

MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



THE CHIEFS

I sat across from the newly elected sheriff to brief her about TIP. The success of the TIP Program was dependent on her support. I briefed her on which of her contract cities was using TIP and on the benefits of the program to citizens and to her deputies. When I finished, she asked: “*Why isn’t _____ City contracting with TIP?*” I told her that despite our best efforts over 5 years, they just did not seem interested.

The sheriff didn’t hesitate. She didn’t wait for me to leave. She picked up the phone and called her Lieutenant who was the Chief of Police in the City in question. She asked “*I’m here with a guy from TIP. It seems like a good program. Why aren’t you using it?*” I didn’t hear the Lieutenant’s response, but the conversation was brief. The sheriff hung up, smiled, and said, “*He will call you tomorrow.*” The Lieutenant called me 5 minutes after I left the sheriff’s office. “*We want TIP here,*” he said brusquely.

That brief (but somewhat dramatic) encounter with the sheriff was a learning experience for me. The lesson: **It is important to have a relationship with those at the top of our user organizations.**

Today that seems like a simple and rather obvious lesson. But before that encounter with the sheriff, I wasn’t focused on chiefs. I had relationships with the TIP liaisons in user agencies (usually someone down on the chain of command). Yes, I occasionally would say “Hi” to chiefs. But I didn’t focus my relationship building efforts on them.

Why? When I thought of meeting with chiefs, I talked myself out of it with thoughts like... chiefs are busy; chiefs can’t be bothered with a small program like TIP; I already have good relationships with personnel in the departments; and TIP has worked just fine without my strong relationships with chiefs...why change strategies now?

It took the brief encounter with the sheriff to make me realize that I needed a relationship with chiefs to “bring TIP to the next level.” So, for years I made that a priority.

It paid off. I found that chiefs could be very helpful in many ways... by vouching for TIP with non-TIP agencies; by giving TIP credibility by speaking at various events and by speaking to TIP recruits and family members; by putting TIP in their budgets and keeping us there; by providing TIP needed

resources (audio visual, conference rooms, community relations dept...); by explaining TIP to elected officials; by opening doors to key people and organizations in their jurisdictions; and generally by letting the personnel in their departments (including TIP resistant personnel) know that *“TIP is a good program. Support it.”*

One of my favorite TIP memories was traveling across the country to Harvard University with the Carlsbad, CA police chief to compete on TIP’s behalf for a major national award (and \$100,000). Our job was to present TIP in 5 minutes to a panel of prominent leaders from across the country. Although I think my part of our presentation was good, when the chief began to speak, I could see everyone on the panel perk up. His presentation “sealed the deal,” and TIP won the award and the \$100,000.

Many of us have champions within our user agencies who do much of the above. I certainly value these internal champions who help TIP on a day-to-day basis. But I believe that TIP leaders can and should supplement these relationships with relationships with their chiefs.

Here is what I have learned along the way about how to establish relationships with police/fire chiefs...

- **Make meeting with Chiefs a priority.**
- **Make the time.** Building relationships with Chiefs is not time consuming. Two or three 20-minute meetings annually is all it takes.
- **Do research on a chief before meeting them.** Try to find something you have in common.
- **Research the Chief’s city before meeting.** Know what’s going on there including challenges, successes, politics...
- **Open the door:** When you call for an appointment be specific with the chief’s secretary. *“I’d like 20 minutes of the chief’s time to brief him/her on TIP and to bring you all my homemade candy apples.”*
- **Be nice to the Chief’s secretary:** While waiting for the chief show interest in their secretary. (*“How long have you worked here?”*) Give the secretary your treats to share with the chief and those in their office. On an ongoing basis send the secretary news and updates on TIP to share with the chief.
- **In the first minutes of the meeting with the chief, find something about the Chief to appreciate...** even if it is only *“I appreciate you meeting with me. I know you are busy.”*
- **Show interest in the Chief before launching into the TIP presentation.** *“I know you are new here. How are you liking the job? It seems like a tough one.”*
- **Provide a brief update on TIP:** Focus on feedback you have received from their officers and local citizens about TIP.
- **Ask the chief for help, even if only in a small way:** *“We are graduating new TIP volunteers. Can you speak?”* (Chiefs love to speak.)
- **Thank the Chief for meeting with you.**
- **Acknowledge the secretary** as you leave.

Repeat the above 2 or 3 times a year, ideally around holidays so you have an excuse to bring your treats. For example, at Thanksgiving time: *“I’d like to stop by to bring you my famous pumpkin pie and to briefly update the Chief on TIP.”*

Over time, the TIP program will become for chiefs a tangible program with a face and a personality (yours!) The program will no longer be just a line item in their budgets.