

LORNA MCEWAN

Chief Inspector
Manchester British Transport Police



Lorna is a uniformed Chief Inspector for the British Transport Police covering the Manchester District. When the pandemic hit, Lorna and her team had to adapt and respond quickly to continue to support the public effectively.

LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

“My team operates 24 hours a day, the pandemic was frightening for everybody, so we had to focus on being able to keep our people safe and on the move, responding and adapting to the different challenges this brought. From understanding the different PPE and adapting this from a clinical environment to operational policing, communicating the changes and getting people comfortable with the kit they were suddenly being asked to use.

It was about ensuring our people felt safe at work, making sure they felt valued and special. They're coming to work when everyone else has been asked to stay at home.

My job as a leader was to keep them motivated and give them that proverbial (socially distanced) hug. A big part of my leadership was stepping up and making sure they felt supported and that their concerns were heard. None of us have ever policed in a pandemic, so it was all new.”

MANAGING FOR THE PUBLIC

“The public has an expectation of the force. So whilst we might not have been as busy with calls, we have had a lot of other demands on us and had to adapt quickly. I'm proud of my team and how adaptable they have been picking up the responsibility and actioning it at speed.

Although the new legislation is written down in black and white, it often isn't actually black and white when you start to unpick it. By having open conversations with my team on the front line, actually delivering it, brings different viewpoints and experiences into the picture, which has been invaluable.

The people on the ground are the key people, all the time. As leaders, we can write strategies and tactics, but it's the people on the ground that do the delivery so it's so important that they are included.

For me a leader isn't a rank, it can be anyone, a good leader is one that's effective at capturing someone's imagination to inspire and motivate them to do the job. Explaining why we are doing things so they are on board with us.”

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

“The biggest thing I've learned about myself as a manager and a leader through the pandemic is my personal resilience. I was coming into work on the odd day feeling flat or low and I think I was being a bit hard on myself sometimes, which could then translate to me being hard on my teams.

By stepping back, I learned it really is ok to not be ok, it's ok to feel a bit flat it's perfectly normal, and you're coping, still resilient. By taking that ten minutes for a cup of coffee and having that time for myself I can then, in turn, manage my team better.

My approach has changed from learning and speaking to other managers and leaders that I've met along my leadership journey. Where something has lit that leadership fire in you and you've done that extra bit of work or research, you then have those tools to navigate through the uncertain times.”

ADVICE FOR THE FUTURE

“The key piece of advice I'm giving myself for the next year is to keep my own leadership knowledge and skills up to date and really look at what's out there. There are so many fabulous leaders out there, and even though we're in different industries, you can still learn, adapt and add it to your toolkit.”

I'm taking the time to develop my management skills, working on resilience and wellbeing, finding things my team can use. I'm aware that this is not a normal time so we need to be careful that we don't lose people mentally or by what we're asking people to do. My personal mantra is to keep on top of that, learn and network so I can be a more effective leader, which then directly benefits my team.”

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

“When I joined the police in Glasgow in '97, I was one of two females on shift. Now where I work, I see females everywhere, we're balancing up! It's an improving picture, as a force we are trying to do better, but I do think as a service the police have to modernise the way we look at things and some of the roles that people are working in.

Being a female in leadership, I think it's important that I am a role model to people and that I'm always accessible. As well as ensuring I'm getting involved at a force level, ensuring my knowledge is up to date and getting stuck into any changes and to keep challenging the way we do things. ”

Lorna completed the CMI Level 5 Certificate in Management Coaching and Mentoring in February 2021.