



Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.

Passion for the Job

4 signs your LE partner is in crisis (and how to help)

A focused question can confront a person with an integrity issue that may be interfering with his wellbeing, his career, and his (and perhaps your) safety

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The essence of integrity is wholeness and unity of character. Integrity is who we are. Integrity is a choice, although it can be battered by circumstances — chipped away by life's challenges. That challenge could be a family crisis, depression, substance abuse, or just a temporary funk.

Our closest partners — on whom our lives and careers often depend — might at times need our help in maintaining their integrity.

Here are four signs your partner may be in crisis and how you can observe and understand any change in your partner's integrity.

1. Behavior Changes

Changes in energy level, lack of attention to self-care and appearance, less interest in conversation or normal recreational activities all may be signs of a life stressor. Moods can change, of course, but significant shifts in routine and demeanor can be a sign of a struggle to cope.

2. Hidden Outcry

Persons in distress will often be vague in expressing their need for help. Whether they lack the

vocabulary, can't really identify the source of their trouble, or just give hints hoping someone will pick up their cues and provide support, a good listener will hear what's really going on.

Unusual conversation themes, hypothetical questions, expressions of defeat, or avoiding certain topics can tell you that something significant is below the surface. A direct question may seem intrusive, but if you sense something needs attention, ask a direct question about your suspicions.

If you're wrong or they don't want to talk about it, you've at least established yourself as a person who cares.

3. Distancing / Secrecy

Furtive texting, unusual break-time patterns, avoiding conversations, increasing use of sick days, and a sense that "the old Bob I know isn't around anymore" can tell you that there is something going on that involves shame or secrecy.

It could be an inappropriate sexual relationship, substance abuse or other addiction, or even illegal activity. You may want to confront the person and offer them help, or at least let them know you are there to listen.

4. Change in Empathy

When a person who previously seemed to care about others becomes suddenly cynical, or when a person who used to be stone cold starts letting things shake them up, it can indicate a life change that is challenging the person's core identity.

It may be a positive self-awareness or religious conversion, or a sign of maturing and adjusting to the weird world of law enforcement. Either way, the transition in world view can be rough and a sympathetic ear can be helpful.

Your Intervention Can Save a Life

If you have a reasonably close relationship — either personally or professionally — a focused question can confront the person with an issue that may be interfering with his wellbeing, his career, and his (and your) safety.

Bear in mind that asking "why" questions is less effective than asking "what" or "when" questions. "Why are you so grouchy lately?" will yield a less helpful conversation than "I've noticed you've been a little down lately. When did that start?"

If your colleague's job is suffering, your best role might be to make your supervisor or human resources department know about the person's behavior. If you know someone who has helped you — or someone else — through a rough patch, offer to help set up an appointment.

If there is ever a [sign of potentially suicidal behavior](#) don't just be a sympathetic ear — insist on professional help for your colleague and follow through to see that it happens.

We take risks when we choose to offer help to a friend or colleague. Which will we regret more: wishing you had or wishing you hadn't?

About the author

Joel Shults operates [Street Smart Training](#) and is the founder of the National [Center for Police Advocacy](#). He retired as Chief of Police in Colorado. Over his 30-year career in uniformed law enforcement and criminal justice education, Joel served in a variety of roles: academy instructor, police chaplain, deputy coroner, investigator, community relations officer, college professor and police chief, among others. Shults earned his doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri, with a graduate degree in Public Services Administration and bachelors in Criminal Justice Administration from the University of Central Missouri. In addition to service with the U.S. Army military police and CID, Shults has done observational studies with over 50 police agencies across the country. He has served on a number of advisory and advocacy boards, including the Colorado POST curriculum committee, as a subject matter expert.

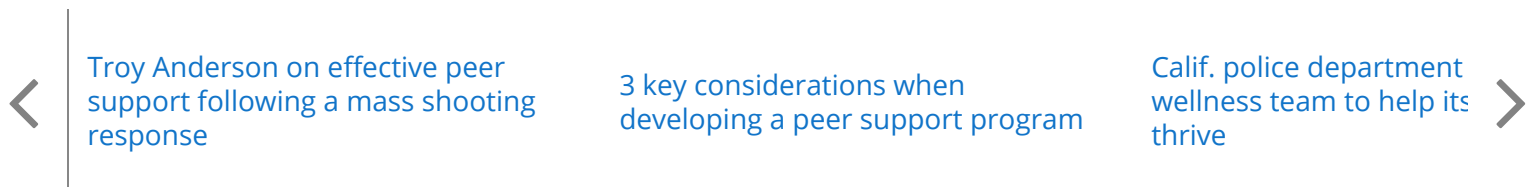
His latest book *The Badge and the Brain* is available at www.joelshults.com.

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