

Transcript for The City Speak Podcast Season 4, Episode 4, “Everyone Needs a Buddy”

[A message from a member of the League’s Business Leadership Council]

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[Podcast theme music begins]

Adriana Temali:

From the League of Minnesota Cities, this is City Speak. I'm your host, Adriana Temali. And we are back this week talking to city leaders, and I'm super excited that we have Chief Naomi Plautz from the city of Wadena here. [Podcast theme music fades out] I'm not gonna take anymore time because she's got some great information to share about her leadership journey, so we are just going to dive straight in.

Adriana Temali:

Well, Chief Naomi, I am so excited that you're joining me on the League's City Speak podcast today. Thank you so much for being here, we're delighted to have you.

Naomi Plautz:

Thank you, Adriana. I am actually very honored and humbled that you've asked me.

Adriana Temali:

So glad that you're here. Let's just dive straight in, and I wanna ask you, I know, I've heard through the grapevine that you had always wanted to work in law enforcement. So tell me a little about what drew you to public sector, but specifically to law enforcement.

Naomi Plautz:

Okay. So it sounds cliché, but I have always wanted to help people. And that's my story and I've stuck to it all my life, because that's the truth. Since ninth grade, I never tolerated bullies or people taking advantage of people who couldn't help themselves. So I wanted to be that, uh, savior, if you will, for the people who couldn't do that.

Naomi Plautz:

So that's what drew me to, to law enforcement way back then. I had no idea in ninth grade what I really was getting into when I started law enforcement [laughs], I will tell you that.

Adriana Temali:

You definitely made a great career out of it. And so we're here talking about leadership today, and you have been the chief since 2013, is that correct?

Naomi Plautz:

Correct. Yes.

Adriana Temali:

Okay, awesome. So, what we've been doing on the season so far, is, is talking about how leadership is something we all have to learn, we're not just naturally born as leaders. It's something that we have to experience and grow with.

Adriana Temali:

So, tell me about how you've learned about becoming a leader, and maybe a story about something that's really impacted you and your leadership style.

Naomi Plautz:

So, I began my law enforcement career as a licensed police officer in 1998 at the city of Wadena. I was working part-time a few years prior to that. But my full time, first full-time job was here. And I had a couple of mentors that really helped me along my, along my journey, and as a young police officer in central Minnesota — also being a female officer in central Minnesota — just wasn't very common. So I really felt like I always had to prove my worth, prove that I could do the job.

Naomi Plautz:

And so, the few mentors that I had, I leaned on them when I needed advice. In 2005, one of those mentors, his name was Pete Rash, he died in the line of duty. He suffered a heart attack after struggling with a suspect. And then within a year after that, my other mentor, Gary, left to go do other, other employment. And those two guys were like, if you could consider you have a favorite uncle in your family ...

Adriana Temali:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Naomi Plautz:

... they were both your favorite uncle. You could talk to them about anything and they wouldn't judge you, they wouldn't belittle you, they would support you, give you advice, and then turn around and tease you. Um, [laughs] you know, and, and so that was very life changing and altering for me at a young age in my career. And it was almost like, well I gotta do this on my own now. [laughs]

Naomi Plautz:

And I've always been a strong individual, independent, driven, focused, but everybody needs somebody that supports you in your role and in your job to be able to continue — in your personal life and in your, your professional life. And so, yes, when both of those two guys left the profession, I was like, "Okay, I'm on my own." But I, I could do this. And I learned quickly that I could, and I did. [laughs]

Adriana Temali:

That's awesome. It's so nice, I love the phrase that you said, everybody needs somebody to be supporting you.

Naomi Plautz:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Adriana Temali:

It's so nice that you had two mentors along the way. How has mentoring played a role, then, in your career or your leadership?

Naomi Plautz:

The way that they were mentors to me, I took that to how I am as a supervisor today. Not being judgemental, not being critical. Although you have to be able to give advice and be specific about it so somebody can learn to know what they need to correct themselves and how, but just without that judgment piece. You know, everybody needs to, to learn, and that's been pretty important. I've always had a very good relationship with all my officers, one-on-one, and that there's an open door policy, and there's no judgment when they need to come in and, and ask for advice.

Adriana Temali:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, fostering that sense of a true team really takes that mentoring role of really looking out for everybody without judgment, and allowing space for people. I really like that. And it sounds like you've got a team that's built on a really strong culture in your police department. Tell me a little bit about how you handle things when life gets hard. I know resiliency is like a little bit of a buzz word, but what do you do when things get tough?

Naomi Plautz:

So, when things get tough, I put my faith in God. And that has been something that I've really relied on. And whether you believe or not, that has helped me through my times. Obviously he still has me here in this position for a reason. Whether it's for my officers, or our citizens. Sometimes citizens still come to the office and they only wanna talk to me. They just don't want to talk to somebody else that they just don't know. You know, I've been here over 20 years, and so a fair amount of people know me, and then when they you, they trust you.

Naomi Plautz:

And as far as my officers go, everything we do, our, from our training to our health and wellness for the officers, I want everybody to be their best self. And, how do we go about that? They still are hesitant when there's a little bit of change, and we all know how much change law enforcement has had the last probably six, seven years, even. Especially the last couple, but ...

Adriana Temali:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Naomi Plautz:

... for sure we've been changing, a lot. So, I just want them to know they're, that we're in this together. I mean, I still have to go through the changes just as much as they do.

Adriana Temali:

Well, you just mentioned something that is certainly happening all across the nation right now. Change in law enforcement is happening rapidly, and in the last two years, as you mentioned, there's been a lot of it. I'm wondering, do you have any sort of thoughts or words of wisdom for all of us who are experience rapid change, but maybe even particularly for those working in law enforcement?

Naomi Plautz:

What I've found that is super helpful, is to have a mentor or have somebody that you're mentoring, but do these things together. You know, not everyone's gonna get along all the time, and in smaller departments, or larger departments. So find your, find your buddy. Find your friend. I also think it is incredibly important for law enforcement to have friends that are not in law enforcement. I can't stress that enough, because we get all wrapped up in how horrible the world is because we see it day in and day out, but you need to have friends who can bring you back to earth and, and realize not everyone is a liar, [laughs] not

everyone's a cheater, not everyone's a thief. You know, there are really good people out there in the world, yet.

Adriana Temali:

Well, I think that sounds great. I really like that idea of everybody should find a buddy, I think that's a thing that everybody in every workplace needs. And I think that when you're at the top, that sometimes can be extra hard. And so I really appreciate you making that as a recommendation.

Adriana Temali:

It's been just delightful to chat to you today. Thank you so much for coming on the show. It's always great to see you.

Naomi Plautz:

That you, Adriana. It was a pleasure.

Adriana Temali:

Well, I've really enjoyed the conversation with Chief Naomi today. I am a huge fan of mentoring, so I was so glad to hear her talk about the impact that has had on her and the way that she brings that into her leadership role. I really, really enjoyed her talking about how hard change is, and the fact that everybody needs somebody. We all need to find a buddy in order to do the hard things together, it just makes it easier. So, words of wisdom from Chief Naomi today.

Adriana Temali:

So that's it for our show today. I wanna thank all of our listeners for tuning in, and of course [Podcast theme music begins] a huge thank you to our guest, Chief Naomi Plautz of the city of Wadena. We adored having you on, and it was great talking to you today.

Adriana Temali:

As a reminder, you can find The City Speak on all the places where podcasts are found, and you can rate and review us. We also love to hear from you. So please get in touch with us with any comments or suggestions at podcast@lmc.org. Until next time, take care. [Podcast theme music ends]