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Dr. Chuck Katz Body-Worn Camera Interview
5/13/2015

PM: Pat McCreary

CK: Chuck Katz

PM: Hello. I'm Pat McCreary, Associate Deputy Director at the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and today I'm speaking with Dr. Charles Katz as part of BJA's Body Worn Camera Podcast Series. Dr. Katz has served as a federally funded research partner for the Glendale Police Department, BJA's Smart Policing Initiative, the Arizona and Nevada Project Safe Neighborhoods Projects, the Glendale and Scottsdale Police Department's Problem Oriented Police Initiatives, the Chandler Police Department Zero Tolerance Project, Phoenix TRUCE, and the Mesa Police Department's Gang Intervention Project.

He has also served as a local evaluator for dozens of police projects related to the implementation of law enforcement technology. Currently, Dr. Katz serves on the BJA body-worn camera expert panel. Dr. Katz, thank you for speaking with me today.

CK: Thanks for having me.

PM: Great. To start, you recently worked on a body-worn camera study with the Phoenix Police Department. What was your biggest take away from that experience?

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CK: I think that the most interesting thing that came out of that study was our appreciation for the civilizing effect that body cameras bring to an incident or to the field. What we mean by a civilizing effect is it appears as if there's a decrease or a de-escalation of energy if you want to call it on the part of the police officer, on the part of the resident or citizen who they're communicating with for several reasons.

People appear to be a little bit more professional. People appear to be a little bit more calm. There aren't quite sometimes the same emotional highs that we will have in that people appear to be simply more civilized to one another, both in terms of the police as well as the public. What we aren't sure of is whether that...of what the mechanisms in which how that has taken place and whether that's a result of what we might call deterrence or is a result of sort of increased procedural justice taking place.

What we mean by deterrence is are the cameras making people more aware that they may be held accountable for what it is that they say or what it is that they do in the field and they become concerned about how others might view them from an outside perspective, and as a result, they may alter their behavior, become more civil to one another out of concern of how others might view it.

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On the other hand, we think that there might be also some issues going on with procedural justice in that folks treat one another more kindly, more professional, more appropriately and as a result the others do the same thing and it results in a cycle in which people are just simply more civil to one another. So we aren't sure if it's the result of people are holding themselves more accountable out of concern that they might get in trouble for something that they say or do or if it has to do with the fact that simply people are behaving more appropriately and more civil and that's resulting in other people acting more civil.

But we've seen that in a number of occasions. It is not unusual for an officer or a civilian to report that the conversation completely altered once somebody realized that a camera was on. You can oftentimes tell that a camera is on by an indicator light or a neon color that shows up when a shutter is shifted and all of sudden a citizen or a witness will notice that a camera is on and their demeanor changes rather abruptly and it's very obvious.

They'll say 'is that a camera,' 'is it on' and their demeanor changes very rapidly. It's been very helpful in terms of deescalating some of the tensions that can sometimes take place in a field.

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PM: That's very interesting. The research really is providing some insights I think for the criminal justice community. Next question, based on your work in Phoenix, what are the most important items to consider for body-worn camera policy development and program implementation?

CK: I think that it's the least obvious ones from the perspective of the police because they're typically much more hidden from your everyday officer working the beat or your administrator. It's the back end processes that I think are perhaps the most complicated to addressing. On the front end, I think that the policy development is extraordinarily important in making sure that you have buy in from a variety of different key stakeholders, including officers, management, union officials, the public, civil rights organizations.

People understand and are on the same page with which direction the program is going and how the policy is going to move forward, when does the camera need to be turned on, when can it be turned off, how long is evidence going to be stored for, policy issues just surrounding the entire implementation and programming of body-worn cameras in the field. Related to that that some folks forget about in terms of policy is there's a lot of the backend issues related to IT and policy oriented issues and dealing with the courts.

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So based on policy how are we going to be housing our data? How long do we keep the data for? How much storage space do we need? Is it going to be at the police department? Is it going to be on the cloud? Is it going to be managed by a corporation that has expertise on this or is it going to be managed by the department or city or county IT department who may have experience in these types of issues?

Another issue that I think that folks need to be very careful with is issues pertaining to how all of this information will affect prosecutors. One of the most interesting things I think that we found in Phoenix that we were not aware of was the impact that it was going to have on attorneys following the receipt of the evidence and it ended up being overwhelming to a number of the prosecutors and while we anticipated that it would have an impact on them, we did not anticipate that it would have an impact to the level that it did.

In the end we found that for about every hundred officers that have a body camera, you need about one paralegal to be working with your local attorneys to go through the evidence, determine where points in the video are that are important for the attorneys to be dealing...this is a very time consuming process and it takes a certain level of expertise and training to be able to address these issues.

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And the same thing goes with redaction, media requests and some of these types of issues. These can be extremely time consuming. There was a study conducted in Mesa by a colleague of mine, Justin Reddy (ph.) where he was looking at redaction issues and what they found was that for every video file that was requested by the media or by others on average took eight hours of redaction.

So in other words, if somebody requests it and it needs to be publicly released, it is an enormous amount of work to go through and make sure that the identification of juveniles can't be picked up, license plates need to be blurred, people's confidential information whether it's social security numbers, possibly some people's names and the others, it's a complicated process and it's a very time consuming process.

And so I guess my point is is that it's one thing to put the camera on the officers and simply ask them to turn them on and turn them off at policy dictated points in time, but it's another thing to deal with all of the work that goes along with that video that is captured. It's a complicated process, it's a time consuming process and it's an expensive process that people are still working their way through.

PM: That's a great point. And I know from BJA's research and support working with the field we're identifying some agencies that are more progressive and so agencies can learn from

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one another, but at the same time, each individual jurisdiction needs to adhere to its local and state statutes which may be different than in other jurisdictions so there are factors that need to be taken into account.

You recently facilitated sessions at the White House for BJA's body-worn camera expert panel. What did you learn from that event that you'd like to share with police executives and communities considering implementation of a body-worn camera program?

CK: I think that's a really interesting question. There was a lot that went on at that event. We learned a lot. My biggest take away from it was how quickly implementation of body-worn cameras is moving across the nation. It is moving at an extremely rapid pace. People are moving very quickly and as a consequence there's a lot of issues that are going along with the rapid adoption of technology and you hear different stories about what's taking place.

When you have conversations and as the event unfolded, we realized about a number of the complications that agencies have as a result of their attempt to move very quickly into implementing body cameras into the field. And you have some very large agencies that are attempting to move forward fairly rapidly and with that can come a lot of issues and complications because you have a large agency, you have a lot of body cameras, you

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have a lot of information that needs to be recorded and sometimes when people are moving fairly quick and my big takeaway was that, you know, sometimes I think we need to take a breath.

We need to take a step back and we need to work with agencies and emphasize to agencies that we need to develop a strategic plan in how we're going to roll out body cameras and that strategic plan can take place in a number of different ways but the bottom line is there needs to be a plan in place with timelines, with goals that need to be reached and that involve multiple actors or stakeholders that need to be involved so that people are involved in the process, everybody's on the same page and that you move in a linear process because of the importance of what is going to be recorded.

What we don't want to see is that there's problems with when devices are being used, when they're not being used, how that can impact issues in the courts down the line. This is important evidence that will be being collected and we need to make sure that it is implemented correctly and properly. We certainly want to move at an expedited pace is that's what the agency believes that they need to do, but at the same time my takeaway was that we need to move judiciously and appropriately in a way that is planned out and the processes are in place to do it properly.

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PM: Those are great comments. From BJA's perspective, what we're seeing across the country is that those agencies that recognize that it does require kind of a phased approach whereas that strategic planning and policy development and community and stakeholder engagement occurs first and then when they have that consensus try to consider kind of procurement of actual body cameras so that's very helpful.

You spoke earlier about research and what it's shown us regarding the use of body-worn cameras. If you would conduct further research on one aspect of body-worn cameras, what would you choose and why?

CK: As much as I know that this can be complicated in terms of addressing issues with unions and personnel (unint.), I think that if there's anything that the Smart Policing Program has taught us is that we need to think about how we can use technology to create synergies or create efficiencies within an agency. In other words, how can we use our resources more efficiently but yet at the same be more effective and I think body cameras are an excellent example of this.

We know that a very small proportion of officers, anywhere between 2 to 6 percent of officers in a police agency, are responsible typically for 50, 60, 70, 80 percent of complaints or problems within a police department and what I would like to see is

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research that would examine instead of distribution of body cameras throughout the city which can be very costly in the early years when you're getting your infrastructure up, what I would like to see is an agency test out what it would be like to use these cameras and implement them with the problem police officers themselves.

So in many agencies that would mean you might only need to have 20 cameras. That could be your pilot study to look at the impact on officers who do generate the most complaints or who are engaged in the most use of force, whatever it might be. But the idea would be to take the few resources that an agency might have that they can dedicate to body-worn cameras, place those and emphasize that technology and use on those that the agency believes that it's most needed and where you can have the quickest and most dramatic impact I guess in the shortest period of time.

But with that, I fully recognize that there's a number of personnel issues that can come across with that, union issues that can come along with that, but in terms of being able to use resources efficiently to get the most bang for your buck, I really think focusing those resources on those officers that perhaps need that the most would be something that needs to move forward and could be helpful to some agencies with limited resources.

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PM: That's an interesting concept and I would imagine if it was done in a manner that was really seen as less punitive but more as a training assistance, that that's an interesting concept.

CK: Well, I think that there's some examples out there of agencies that have done those like things and with early warning systems that we've seen implemented particularly out west where there has been policies already developed that suggest that no, this is not going to be used for punitive purposes or disciplinary purposes but it is going to be used to if you will re-enculturate an officer back to where they believe that they should be.

And a number of early warning systems, you know, will identify an officer who has a divorce or will identify an officer who's going through some sort of personal problems. This was particularly an issue with officers coming back from Iraq, Afghanistan, other areas where there was a great deal of conflict and we were able to use early warning systems in a way of trying to move officers back to how they used to behave so to speak and how they used to work in the field before this traumatic event or issue occurred.

And sometimes it's just a simple matter of reminding them okay, this is an appropriate means of moving forward. You can see here this strategy escalated the situation or here's how you may have wanted to look at things from a different perspective. But these types

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of things can be implemented without the use of disciplinary procedures. Now there are other consequences to it in terms of how this data may be used in the courts and by prosecutors and others, but it does not have to be used at the mechanism of discipline, but instead it can be used as a mechanism for training and bringing officers forward in a way that will be beneficial to their career in the future.

PM: That's very helpful. It's been a great interview today. I have one last question. What is the most important device you would give an agency considering implementation of a body-worn camera program?

CK: Move slowly. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket and implement body cameras department wide on your first go. I think that it's important to have a planning guide or strategic plan to move forward, develop policies that are appropriate, pilot test it with a small number of officers, a small number of officers that's going to be dependent upon your jurisdiction whether that's a handful of officers or 50 or 100 officers, but something that is manageable that you can make changes in a fairly rapid means before your program goes up whether it be department wide or issued throughout squads or whatever it might be.

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But move purposefully but don't be overeager about moving toward an agency wide body-worn camera program too quickly because it is a complicated process and you want to make sure to get it right as quickly as you can and have as few side effects as possible.

PM: Let me thank you, Dr. Katz. We are grateful you could speak with us today to share your knowledge on this important topic. We encourage law enforcement, justice and public safety leaders whose agencies are interesting in learning more about the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit the National Body-Worn Camera Toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc.

This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with adoption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes. We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of these resources and especially the Body-Worn Camera Toolkit have been designed as a national resource, your resource.

Please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. This is Pat McCreary, the Bureau of Justice Assistant signing off. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

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