Administrator's Response to Broadcast Media Report

It is common practice for local governments not to discuss personnel matters and for good reason. However, recent public statements by a former corrections sergeant compel a response to correct the public record.

In a broadcast news report aired last week, the former employee described viewing an internal Sheriff's administration document he discovered at the jail facility. He made assumptions about the origin and context of the document and did not attempt to seek clarification from anyone in leadership about the purpose or confidential nature of the document. Instead, he made several copies of the document and proceeded to distribute them to various individuals including other command staff and subordinate employees. In his own words, he did so "knowing I could be disciplined."

In justification of his action, the former employee stated, "I drew a line in the sand of right and wrong, and I am standing on the right side of history." This former employee is unfortunately mistaken. His deliberate actions were directly contrary to the expectations and responsibility of a command officer and leader within the Sheriff's Office. His conduct violated applicable department rules including, but not limited to, respect for their associates, engagement in insubordinate conduct, personal conduct of such a manner that discredits the office, failure to effectively supervise, duplication of official agency documents without express authorization of the Sheriff or designee, and disrespectful conduct or language toward a supervisor. These latest transgressions caused an irreparable breach the trust in the former employee culminating in his termination.

This former employee went on to comment about conclusions reached in a formal review of the work environment at the Sheriff's Office released on July 7. When asked about the County Administrator's conclusion that interview statements did not meet the definition of a toxic work environment, the former employee offered, "I don't believe he was paying close enough attention if he wasn't able to connect those pieces."

Responses to interview questions did reveal some employee disagreement with management directives, work assignments, and personal accountability. Employees may not agree with a certain management style, but that is not "toxic." By contrast, sending a package of manure to a coworker's home is an unmistakably deliberate display of negativity, disrespect, aggression, bullying, and harassment intended to undermine the coworker's mental and emotional health. That intentional act does meet the definition of workplace toxicity.

The former employee concluded his broadcast interview by stating, "I just think it's a leadership problem, the inexperience that this administration has." Individual opinions may vary, but a demonstrated willingness to confront shortcomings in a contractual relationship, to directly address an employee's offensive behaviors, to critically critique an employee who is not meeting expectations, or to give an unfavorable performance review are all hallmarks of true leadership. I, for one, fully support Sheriff Clark and his command team as they continue to confront such challenges despite the near constant barrage of orchestrated and insincere social media speculation.