




Clear Career Professionals

How Excluding HR Fuels Dysfunction and How to Fix It

2026 Employee Relations for Public Safety Workshop

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This session is not about changing who leads; it's about strengthening how we lead. By partnering earlier with HR, improving communication across the organization, and developing supervisory skills that prevent avoidable employee relations breakdowns.



Learning Objectives

- Recognize the patterns and behaviors that create toxic work environments.
- Understand the link between HR exclusion and deep-seated dysfunction in departments and cities.
- Explore how traditional government structures often restrict communication and reinforce hierarchy.
- Learn how HR and leadership can work together to rebuild culture through accessibility, communication, and shared purpose.
- Leave with actionable practices for restoring alignment, trust, and collaboration across the organization.



Toxicity is never random

Common patterns in dysfunctional departments:

- HR left out of leadership, discipline, and cultural conversations
- Command-driven structures that isolate decision-making
- Defensive, information-controlled environments
- Silence and rumor thriving without transparency



Leadership and Command Structure Assessment

Evolution of External Ties and Professional Relationships

This department's leadership has not maintained collaborative relationships with outside regional partners. Prosecutors and judges often expressed concern over the quality of case submissions, poor communication, and lack of professional courtesy and engagement. These issues have hampered the department's ability to support prosecutors, participate in joint initiatives, or avoid costly legal challenges.

Summary Assessment

The command structure of the Poteet Police Department is shaped by several factors, all of which are more influential than by transparent, professional standards. Leaders have not kept pace with contemporary policing expectations and have instead focused on internal or community public service. Executive decisions have frequently departed from accepted police obligations, and only policy alignment.

These conditions have contributed to a culture of internal division, decreased accountability, and growing exposure to organizational risk.

Reform cannot occur until the current executive structure. The department requires leadership, supported by clear policies, leadership standards, and alignment with its governance. Only then can the department rebuild its reputation, meet its obligations, and reestablish its role as a respected municipal public safety agency.

POTEET, TEXAS / POTEET POLICE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONAL REVIEW

POTEET

POLICE



Warning Signs of Toxicity



- High turnover, low engagement, and “us vs. them” attitudes
- Emotional reactivity in leadership meetings
- Information gatekeeping; decisions made in the dark



➤ ➤ ➤ How can HR be an innovator and energizer in shaping the culture we want?

The Inner Compass

Great leadership begins with self-awareness. The Inner Compass helps you recognize how your emotions, tone, and habits influence others. When you regulate your reactions, you create steadiness that others can rely on.

In the 540 model, the Inner Compass sits at the center of everything:

- it shapes how you respond
- how you relate to those around you
- how you show up for the people you shield, support, and empower.

INNER COMPASS



The Cultural Thermostat

Leadership behavior sets the tone.

- Consistency matters: People follow what leaders consistently model, not what leaders claim.
- Communication drives culture: Silence, avoidance, or mixed messages create rumor and distrust.
- Candor requires safety: If people can't raise concerns and share facts without fallout, the organization stops learning and starts protecting itself.



When HR isn't part of the daily
rhythm of leadership,
dysfunction takes root.





Do people feel more capable after
interacting
with me?



HR's Opportunity and Responsibility

HR's dual role: organizational protector and people partner

- When dysfunction appears, it's not an HR issue alone, it's a leadership issue that's been allowed to fester

What HR must do once at the table:

- Establish open and dependable communication pathways
- Bring both data and discernment (compliance + connection)
- Offer courage and candor: "HR has to say what others won't."



The Partnership Standard

PARTNERSHIP



**SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY**

COLLABORATION

Vs.

PARALLEL



**INDEPENDENT
WORK**

LOOSE ALIGNMENT

HR's responsibility:

**Speak up, show up, and
stay engaged, even
when uncomfortable**



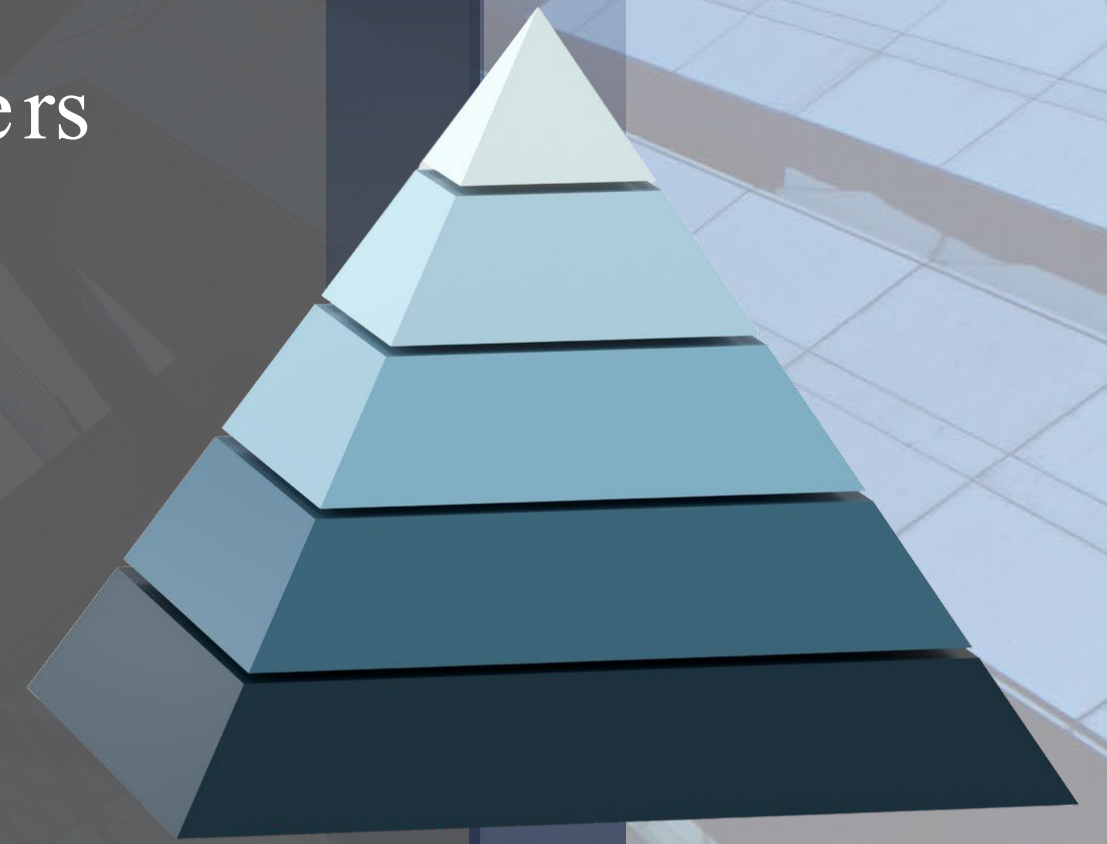
When Hierarchy Blocks Truth

Traditional government structures often reinforce the wrong flow:

- Information climbs the ladder slowly and selectively
- Firsthand operational information is filtered through layers of approval
- Leaders are left managing perception instead of facts

Results:

- Disconnected decision-making
- Culture shaped by rumor and assumption
- Employees see leadership as inaccessible or unresponsive





Who am I becoming as a
leader?

Pathways, Not Process

When HR and public safety leadership communicate freely, culture stabilizes.

HR's role in opening those pathways:

- Facilitate conversations across ranks and functions
- Design communication rhythms that aren't dependent on crisis
- Model accessibility and presence: visible, approachable, consistent





The Connected Leadership Concept

Connected Leadership:

- Leadership isn't diminished; it's distributed
- Communication flows around, not just up and down

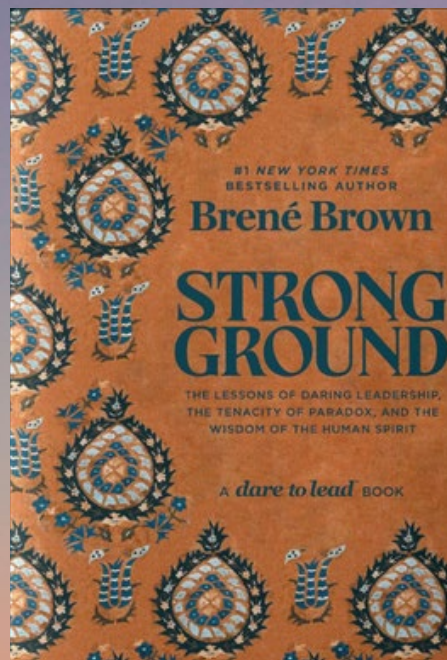
What it looks like in government:

- Leaders, HR, and key staff gather regularly to share information openly
- Input flows horizontally across departments, not just vertically
- HR sits as a central connecting presence, not an outside authority

The background of the slide features a vibrant orange and yellow sunset sky with a large, bright sun. In the foreground, three hikers are silhouetted against the sky as they climb a dark, rocky mountain peak. One hiker is at the bottom, reaching up to assist another who is higher up. A third hiker is at the top of the peak, also reaching down to help. The scene conveys a sense of teamwork and overcoming challenges.

Strong teams don't stay divided; they grow
through shared trust.

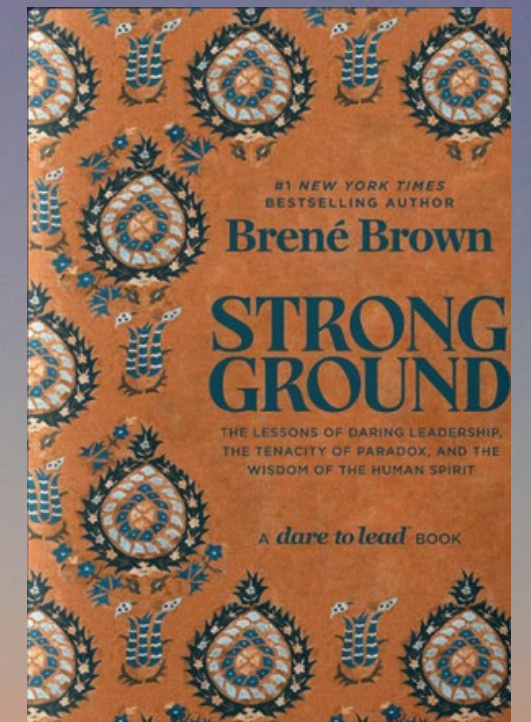




STRONG GROUND

A *dare to lead* BOOK

BRAVING TRUST



BOUNDARIES

Setting boundaries is making clear what's okay and what's not okay, and why.

RELIABILITY

You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

ACCOUNTABILITY

You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

VAULT

You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

INTEGRITY

Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and practicing your values, not just professing them.

NONJUDGMENT

I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.

GENEROSITY

Extending the most generous interpretation to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

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Antidotes + HR Playbook

Leadership antidotes:

- The Power of Presence: leaders with presence don't overshadow others; they elevate them
- Burn Barrel Authenticity: transparent, direct dialogue
- The Culture You Create: consistent leadership behavior sets the tone

HR's playbook:


- Establish structured communication channels between HR and department heads
- Coach leaders on communication and conflict response
- Create safe feedback systems for employees
- Reinforce culture through transparency and accountability





What mask or persona do I need to
“burn”?

The Recovery Process

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- Recognize dysfunction early
 - Realign communication structures to support truth and collaboration
 - Reinforce through consistent actions, not slogans
 - Culture repair takes consistency, not programs
 - Trust becomes sustainable when communication becomes normal, not exceptional



Thank You

For Your LEADERSHIP

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