majority of the officers that were going home at 3, 4 in the morning had great discussions. And a lot of

thank yous to us and the command staff for making the right decision. That was good for us as command staff, you make the decisions, you go on to the next battles on whatever that's going to be. But to have a couple hundred people coming out and going home, and shaking your hand saying, "Thank you." I think that mattered.

JON: Oh, you know, somebody who knows a lot of people in your department and grew up in the city of Pasadena, that decision had more impact on your brand than you could have possibly recognized.

JOHN: Well, even in the community, we had people the following week. Officers said they'd go get their food, and people paying for their food, and clapping for them when they walk up to pick up their food because we're still in the pandemic rules. But they had a lot of community support from people for doing what we did. It got very little attention because it went the opposite way. The new stations were looking for occupation not the other way around. So, it got very little traction. And that was fine by us. But it got very little traction from the public. And we had another 75 protests thereafter. And all of them were handled in the same regards except for having to put out the line of officers because it wasn't an occupation. It was a protest or demonstration which they had the constitutional right to do, and we supported that. And so, all those other 75 protests and demonstrations, we allowed that to occur without our presence. Again, we planned in the same way, the same accord. Again, you open the door, and everybody would fall out. But we were not seen other than the traffic officers on the motorcycles providing the traffic stops and the breaks they needed. Or those moments we had to run out and make an arrest for a gun, or a fight, or something that was happening. Those were the only times you saw the majority of our officers.

JON: So, you say you have 75 additional protests like- It's an interesting choice in a modern law enforcement environment to decide between having a large presence or allowing a protest. Like constitutionally, you're there to protect their constitutional rights and give them an opportunity to protest government, which is the whole point of it. And so, you need to let them go. But the amount of presence and the type of presence seems to almost give these things the ability to create their own weather.

JOHN: Yes, it's possible. You never know. Once again going back to leadership principles, we're going to a true north. It is the foundation of what I believe that in doing my experiences over the years with Janitors for Justice, the Occupation period during the great recession, and then reading literature. Madison, Wisconsin may be the lead in the country in the 1970s,

writing literature about campus protests and not being seen, and how much the chances were heightened that it would conclude safely for everybody. And so, I took all that into an equation and came out with the fact that we should go on that route as often as we can. There are moments in which we can't. Occupation was one of the city hall, correct? But I had to be able to try to identify those or have a team that could identify them. And that's only going to happen through discussions and having our staff meetings and giving the confidence to say, "This is not the one" or "We need to do something better on this other one."

So, that was really important. But it really goes to the true north principle, believing what you believe, knowing you studied, the confidence, everything that you've done, and you've got to wait for the fast ball to come at you. I had a great talk with Manny Mota in 2018. He came to our station, and we donated equipment. And I asked him, "What is it like to be there and Walter Austin or Tommy Lasorda asks you in the ninth inning to come up and get ready?" He says, "Well you know, you've done all your study, you've prayed to God, you've done everything you're supposed to. You lived your life well," he said. This is for a pinch hit, right? The guy who led the most in the season for decades was the record. He says, "But then you studied everything you needed to. You knew you had it. When you get to the plate, you make your decisions. The ball comes at you, and you say, 'bring it on' to the pitcher." And basically, I love that because that's the same approach we basically took, was to say, "Look, we studied everything. We're taking everything into consideration but now we're at a point to make a decision.

JON: But I think implicit in what you're saying, apart from what we already talked about authenticity and having true north is being a student of the game. Like you're not walking into the bottom of the ninth inning wondering what could happen and having no plan in place. So, what are your thoughts about that? Like, it strikes me that you've always been a student of the game.

JOHN: And one of the terms I used often is a student of the profession for us.

And being a student of the profession means you're always studying, you're always learning, you're always bouncing off your mentors, listening to other people, debriefing situations, and taking all that into consideration. And this was part of all that. If understanding you're going way back in time and pulling things out and knowing where you want to be. And so, this was the

right thing to do. It was the right thing to do not to be present in the dozens we had out in front of the police station, where people wanted me to take a knee, or the hundreds of people. You didn't see a police car, police cars driving by. And it was very peaceful events where people got to experience the emotions of other people. And the tragedies that have happened in their lives, and to share them without us being in the middle. Or me coming out in uniform and for a moment taking the knee and taking all that away from everybody. That wasn't the point. At the same time, we had to know when we had to be present and when it was about protecting the proper property of the city or people. And I believe that was the right time to do what we did. So, it took a lot of thought and support from people around me. And not everybody around me was in support of what we did. In the day, it was the right thing. We did take a chance. We had an opportunity to be leaders in the organization and in the community, and we took that route. And we stayed with it.

JON: I think that another interesting thing about your career was your willingness to almost follow a Lincoln. And you know, of all the chiefs I've known over the years, hundreds possibly thousands of chiefs of police, I've never seen anybody walk into a crowd of people that did not like him. Maybe Daryl Gates, walk into a crowd of people who did not like him and say, "Tell me what's wrong with me the way you have." Talk about that for me.

JOHN: Early on, learning from other chiefs like Bernard Melekian and the others have been around, you have to engage the community. You have to do it your way. And I believe the only way to do that was to be as open as I could with our community. We had something called Community Conversations where we went in with frontline officers to engage the community and talk to one another about real issues in policing. Anytime people called me on my cell phone, I answered. Anybody sent me an email, I answered it. You invited me to your forum; I did my best to be there. And those engagements were hugely important, not just with people that I connected with and philosophically we might have been in the same arena. It was connecting with people that we weren't in agreement philosophically on a lot of issues. And some of them are very close friends.

They're what we considered activists. People in the community that wanted police reform. I wanted police reform. And for them to understand the route I was going and re-orient the whole department, we flattened it, we regrew it. We put new equipment, new training, new technologies. We're a better police department for it. And many police chiefs and departments

had asked, "Hey, how did you do that?" We created new units, we put more officers into patrol without raising a penny on the budget. All that done. And so, how did that really happen? A lot of work, a lot of meetings, and a lot of teams of people coming together. And not everybody was in agreement. I eliminated the gang unit for a new model, a contemporary model that was an intelligence-led model that we have today. We still put units out there when we need to on overtime to patrol these neighborhoods. But much of the work we're doing up front is intelligence-led. We're going to identify these career criminals, the gang members, the people that are doing this crime. And arrest them before they do it or immediately after the arrest. That's the goal to ultimately get.

JON: I think saying *philosophically disagreed* is a gross understatement of people who are calling for your resignation while you're inviting them to be on a chief's council.

JOHN: And some people even threatening my life.

JON: Yeah, I mean literally. It's interesting because you know, Sun Tzu's know yourself, know you're going to be better, hold your friends close, hold your enemy closer. It was interesting to watch you start a chief's advisory council with people who strongly philosophically disagreed with you. And then open yourself up to criticism in a forum you created. Talk to me about what that- What was the advantage of that?

JOHN: Well, it's where it came from. And where it came from was, you know, in July 29, 2016, I had a V-Fib incident where I died for, they said, 60 something seconds. Then I had a heartbeat, and I came back, and had a surgery and blah, blah, blah.

JON: I think you might be skipping over-

JOHN: Yeah, probably.

JON: How about you dropped dead and were dead for a minute or more.

JOHN: Yeah so, with that-

JON: And would have remained that way.

JOHN: If not for people in the room-

JON: If not for people in the room putting on, you know-

JOHN: So, Bill Sanchez and many of the officers in that room did a wonderful job in making sure I was still around. But during the time I was off, a lot of reflection- I always thought I was a pretty good person, but you

know, when this happens to you, you want to be even better. And you should strive for ways to do that, which was done in terms of reading and really finding yourself. And part of that was reading about Theodore Roosevelt, and many of the presidents I read including Team of Rivals on Lincoln. And how he brought people into his cabinet that were against him. And when the opportunity created itself for interim chief which nobody was searching for at the time, not me. And the permanent chief which I really wasn't searching for, and let the city know I wasn't going to apply for that job.

It really was interesting that reading, that approach, that study helped me embraced the activists even more. And create a chief's advisory that in fact was made of people that were looking for deep, deep-rooted, defunding, or changing of the police department in ways that was not healthy for the community. And many of them, if not all of them, I believe, really changed their perspective over the years of how they viewed the police department. In fact, in the beginning, the union absolutely and- You know, I love Roger Rodin, one of the best presidents in any police union anywhere in the state of any country, the way he approaches. But he heavily was saying, "Hey man, this is not a good idea. I don't think we should be doing this." At the conclusion of all this, if I were to get rid of it, Roger would have beat me up first. Because the union appreciated this group of people to engage them and to have meetings with them and- Because each one of the board members represented multiple nonprofit organizations representing hundreds in each one.

So, you're touching thousands of people. Some of the chief's advisory members even lost some of their credibility in the community for what they were learning at the police department. So, when you see how diverse we are, when they see the changes we're making, you know, change doesn't come from the outside. Change comes from the inside not just on the leadership to say you're going to do it. But the management work that's taking to create the systems and the budgets and the protocols, and all the things in management that are hugely important. And that's a learned skill as is leadership which is a leadership- Which is a tool. It's a skillset you have to have.

So, all that put us in a place that helped me during that period of time to really function through and keep the chief's advisory updated. If that chief's advisory was made of all John Perez' friends in the community, what good was it to brief them before the occupation of city hall. Really it wasn't going to do me any good. I needed people who are going to criticize me and say,

"Well, wait a second." But to explain to them why, they helped market some of the things that needed to be done in the community from an education standpoint.

JON: Yeah, it's interesting. There is currently with law enforcement a bit of a siege mentality where there are a lot of vocal critics and a very quiet law enforcement lobby. Where, you know, every bad thing gets publicized and dragged through the news. And law enforcement is not proactively defending itself. And it strikes me-

JOHN: But they're trying.

JON: Yeah, but not at an organized level.

JOHN: I understand that completely.

JON: You know, and it's- You look at some of the legislation that's happening in California related to law enforcement. And some of it is just moronic. You know before AB 481, and this idea that, "Oh, military equipment is what's causing the problems. First of all, half of the things on that list have nothing to do with the military use of it. But it strikes me that that happens is this siege mentality and this kind of pushing out of criticism and now having the willingness to engage.

JOHN: It's a lack of education I really need. Even internally.

JON: On both sides.

JOHN: Yeah. Even internally I started a Sunday email that was based on our last chief, Chief Sanchez's Sunday Email about everything went on the community. Way too much information for what I could do. So, I changed it to a format was about education our personnel. The new laws coming out, the promotions, the areas that needed policing focus, as well as leadership issues. Providing good video on leadership and things we could all learn from collectively. And it was a starting point in the organization no matter where I went. I could start my conversation at the Sunday Email, "Hey chief, you wrote this last Sunday. I agree or don't agree. Well, let's talk about it." And it was a great place that when I didn't do them on Sundays, I would get half a dozen or more text from people-

JON: Where's my email?

JOHN: Where's your email? Yeah. And in the beginning, I didn't send it to everybody. I only sent it to the lieutenants. I wanted them to talk to these points. And I quickly discovered there was a portion of the lieutenants that said, "I don't talk to this stuff." They could read it on their own. I said,

"Nope, not until you guys learn how to read it to your people and have this discussion. I'm not going to get it out." So, a lot of pressure started to come to send it out to over 400 people every Sunday. And not just the command staff, and lieutenants, and administrators of 23 people. So, it really was a platform I stuck to as long as I could before I released it out to everybody. And it was helpful. And I tried to do it all on my own so, it came for me. It wasn't 10 people writing and sending it to me and whatever mistakes or things you didn't like, it's my stuff. You know, this is from me to you. A love letter here. And so, I think, it really did help in a lot of our communication with the new the new laws that were coming out, and things that were happening.

JON: But it's once again inviting potential criticism.

JOHN: Oh, without a doubt.

JON: It's once again commander's intent open to discussion of which- I mean, that's kind of leadership 401. Right? That's not- You better have your ego in a pretty comfortable box.

JOHN: Yeah, let go of your ego.

JON: Yeah, like you got to leave it at the door. But I think that comes back to one of the last things I'd like to talk about before we go into the rapid-fire questions. Which is this notion of servant leadership, and this notion that the most important person in the organization is not the one at the top of the orchestra.

JOHN: One hundred percent.

JON: So, tell me your views on that.

JOHN: Well, growing up playing sports and having a large family with 7 brothers, servant leadership is the direction you go. You follow others and you're a strong follower and supporting you family. Coming into the police department as well, always following then new chief, following people around me. Following to learn has really always been part of my platform foundation for myself.

If I believe in you and I support you, I'm following you everywhere because I want to learn from you. I want to learn how I could be better. And I want you to believe in me. And that's just part of having a circle of friends. I have the same friends for the most part, I've had since I was 13, 14 years old. Which is really cool, right? Because we believe in one another. And the same friends that have been core with me over my years at the police

department are still close friends of mine because we haven't lost that connection. And with other people you come and go, depending on the decision, right? And so, servant leadership is an actual management leadership principle that was written by Dr. Peters in the early '70s. And his leadership principle at that time was about learning how to follow others in your leadership. Knowing that it's important to listen to people around you in their issues so, you could become a better manager, but it was also about leading. And I believe that this foundation of servant leadership is something that is going by the wayside, we've got to bring that back.

The most underrated leader forever, will be the most consistent leader. It's an unusual place where we define our leaders by the home run by the moment, by the things happening. But the most consistent leaders over a period of time are usually lost. Lost in time for a reason, we just say, "Well, you know John was really good. Always treated us well over those 20 years as a leader." But because it wasn't that one time the building burned, you carried everybody out, "Man, he was the guy." So, we tend to devalue the consistent leaders time that do it in a Serbian leadership style. Yet, the essence of everything we do in leadership.

JON: That's a fantastic place to move on to our rapid-fire questions. So, these are-

JOHN: Do I need a lawyer?

JON: Say again?

JOHN: Do I need a lawyer?

JON: Probably not. I mean you did for the last 5 years of your career but probably not now. So, these are kind of single sentence. I want your kind of quick reaction thoughts. What's your most important habit?

JOHN: Relationships, people around me. Making sure that if you're going to lead, that people believe in you. At least they know who you are. So, it's about creating those relationships and the conversations with the people around me.

JON: Leader versus manager. What's the difference?

JOHN: Leaders versus manager. Leaders got to know the opportunity to lead. Managing is something that we do every single day the majority of the day. Hugely important, but we have to really have the skill sets to be leaders and when to identify and how to treat it with respect and love.

JON: What's the best book you've read.

JOHN: I would start probably with the 7 Habits of the Most Effective People by Dr. Covey. But that could probably be sharply debated with Jocko's Extreme Ownership which took a lot of those principles and his experience. And so, I'd be for those two. But you know what? Jordan Peterson, 12 Rules for Life, his amazing book. Jordan Peterson is absolutely our Plato and Aristotle of our time. But so-

JON: What's the most profound memory of your career?

JOHN: I would have to say likely that we had as a command staff after Occupation of the City Hall. And the fact that the department- Everybody believed in what we're doing. The community believed that we did the right thing. At a moment that I think many people wanted the opposite thing to happen to feel good, in terms of activists and so forth. So, I believe that moment, that feeling, that driving home at 4 in the morning with no sleep for over 24 hours. I really felt we had done something collectively together. There are very almost no moments in our lives where we think about the best thing that ever happened, it was just you. There are always people around and that was an example of just that.

JON: What's your favorite online resource website or Podcast?

JOHN: I have to go back to Jocko, man. Well, The Debrief, I'm going to say is first without a doubt debrief is it. That's the new learning place for us to find our leaders. Locally, you connect with them because of the profession. You know what they're saying, you could learn from the leadership lessons being thrown out there. But for the last few years before The Debrief, Jocko was really the place to be for me because he's taken the science of leadership from all the years before with management. And he could break it down with great guests that he has and also the principles of what's worked for him in wartime.

JON: What keeps you awake at night?

JOHN: Has to be the safety of police officers. My heart goes out to every single one of them doing the best that they can. The absolute love they have for their communities.

It's really undervalued by the media and people out in the community. There are so much great things going that they don't get the credit they deserve for their love, for what they do, their sacrifices for what they do. All the many different areas of policing from homeless, to having to take action, to working with people in need, to the amount of work that's needed and all the training that comes with all that. The love these people have for this

profession and their communities is unbelievable. Yet, I don't think they get the respect for that. I don't think there's enough there to remind our communities how lucky they are to have that one, two percent society serving as police officers.

JON: And that is a fantastic place for us to stop. John, thank you so much for doing this.

JOHN: Thank you, brother, thank you. I hope it was something I offered for everybody out there. Appreciate it.