



SPOTLIGHT DEPUTY CHIEF MONIQUE “MO” BROWN

Deputy Chief Mo Brown of the newly constituted Johns Hopkins University Police Department did not originally set out to be a leader in law enforcement. In fact, she resisted it for years. But when she looked at the state of policing around her and at the lives of the people in her Baltimore community, she knew she had a role to play in making things better. **“We can’t just stand outside throwing rocks. We have to insert ourselves into the system and improve things from within.”**

That blend of personal responsibility for advancing change and determination to have an impact seems to permeate everything about DC Brown’s journey. She grew up witnessing firsthand how the current system can fail both the people it serves and the people who serve within it. Her leadership philosophy centers people’s human dignity, and her career is a testament to her belief that things can and will be better, as long as we all do our part.

EAST SIDE BEGINNINGS

Brown's story begins in Baltimore, and she calls herself an "east side girl." "We're a city of neighborhoods," she said. "That's how we define ourselves. Also, by our high schools, not colleges, but where we grew up." As a teenager, DC Brown saw herself becoming a lawyer. "I just knew I was going to be Olivia Benson. You'd hear that 'dun dun' sound from Law & Order, and I was like, yep, that's gonna be me."

But life had other plans. "At 17, I was already a mom. By 19, I had two children." DC Brown said law school felt "a million miles away" at that point, so she applied to Baltimore City PD, County PD, and Corrections. Brown saw law enforcement as a way to have an immediate impact and support her family in the process. But her grandmother, a woman deeply skeptical of the police, encouraged her not to join. "She told me, 'We don't like the police. Why would you do this?' But I told her, 'If we don't join, how do things change?'" DC Brown recalled that her grandmother didn't come to any of her ceremonies, except one. "The only one she ever came to was when I made deputy commissioner."

PATH TO LEADERSHIP

DC Brown was clear that, at first, she did not want to be a supervisor. "You mean I gotta be accountable for everybody else's decisions too? No thank you." But one of her peers, a respected sergeant, saw her potential. "He said, 'I hear you on the radio when you're the officer in charge. It's just different. People listen.'"

When she first sat for the sergeant's test after eleven years, she didn't pass. "I sashayed my little self right up to that test," thinking she had it in the bag, she recalls. "I didn't even make it past the written."

DC Brown said that the setback ignited something in her. "I don't fail at things," she said. "So for the next nine months, I dedicated my life to studying for that test. People were like 'How much studying can you do?' When I walked into that test, I could literally visualize my notes in front of me. I was already a sergeant in my head before I made the list." When the results came out, DC Brown had placed third.

30X30 PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

After that experience, DC Brown committed herself to helping other people on their leadership journey. “Anytime somebody told me they wanted to promote, I was like, ‘Okay, come sit down.’” DC Brown regularly shared her preparatory materials with colleagues. “I’ve probably sent that folder out 40, maybe 50 times,” she said.

Mentoring the next generation of transformative leaders and helping them find their own leadership voice is something DC Brown takes very seriously. “Some of these folks just needed someone to tell them they were ready,” she said.

Brown is especially committed to showing women they belong in leadership, now. “As women, we’ll have 80% of the boxes checked and still say, ‘I need two more things before I’m ready,’” she said. “Men have two boxes checked and say, ‘This job was written for me.’ We don’t have to wait.”



When DC Brown was later promoted to lieutenant, Baltimore was reeling from the death of Freddie Gray and the ensuing unrest. “I inherited a shift that was broken,” she said. **“They were tired, angry, and felt like nobody in the community respected them.”** Instead of lecturing, she listened. Then she asked them a question that seemed to shift something in her people. “Why did you start this job?” she asked. “Most of them said, ‘To help people.’ So I told them, ‘Then let’s go do that. The community is still there. The community still needs us.’”

Slowly, she intentionally rebuilt trust with the community. “I’d be out all the time talking to people, laughing with them,” she said. “People would tell me I shouldn’t be out there alone, but I said, ‘Does it look like anybody here’s threatening me?’” Her team began mirroring her approach. “They saw me talking and laughing with people and realized it doesn’t always have to be confrontational,” she said. “They started doing it too. Before long, we were the most proactive shift in the city, not because we made more arrests, but because we built relationships that helped us reduce violence.”

POLICING PHILOSOPHY

DC Brown’s childhood directly informs how she approaches her role and her vision of service to the community. Her father was murdered before she turned three, and her mother spent her life battling addiction. “I’ve come in the house and have caught my mother shooting up, my uncle shooting up, finding people who OD’d and passed out, and I’m there doing CPR. I’ve kicked in doors trying to find my mother in vacant houses. I know what life a lot of people are living.”

While these experiences could have hardened her, they only deepened DC Brown’s compassion. **“I will never dehumanize people,”** she said. **“We are all one incident away from being where they are.”** She remembers one officer who treated her mother with rare kindness. “He never looked at her like she was the worst of the worst. He always made sure she was seen as human.” DC Brown carries that forward. “My passion really is community,” she said. “Even when we have to make arrests, people deserve dignity.” She often challenges how officers talk about residents, especially those struggling with addiction or poverty. She recalled attending a forum with many affluent people, including local business leaders and executives.

Her philosophy is simple but not necessarily common. **“We have to center people’s humanity” and acknowledge that “not everything requires enforcement,”** she said. **“Yeah, we’ve got the authority, but is that really what’s needed? Sometimes people just need an opportunity. They need someone to listen.”**

That perspective now guides her as she helps shape a new agency from the ground up at Johns Hopkins, one focused on dignity, accountability, and equity. While she was conflicted about leaving the Baltimore Police Department, the agency she grew up in, DC Brown said, “it’s too tremendous an opportunity to start from scratch and to build a healthy culture where we hire people who share that same passion.”

Through every stage of her journey, DC Brown has demonstrated what is possible when leadership is grounded in empathy and integrity, and centers the humanity of community members and the officers that serve them. As she helps shape the Johns Hopkins Police Department from the ground up, she is a model for what is possible when officers see themselves not just as enforcers, but as compassionate servants and problem-solvers. Her approach is a strong example for leaders everywhere who are seeking to rebuild trust, strengthen legitimacy, and deliver public safety that truly serves everyone.





ABOUT 30X30

The 30×30 Initiative is a coalition of police leaders, researchers, and professional organizations committed to advancing and supporting women in law enforcement, both in the U.S. and beyond.

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PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

Our *Profiles in Leadership* series celebrates the courage it takes to lead change in policing. These stories highlight women who have broken barriers, challenged conventions, and strengthened their departments and communities through integrity, vision, and resilience. Each profile honors those who forged the path and those who continue that work today. By sharing their experiences, we aim to inspire others to lead with courage, authenticity, and a commitment to building a healthier, stronger, and more inclusive profession.