

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ADMINISTRATIVE ADVICE FROM THE FIELD



Name: Gary Raney

Current and former positions/ City/State: I started with the Ada County, Idaho, Sheriff's Office in 1983 as a jail deputy and rose through the ranks and was elected sheriff in 2004. The Sheriff's Office is a full-service agency with a large jail, a consolidated

emergency communications center, and policing duties that include three contract city police departments. I have also held the positions of vice-chair of the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission, the chair of the Peace Officers Standards and Training Council, the chair of the Idaho Criminal Justice Grants Council, the president of the Idaho Sheriffs' Association, and a US attorney general appointment to the board of the NIC.

Primary duties and responsibilities in your position as sheriff: While the county commissioners are statutorily bound to provide funding for the jail, as sheriff I am solely responsible for the operation of it. As we all know, there are many different philosophies about what that should look like, but mine is that it should be a positive and safe place for staff and inmates and that we have an obligation to help inmates improve their lives and reduce the likelihood they will reoffend. The

Ada County Jail has been recognized as a model jail by the U.S. Department of Justice, jail experts, and others since about 2008. Our jail and its related services include:

- A 1,300-bed facility that has housing areas that range from maximum-security single cells to large dormitory settings. Every housing unit built since 2004 has been built for direct supervision, where the staff is directly interacting with the inmates 24/7/365.
- An 80-bed specialized area for medical and mental health treatment for inmates.
- Evidence-based recidivism reduction programs and a comprehensive inmate behavior management system that incentivizes inmates to be active in their success and learn good decision-making skills that translate to better decisions after they reenter the community.
- Pretrial release services that rely upon research and science to guide the judiciary in their release decisions. The research is clear that low risk offenders are harmed by being held in jail and high risk offenders are too often released simply because they have access to bail money.
- Alternative sentencing programs that allow offenders to serve their sentence through community contribution and reinvestment rather than sitting in jail.

Personal attributes/characteristics that have proven to be most helpful in my position as sheriff: While my experience has been invaluable, it is my education and personal reliance upon research and data that has helped me make the best decisions. I returned to college and earned my master's degree near the time I became sheriff and it was during that coursework that I came to appreciate the vast amount of research that is available to help us make better criminal justice decisions. There are many myths around jails like, "Let them sit there a couple days and that'll teach them a lesson." We made smarter decisions based on reliable research and that has lowered the incarceration rate, lowered the recidivism rate, and made the community better.

Along with my education, my curiosity has been a great asset. I try to be a life-long learner and I love discussions that bring forth new ideas and new ways of doing things. I have always had an open mind and I listen to people even though I may disagree with them. When you model that as a leader, others follow and I have always tried to create a collaborative learning organization.

My three greatest challenges in the role of sheriff:

- Hiring and retaining the absolute best people. Even if you're the greatest organization in the world, you should always try to be better. All law enforcement and corrections agencies are service organizations because our success depends upon the quality of people we hire and the way they interact with others, including inmates. The difference between a deputy who takes the opportunity to talk to an inmate and the one who avoids talking to an inmate is all the difference in the world. Agencies that don't develop hiring and promotional processes to put the best people in the right position are destined to be average at best.
- Leadership requires constant and iterative communication and it's easy to forget that when you're the one who is responsible to do it. Whether changing public attitudes about jails or helping employees understand the direction of the agency, success comes by not only having a vision but by being able to explain it in a way that people buy into. Then, you have to repeat those messages over and over and over. Sometimes it seems like you've beaten a subject to death, just to then see someone new "get it."
- Changing attitudes and perceptions about jails. Even today some people think the right way to deal with crime is to make more arrests. We know crime and criminal behavior are complex problems that

require complex solutions. Forward thinking people now recognize the critical role jails play in criminal justice and that they are the pivot point where we can intercept offenders early in their lifestyles and redirect them to be healthy, positive members of our community. We need to be prescriptive about the way we deal with offenders. Some need locked up. Others need enough education to get a job that pays enough to live on. Still others need help dealing with the physical and sexual abuse they experienced as a child. Many need to overcome substance abuse and mental health issues. We are learning more all the time, but right now we are at an exciting time when we are seeing change come at an exponential pace.

Personal accomplishments during my administrative career about which I am most proud:

- Having a consistently high rate of employee satisfaction. Happy people are productive people. Just before I became sheriff, I initiated an annual employee satisfaction survey as a report card on our leadership. We consistently had about a 94 percent satisfaction rating across all employees that work in the jail. There are few organizations that could exceed that, regardless of who they are.
- Changing the jail from one that was probably better than average to one that was nationally recognized as a model. We have had people come from all over the nation to watch and learn how we run our jail. That makes the jail staff and me proud and reminds us of the importance of what we do.
- I have been fortunate to meet and learn from many criminal justice leaders from across the country who are changing the nation, if not the world. Those opportunities came because I was involved. I count that as an accomplishment because I controlled my destiny. Over time, I moved from being more of a listener to being someone people wanted to listen to. It's a good feeling to contribute.

Advice for someone who is interested in occupying an administrative position such as sheriff:

1. You must be educated. This is the information age and just like the CEO of a business, the modern criminal justice leader has to be knowledgeable in many areas. You must not only know how to do the job but how to do it differently, in a better way and in the right way. We have moved from corrections

being a high-school educated blue-collar job to one where advanced degrees are common and the modern CO is an educated professional. The future will only further that trend and leaders must be the example of the educated professional.

2. Good leaders are passionate. Leadership is hard because it takes a lot of time and effort. It's not for

those people who want to send e-mails and then go home at 5:00 (or the end of shift). Leaders need knowledge, but they also need to be committed to the success of the organization and willing to put in the time and effort to make it better. One of the most common failures of leadership is not having the courage to do the right thing rather than the easy thing.

Source: Used with permission from Gary Raney.