

# ADVICE FROM WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS IN POLICING

CARMEN BEST, SYLVIA MOIR, KATHLEEN O'TOOLE, AND SUE RAHR



### Key Takeaways: For the Individual Officer

#### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Becoming a police officer means trying something new and different. You will find the job not only rewarding but meaningful and enriching.
- There is no monotony in the policing profession; it is a job that allows you to have the autonomy to solve and fix problems independently.
- Ride-alongs are great opportunities to learn more about policing and how it can be a profession filled with being kind, tough, compassionate, and gritty – and not just about arresting felons, car chases, or taking people to jail.
- Gain exposure to different roles, such as administration, human resources, and management, to grow and be best suited for a future leadership role.

When ready to promote, Kathleen O'Toole was put into a chief of administration role and due to her reservations about the role, she did not realize the benefits of learning management and budgets. However, she claims it better prepared her to be an operations chief in the future.

### “Preparation is separation.”

- Carmen Best

- Be prepared for all promotions or leadership position requirements, such as receiving degrees, certifications, or training.
- Believe in yourself and have resilience regardless of the challenges. Build your endurance by investing in yourself intellectually, physically, and psychologically.
- Show up in a way that serves yourself and other women in the profession by seeking out opportunities that are unique and enriching to you and your service, even when your leaders do not offer them.
- When afforded the opportunity to be a part of different conversations and “sit at different tables,” recognize and embrace that you provide a different perspective and approach.
- Do not hesitate to network with men and women in the profession and outside your organization. Having role models to look to for mentorship or guidance in this profession is essential.

## GENDER-BASED CHALLENGES

- Overcoming gender-based challenges involves building self-confidence, making it easier to ignore the doubting glances and overcome barriers. Approach all challenges pragmatically even if you think they are small, such as maneuvering the restroom with a gun belt on.
- Establishing credibility on the front lines and working in the field with colleagues is essential for success in the profession. Credibility will not come from being promoted or being in a leadership role. Accepting the jobs others may not want and stepping up for less traditional roles like night shifts will help build confidence, competence, and reputation.

**“I would really encourage people to get in, pay your dues, learn the job, establish relationships, and really engage authentically with your colleagues and with your community. And then, pursue promotion if you decide.”**  
- Kathleen O’Toole

- Work-life balance is hard to accomplish in this profession but embrace that fact and put little pressure on yourself to achieve traditional balance.
- Work-life balance can be achieved if approached pragmatically and through prioritization. Trying to do more than 100% all the time is unrealistic.
- In this profession, it is essential to recognize and be bold about how much can be devoted to certain aspects of life at a given time. Accept that some things will get more attention than others but do not apologize for having to give to more than the job itself. In addition, ask for support from friends, family, or colleagues when needed.
- Rather than approaching comments about gendered roles as a setback, allow your work-life balance to be a way to prove strong organizational skills and the ability to manage things.

## Key Takeaways: For Agencies and Leaders

**“Fear is a liar. It’ll talk you out of a whole bunch of things. Let’s fix each other’s crowns, straighten each other’s crowns behind the scenes, and then never tell anybody that it was crooked.”**  
- Sylvia Moir

- Acknowledging the value of supporting and lifting up all officers is important. Officers must be given opportunities to be guided and directed by their leaders and be granted the space to make mistakes and learn from them.

**“We have a new responsibility as women to really lift each other up and save a seat for a sister. Kathleen O’Toole gave me an opportunity I didn’t even know would serve me well and she brought it into perspective. She shined a light on it. She advocated for me, and she didn’t have to do that.”** - Sylvia Moir

- Be open to bringing in sworn officers and non-sworn employees with diverse perspectives. Be courageous enough to pick the person that is best for the job regardless of gender.
- Consider diversifying agencies to include more non-sworn employees who would be impactful contributors.
- Invite all professional and sworn staff to be a part of solving problems as a variety of perspectives will improve overall problem-solving, strategy and policy tactics development, and the way that people look up to you as a leader.

- When handling issues that require disciplining officers take gender out of the equation and stay focused on the proper actions that need to be taken for the sake of the entire agency and the community being served. You cannot change the individual, but you can ensure that certain behaviors do not happen again. In any situation, you must always proceed by doing what is right.
- More effectively communicate the policing narrative and what officers actually do in order to attract a broader pool of candidates. Policing requires service-oriented personalities, and illustrating policing as a constant battle between good and evil will cause many qualified candidates to hesitate to enter the profession, especially women who are socialized to problem-solve and resolve conflict.

- Increasing women in policing through the 30x30 Initiative will help men in the profession, not disadvantage them. Meet with your agency (men, women, non-sworn, and sworn staff) and start a conversation about advancing women in policing to influence positive culture and climate within the organization.

**“We have to be champions of the profession, even if we acknowledge there are challenges.” - Carmen Best**

**“Let’s stop promoting so much the sense of adventure and talk more about the sense of service. This is not a battle. This is a service, and we are there to serve people. The more we promote [this idea], I think we are going to attract a broader range of people, especially women.”**

**- Sue Rahr**

- Identify and invest in professional development opportunities for those seeking promotion and to improve all officers' retainment.
- It must be acknowledged that impactful incidents, as recently seen in Memphis, have set all of policing back, but at the same time, advancements have been made that must be recognized.

**“[There are] examples across this nation of individuals and organizations that are doing it right. We need to find them. We need to lift them up. We need to replicate what they're doing. And a great person said in policing, ‘There’s no such thing as plagiarism.’ Find somebody who's doing something really well, find their logo, and replace it with yours. Massage it so that it's unique for your organization and use it and continue to use it.” - Sylvia Moir**

- Recruiting materials must reflect women, and recruiting should be done in formal capacities as well as in day-to-day conversation.
- Introduce young people to policing through cadet programs or exploring programs. These programs often bring in a diverse group of individuals who can bridge the gap between the agencies and the communities they serve. Also, partnering with academic institutions can educate students on the many career paths within policing before receiving their degree.

- We must educate the policing profession on the history of policing to better understand how policing started and how it is being used. Change cannot happen and systematic issues cannot be addressed until the workforce acknowledges the history of policing.
- There must be honesty and transparency between agencies and the communities they serve, as it will enhance trust. This must be achieved by patrol officers up to the highest-ranked leaders.
- There needs to be an emphasis on authentic engagement with officers in the field and community members through active listening.

**“I would encourage those of you who are the future leaders in policing to really emphasize the importance of getting out [and engaging]. [This] helped inform my work and our organization's work, and I think we [as leaders] can model that behavior so that we get people at all ranks of our organizations engaging with the community. When there's a crisis, stand up, tell the truth, and take responsibility. Even apologize, if appropriate. Just be honest with the community, and people will genuinely appreciate that, it really enhances community trust.” - Kathleen O’Toole**

### **Resources Mentioned for Professional Development**

- International Association of Women Police (IAWP)
- International Women’s Forum
- National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE)
- National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
- National Policing Institute (NPI)
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
- Women in Federal Law Enforcement (WIFLE)
- Women Leaders in Law Enforcement (WLLE)