

BANGING ONE'S HEAD ON A BRICK WALL



Mark Thornton CTArc is a Superintendent with Cleveland Police and spent over two years leading the joint Specialist Operations Unit for the Cleveland and Durham Forces.

So, you did your research, prepared for the interview and described your past experience and how it will help in the post advertised. You did well; you passed the interview and you are now the head of a collaborative venture; involving two forces who are combining their specialist operations capability.

They have been working together for many years, although to a lesser degree of formality. Now they want to take things to a new level, greater collaboration!

A small project team has been in post for some time and it's your job to take their thinking and plans forward - great, so now you can get started!

Delivering against the plan...

Delivering against a plan and reporting to the Management Board, you are truly excited and proud of what lies ahead. You know by the very nature of policing that you will have around two years to deliver your legacy before change affects the Head of Unit and you find yourself in a new post (it is what the service does).

What is actually being asked of you? Well, the forces want to see the previous iterations of collaboration set new goals, the biggest one being the deletion of a geographical boundary between the two forces' areas. In essence, a one force mentality towards specialist operations.

With the full support of both forces' Senior Command Teams, that should be straight forward enough! Shouldn't it? "OH!" And with austerity still a big issue, please reduce the size of the unit in terms of staffing compliment and structure.



Applying the 'Golden Circle'

Understandably, both forces are very different entities; they have different customs and cultures. Yes, they both comply with a Code of Ethics and the College of Policing's approved practices doctrine, but they are still very different.

Their respective strengths though lie in the dedicated, professional and hardworking staff they both employ. One of your first tasks you employ is the principle of *Simon Sinek's Golden Circle*; reminding staff of **WHY** they do what they do, not how or indeed when.

The Golden Circle principle lands well and you use this to get the staff to help design an identity for the unit; something they can believe in and not something that the "bosses dreamed up".

We won't do it the Cleveland way, nor the Durham way, we will deliver our service in a way that is right for the unit.

It is only then that you ask them to think about the concept of two forces without a boundary; guiding them to feel empowered to deploy into areas geographically they may not have expected to in the past. Indeed, their expectation would have been for someone else to have "done that job because we

*One of your first tasks you employ, is the principle of Simon Sinek's Golden Circle. Reminding staff of **WHY** they do what they do, not how or indeed when.*

36 million people have viewed Simon Sinek's Golden Circle on [TED TALKS](#)



Indeed, many months after the negotiation, it is in place, working well and is one of your best technical legacies. Loved by all staff **but more importantly** helping officers and colleagues to “Keep People Safe, Tackle Criminality and Maintain Public Confidence”.

cannot”, even when they wanted to.

The staff response

They say: “no problem boss, happy to do so **but** we need

- Access to each other’s stations
- Access to computer systems
- A deployment and tasking process
- A joint radio channel”

Your response is to say to your Senior Leadership Team; “It is our job to find the solutions to these issues, to furnish the staff with what they need”.

Full access for all team members to stations comes rather easily (only a matter of a few months) no one is being obstructive, it’s just the “stuff” that needs to be done!

The need for a joint radio channel is clear and well presented, so that would be straight forward enough and actually it is when you consider a national radio system is already in place across the United Kingdom for the police service.

Indeed, many months after the negotiation, it is in place, working well and is one of your best technical legacies. Loved by all staff **but more importantly** helping officers and colleagues to “Keep People Safe, Tackle Criminality and Maintain Public Confidence”.

What is it you do each day?

As you progress through the tenure of your post, many people ask – so what is it you do in policing? Your response is “I go to work every day to bang my head on a brick wall in terms of collaboration - so that those who follow me don’t have to!”

You start to shape your joint protocols on human resources and financial issues; a collaborative approach to health and safety and even get staff onto each other’s IT systems, progress is made every month.

It works! The public are being given a good quality of service and the staff make a massive difference every day.

Do they/will they and could the unit do more? Of course they could, there is no room for complacency. Not because the old ways were better and change is tough, but mainly because they care; if they didn’t, they wouldn’t do this work.

In a blink of an eye, your two years are up, and you move on to pastures new within policing, to assist in further collaboration (harnessing what you have learnt and adapting it for your home force).

Indeed, you are now given the opportunity of a course in this developing area of business and what you learn is: you’re not alone, you never where!

This collaboration stuff is hard, but there are those who have gone before you and have captured experiences and have put them in a tool box.

So what is the point of these ramblings?

Well, to give you a couple pieces of advice, if you know anyone destined to work on a senior leadership team in a collaborative setting, tell them to:

1. Recognise that it will be tough
2. Don’t bang your head on a brick wall, there are plenty of those who have gone before you and have done it
3. Learn from others and ask for help (then you won’t need paracetamol)
4. Get on the Collaborative Transformation Practitioner Programme and start using the tool kit
5. Tell them, by the way, that they will love the challenge.