

## #81 (GINA HAWKINS)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. Gina Hawkins is the assistant Chief Deputy for Cobb County Sheriff's Office in Georgia and an experienced police leader with more than 35 years in blue under her belt. We chat about leadership in policing the personal sacrifices people make to move and become a chief and the need for support networks to get you through the day.

Hi, I am Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is the Reducing Crime Podcast.

Gina Hawkins is the assistant Chief Deputy for Cobb County Sheriff's Office in Georgia, a former chief of police for Fayetteville, North Carolina, and before that she served with the Atlanta Police Department in 2020, the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives. It's just easier to say NAWLEE, awarded Gina the Women Law Enforcement Executive of the Year Award, and she now serves as the organization's president.

She's also a member of the National Association of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association. She has a bachelor's from Georgia State, a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University, and in her more than 35 years policing experience has completed a slew of major police leadership courses, including the FBI National Academy, PERF's SMIP, and the Harvard Kennedy School's Executive Education Program. In 2019, Chief Hawkins was awarded the North Carolina Dogwood Award for pursuing community solutions to North Carolina's most pressing safety issues. This episode gets to the core of leadership and policing, the personal sacrifices people make to move departments and become a chief and the value of support networks across the career. It's quite an episode. I've been wanting to catch up with Gina for a while, and fortunately, the IACP conference in Boston provided the perfect opportunity.

### Gina Hawkins:

So I think why I feel like I'm living my best life Jerry right now is I'm okay with being imperfect and truly okay with choosing where I am, who I work for right now, and being me and having my beliefs and understanding others, and I don't have to be as politically correct as I used to be in the past.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

What a lovely place to be.

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**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh my gosh.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I have to be okay with being imperfect because that's what I am and I've got no choice. [laughter]

**Gina Hawkins:**

I know, but everybody's not okay with, it's like you realize you're not perfect. You got to be okay with it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think you're being hard on yourself because trying to schedule something with you, here you are all over the place. You're involved in NOBLE the Black Law Enforcement

**Gina Hawkins:**

Association.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You are the vice president.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I'm the president in April. Starting April. Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, congratulations. Or commiserations, I'm not sure which it is because it's always work, right?

**Gina Hawkins:**

It's a heavy lift.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Okay, so that's the National Association

**Gina Hawkins:**

Of Women Law Enforcement Executives, and this is like a sorority each other. As you go up in this profession for a long time period, you start knowing the other women in those positions in other ranks. So you become friends along the way.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've spoken in the past to

**Gina Hawkins:**

Vera,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Vera Bumpers and Carmen Best, and you guys all connect and know each

**Gina Hawkins:**

Other.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is that connection important?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Absolutely. It's important because so many different things happen. The joys of what we're doing, the excitements of our family lives and saying yay, and then the challenges so that we have each other on speed dial to say, you okay?

What do you need? Because sometimes you need to vent or sometimes you need to say, okay, I got this situation, what you think or sometimes you need to just truly vent and cry. They understand it's hard. This is all working. When people say you going to a conference in Boston have fun? I'm like, I don't often get to have fun. I'm going to meetings and meetings, but when I can group with my peers and connect, it's important. Especially like you said, we are at a time where there's fewer and fewer and a few of them were at major city chiefs and they look around the room and they say, whoa, it's not even as much as it was last year.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. It's still a bit pale male, and stale.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, everybody's going to be a bit older except for you. I mean you look like you're in your twenties. It's really annoying

**Gina Hawkins:**

And you're right, but then I know I stay in it and then our peers who've been in it past 30 years, the debate of why are we still in it and I'm still in it because I know I have work to do for the future. I need to help with the up-and-coming leaders realize, okay, learn from the mistakes that we all have made. Please listen now let me help you get ahead because you need to go further. You need to keep the baton going.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But you guys have had shared experience going through it. It really sounds like having people you reach out to possibly not even in your department

**Gina Hawkins:**

Absolutely

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Gives you a wider breadth of experience to draw on because everybody's going through it in different ways. Right.

**Gina Hawkins:**

It is definitely important the ones that are not in your department because being at an executive level, you have to be able to trust to share what's going on and the trust that the person's going to give you advice from their perspective. I'm outside the bubble, lemme tell you what I see or lemme tell you what I experienced and vice versa.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I spoke to a British police chief who said one of the things he didn't appreciate when he became a chief constable, which is the leader of the organization, was in the nicest possible way, how lonely it is

**Gina Hawkins:**

Because

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's nobody else in your organization that who really gets it

**Gina Hawkins:**

And they tell you that going up. They're like, until you sit in the seat, you don't get it. To be able to go outside and say and sometimes say nothing. There have been times with our small groups, chief Davis of Memphis, Vera, Linda Williams who retired from top physic and Secret service. We just show up at her house and we're like, we're just going binge on TV and food. But that's it. Sometimes getting together just to say nothing, that trust and support is there because it's very hard to be lonely in this position,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

A tragic outcome. The murder of George Floyd, President Obama had the 21st Century Commission report. One of the pillars that came out was around officer wellness.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh my goodness.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, I joined the job in 1984. You joined the Atlanta Police Department. If I'm right in 1988, we never talked about that. Nothing. Zero nada, nothing. It was just not on anybody's radar.

You went to all sorts of horrific things. You dealt with some weird shit internally in the police department and you're supposed to suck it up.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh my gosh. So that's another reason why I'm still doing it, that mental health and wellness portion of it. We are getting a little bit better, just a little bit better with other agencies recognizing the importance of it. But to reflect on it, I was a kid, right? 21, no one told me that what I was going to see was everyday trauma and that it was going to affect me and that I was going to have to figure it out and deal with it. What they told me was, suck it up. You're supposed to not have emotions about it. You're supposed to take it in, write the report and move on to the next thing. But I'm extremely passionate about it right now. I do a lot of training with valor and even when I was the chief going through it, especially after 2020 strongly getting funding to have mandatory counseling, they hated it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But when you make it mandatory, it doesn't make it feel like you're targeting me.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes, exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Most people are probably fine, but if you target specific people, they're going to feel called out. Whereas if you make it for everybody, even the people who seem to be fine,

**Gina Hawkins:**

But then you also have to get the right type of counseling. It's just not anyone to understand and then make sure it's not connected to the agency so that they have that anonymity. So many people, sneakingly came up and said, thank you for making us go. I didn't realize it and I didn't realize I needed this help. Then they'll say, but don't tell anybody. There's still this atmosphere of

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Stigma of seeing counseling stigma. Yes.

**Gina Hawkins:**

So one of the things that we have to do is not only tell in the academy, you're going to go through this, it's going to happen, but we're going to have resources for you. When it happens, your supervisors going to say, go to the counselor, go get help, including your personal life. Personal life is challenging, and then it continues on. They need to have normalize.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

One of my friends, a previous podcast host, Steve James was telling me when he was in the military, you would do a six month training for a nine month deployment. And he said, in policing you do a six-month training for a 30 year deployment.

## Gina Hawkins:

Forever and forever of chocolate up. Don't do anything about it, and if you say something, you will also get critiqued, criticized, or looked at that you're not fit. You couldn't take it by your peers. So the culture consistently looks at you strange. I remember having one officer who had saw the murder of a 10-year-old and he has kids and he was breaking down and we were like, it is normal. You are human. If you weren't human, then we need to make sure what's going on with you.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

So this brings me to then thinking about do you think the reputation that policing has of being this kind of standoff, suck it up basically man up kind of approach is one of the inhibitors that brings more women to the job. Because I look overseas and I see that British policing is now at 36%. Women, the academy classes in New Zealand for about three or four years have all been at least 50 50 the norm, and here we are maybe scraping up the best. I think the 30 by 30 people term is about 14%, and for police leaders it's two to 3%.

## Gina Hawkins:

At most, at most. So I think the culture of our history in policing in the US has to one, recognize how we started recognize it started by this theme of I'm going to control the environment with do as I say, mentality. If you go to the basis of Sir Robert Peele, it didn't say anything about that. It said be it a part of the community. It said the same thing in 21st century policing said, and we forget about that and I think we forget about the training that we had in the academy. Once we step out and get exposed to the culture who want to stop learning and stop being human and stop thinking that we have to listen to the community or understand the community. It takes work to care. It takes work to continue to care. We get in it because we care, but it takes work to communicate and make that thing of I'm going to keep getting better. I want to keep learning from mistakes along the way.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's interesting then because it changes the nature of what police are doing when they turn up. Because so much of it has been, I'm turning up, I'm in charge. But what we're really talking about is, okay, this chaos unfolded before I ever got here. Right? So these people are going to have to sort it out. What's my role in helping everybody sort this out rather than I'm just going to sort the whole thing out.

## Gina Hawkins:

Or you call me, what do you want?

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

And of course, I did the job for 11 years and you're still involved. The public never know what they want. They have no idea what they want. They just want to make it stop.

## Gina Hawkins:

Exactly. And they know they need your help. So they didn't call you to agitate you. They called you. They need your help.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes. They didn't provide a to-do list. Here's exactly what I need from you. Here's a fucked up situation. What we'd really like is you to unfuck it. Please.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yeah. Or I don't know what's going on. I'm scared or I need help.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Nobody's ever calling the police when everything's going great.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yeah, exactly. That's the best day of their life that they're calling you for. So we talking about our own mental health in law enforcement and we're not even the reflection of the community mental health. They're going through a crisis with their family members and their family members are acting out of control and they want to be protected, but they want to protect them. That little balance and then the officer shows up and unless they're trained to have recognized what autism looks like, what mental health breakdown looks like, they're going to go and see somebody aggressive.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, I just still do ride alongs. So I've been to so many of these where you turn up and it's like, well, do you want us to arrest him? And they're like, no, it's family. Well, do you want us to call social services? They're like, no. They come here every week, they're useless. And at that point it's like, what would you like me to do? Distract him with sock puppets? They don't know.

**Gina Hawkins:**

That's right. Remember, those first six months of training doesn't implement anything into the extra continued training that we have to learn from all the analysis of what psychological imbalance looks like, what it looks like if you're going into diabetic shock, right? The medical things that we have to know to respond to. It's enormous for law enforcement. And then some people don't want to know, don't want to learn. We're talking about leaders don't want to teach their people how to deal with it. And then the crisis happen.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We've been trying for a while now to increase the ratio of women in policing. What are we doing wrong? What do we need to do better?

**Gina Hawkins:**

I think we just got to talking about a little bit about mental health and the balance of being able to have it all. First of all, if there's such a thing, there is no work-life balance. Something's going to be sacrificed at some point. I have two daughters

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And one of them just got married. Congratulations.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Married, and then two years ago, the other one graduated from college. So I have two adult daughters, which is a bonus, but along the way of my career, I had to figure out who was going to take care of them, how I was going to nurse them, how I was going to do all those things, which is a lot. And if you don't have the family support or advocate for family. So I think the first thing that needs to change is the thought that you don't have family or can't have family for men and women. Right? Because men who have families should be taken off for the same paternity leave as women when they take off for maternity leave.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Absolutely.

**Gina Hawkins:**

And it should not be looked at by the culture of police to say, why are you doing that?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's amazing that actually wanting to care for your kids, not that I have any, not that I'm paying for

**Gina Hawkins:**

It's a negative thing in our

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It is stigmatizing.

**Gina Hawkins:**

It is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How is that the case? And yet we go to calls for service And We complain that people aren't raising their kids,

**Gina Hawkins:**

Their kids. Absolutely. So I do truly believe that when we start understanding in allowing it for the men to normalize being a parent and being able to take off as a parent, then they will also normalize women being able to adjust their schedules. Be a parent. Unfortunately, I think it's going to start with the men. Then we allow for women to not have to choose family or what your passion of law enforcement is. Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you talked about the importance of family support when you were raising your daughters, and yet after 20 something years in the Atlanta Police Department, you moved to be the chief in Fayetteville,



**Gina Hawkins:**

North Carolina. Yes. And it was a, oh, we not get into that because that might make me emotional. I had a 16-year-old at the time and I had not moved and gone anywhere in the Atlanta metro area because of my two daughters.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So this was a huge leap for you?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Huge leap because it was important for me that they had access to their father. We weren't married at the time, but always, no matter where I moved, they needed to have access to their father because, so I literally asked my daughter, what do you think? And Jerry, she was okay with it, and I went through the process of a long process along the way she went, the whole thing. I even thought about what family support I would have there for her even though she was 16

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because her father's in the Atlanta area.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Atlanta area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You were moving up to North Carolina.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I got the position Jerry and then had the moving truck, literally had the packing up for the moving truck on a Sunday. I got served with custody papers for my daughter. Geez, Jerry. When I tell you I had an emergency hearing on that Friday. It was a summertime on that Friday for custody, and I was at the same time working on a global conference. Literally at the same time. I went from having to hire two attorneys because my daughter decided she didn't want to go and kept it a secret with her father to not share that with me, but to fight for it through court in a custody battle. And I lost custody of my daughter that day. That was the worst day of my life. And I had to truly go in my faith and trust God that he was going to cover her and the decision I made to leave. And truly, it took a couple years, but I had to go in there and tell the command staff crying, Nope, my daughter's not coming. They knew she was coming. I had the school set up and everything and I had to tell them no. So I guess you guys get to be a children. And I had to focus and know that she pretty much was going to raise herself and that was very hard. So she's good now. She's good now.

But even the trauma of that for

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You, that was years ago.

**Gina Hawkins:**

That was years ago.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Gina Hawkins:**

That was 2017. And even now

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It feels like yesterday, doesn't it?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Because never would I have imagined as a mother to lose custody of my daughter. The everyday impact that I had of her, and she was 16, she didn't realize, but she was just scared. It is important for me, for my daughters to make sure their life is stable, even though my life was crazy. She had always been in the same neighborhood, the same community, the same environment, great school, great support. So for her, she was like, the unknown, I don't want to do this. And it was easy for her to ask her father to say, I don't want to go. And he went that route, which is literally, it was a Sunday, Jerry. So aside from that, had she said no, I would not have even applied, and who knows where I would've been at that time, I would've stayed there. I'm like, no, I'm going to stay here. Navigate just until she wants to go where she wants to go, then I can venture off and choose what I want to do. It was a learning experience, but it was still very traumatic

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Of course. And these prices that people pay in a job that because of the decentralization of policing in the United States, if you want to have leadership executive level positions, you're probably going to have to move.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Leave. You're going to have to leave. You're going to have to pick up and move and go someplace else. Where you have the opportunity, especially for women, where those opportunities, you have to have a resume that's beyond, beyond. You can't have a peer resume. You have to have the experience, and then you have to have support of somebody's going to take a chance with you because you're a woman, not take a chance with you because you're experienced, because you're a woman.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I mean you've got this multiple factors of one being a woman in policing. So you run into the standard misogyny in the community and then whatever we have in policing.

**Gina Hawkins:**

The expectation from the community as

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, and then being black on top of that.

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**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes. And Hispanic.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you're just piling it all into,

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yeah, it's a whole lot of, but it's a benefit to me then I can see it from all perspectives and especially see it from the community side. So although I've been in law enforcement all my life, Jerry, I'm truly an activist and I've been an activist for people. I'm an activist for the community, and I'm the only one in my family in law enforcement. So I can always imagine what my family does not know what our rules, what the law is because they're not breaking the law, but they might get stopped by an officer. So you need to react in a certain way because this officer may not be fully trained, or they may come from an agency where they're being trained and taught constitutional base things, or they must be exposed to an agency that's small and rural and they know nothing besides the first time, the minimum training they need,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But they think they're a great cop.

**Gina Hawkins:**

They think they know it all. They know they, and they have the power. When we get in this profession, we come with the heart. We need to be trained on the trauma that we're going to see. We need to be continuously trained on being open to say, if we implement this training for best practice and test it out and it doesn't work, then we got to say it's okay to let's readjust. Think about no, no-knock warrants. Right? Think about getting in there just to save the dope for me and flush down the toilet. Right? At the risk of somebody's life, your own life. I myself came up, did the gangs and gun unit in Atlanta.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a gig.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh my God. And I reflect on how dangerously we would go into places and thank goodness we were covered. We would just go in trying to rush in with no knowledge of no information, no intel or anything, and get in there. That was so dangerous. I lost a very close friend who was in my academy class, been to my wedding baby shower. She was killed in the line of duty doing a search warrant. The vest went under her right of hoe.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Under the armpit is always the weaknesses,

**Gina Hawkins:**

Let alone a woman having a vest fitted for her is different.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes.

**Gina Hawkins:**

She doesn't have one until more recently. They're trying to adapt to that. Just even the equipment for women, that's a danger.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So the move to Fayetteville was traumatic from the very start.

**Gina Hawkins:**

From the very start.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I think God balanced that out because the community was welcoming.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's in the public domain because I've read the newspaper that the city council seemed to have voted to settle some months ago because you ran into problems of that. We were just discussing about misogyny and problems, about Racism,

**Gina Hawkins:**

how they treat you,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And was that from within the department to some degree, or was that more the city council and from the city

**Gina Hawkins:**

It was more the city council because wanting change and making change happen, you're going to come up against the wall internally,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

As I so frequently say. Cops are very optimistic. Only two things they hate. How are we doing it right now? And change.

**Gina Hawkins:**

So when you're trying to change it and you're doing it consistently and you're doing it for the betterment of the whole organization, you're going to have people who challenge you and people will change. And unfortunately it's increased a whole lot across the nation with false attacks, false statements that happen to leaders. North Carolina doesn't have sunshine laws. So sunshine laws, you can't learn about an investigation. You can't know about people's personnel records unless they're terminated. You can't see body-worn camera. It's different than Georgia. Georgia. Everything's open. So you can't tell why somebody's being investigated internally. You can't tell why I've disciplined somebody, why I'm holding people accountable.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, even increasingly, what's worse is they're not held accountable for just doing the basics of the job.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You don't even have to screw up and do anything that gets a criminal and get jammed up, do work. There's a lot of mediocrity.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh my gosh, it's a lot of, I've got the title, so I'm just going to have lunch, eat breakfast, and go home. And you're not going to lead the people or help the people under you who are doing the work. I did a lot of accountability in the organization and I was fair with it. I was like, I don't care what rank you are and it's progressive. I believe in truly people need the opportunity to learn, make mistakes, but after you've been told 10 times, then I got to hold you accountable.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But without the capacity to make it transparent and open, then it just allows rumors to run rife right

**Gina Hawkins:**

Lies. Because publicly the outside can tell lies and then I'm defending lies. But when there are political people attacking the leaders, the women leaders who wouldn't attack the male leaders in the same manner, and you got to speak up. You don't treat people like this. If you wouldn't treat the public the way you treat me or another employee in the organization, then I'm going to hold you accountable. But ultimately it wasn't everyone. It was just enough though. And they knew it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You ended up having a lawsuit with them and that makes sense.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yeah. It didn't even have to go to a lawsuit. It was a letter for the record. That's fine. No, for the record,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's never clear. When you're reading the newspapers, did you know that it was going to be problematic when you moved there?

**Gina Hawkins:**

No, not at all. I knew it was going to be challenged, right? Because wherever you move to my first move from Atlanta to the small city of Sandy Springs going to be, but that was more internal, right? I knew going into the third one I went to, it was going to be problematic because they didn't know me and I was probably taking someone else's position.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You so often find with city councils anywhere that they've always got their favorite internal candidate. They've known for years who probably isn't going to do anything. Don't rock the boat. Let us continue to run the police department. Even though I'm an expert in Being a realtor or a plumber, I'm a city council now. So now magically I'm an expert in policing,

**Gina Hawkins:**

Right? We want change. We want to make a difference, but we don't have to make the hard steps to do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes, we want change. We want to make a difference, but we don't want to actually change or make a difference. I've often thought that we should spend more time speaking to the city and council managers because they're the ones who are doing the hiring. They don't know anything about policing and they're hiring police chiefs. So police chiefs can go in and talk about evidence-based policing and community policing and talk utter nonsense and get hired. Is that something that organizations need to explicitly take on? Do we need to actually actively spend more time educating managers and certain ways?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think there are definitely some cities that do it right, that really care and want to get the right fit for their community, but there are some communities that still do the whole thing of who you know or

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The safe bet From Within the agency.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes, I don't want to rock too many boats, just keep it flowing a little bit longer.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And was talking to the people in 30 by 30 about was this recent criticism was directed seems to be an all women in policing as a result of one incident, the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump in Pennsylvania,

where people just looked at a snapshot of information and decided to judge all women in policing the same way. And I think one secret service agent came in for extensive criticism,

**Gina Hawkins:**

Thoroughly

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Unwarranted based on probably a 30 year career for a nanosecond.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I think it's definitely the power of ignorance. The power of ignorance,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Never underestimate the ignorance of the public,

**Gina Hawkins:**

But also never underestimate not just the public. The culture still has that evolution of facing their own biases, right? Wanting to find a reason.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The criticism seemed to come from both the public as well as a lot of former law enforcement who like to be talking heads on televisions for two seconds. Were you surprised by that?

**Gina Hawkins:**

No, I'm not surprised. I'll say the power of ignorance, truly Jerry, when it happened, I didn't believe it is because I have had too many times as a chief preparing for him specifically or any other political person come into my city, I know how much we work, we debrief and we set and plan and prepare. I know what that looks like and there's no way that would've been open. I was like, no, there's no way that could have happened.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

People that came in for criticism was one the actions of the secret service agent at the time. And then secondly, the executive who was in charge of the organization, and I've always found this to be preposterous, this notion that you come in and you head an organization, you are instantly responsible for every minute decision made by absolutely everybody in an agency that you took over what? A year ago.

**Gina Hawkins:**

And there comes the double-edged sword, Jerry, maybe a lot of people will say, I ask too many questions. I do when a plan has come up, when my team for my agency wants to execute a warrant or wants to do a plan of action for a special detail, I'll want to ask and I want to know about all the details of the plan because ultimately I tell them I'm responsible, period. So if you tell me I'm good with it, but if you don't tell me, if you tell me I got it and don't tell me the details, it takes time to build that trust

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because otherwise, pretty much every police chief in the United States is one bad shooting away from unemployment.

**Gina Hawkins:**

It is, yeah. So it's the difference of overly asking questions or trusting and the trust does come when they've shown you. They know the steps to take. You believe they're going to take all the steps.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How long do you think it takes for somebody to come in from the outside into a new department, go be a sweet spot whereby you've built up enough trust that you can survive the odd bad incident, but the tenure of police chiefs in the United States is really short.

**Gina Hawkins:**

It is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've heard three Or Four is The average.

**Gina Hawkins:**

And I did five and a half. So I was like, yay, there you

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Go.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I'm an expert. But

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Saying it takes time to build up that level of trust, the bad thing, whatever. And sometimes it doesn't. You have to be that. You can just outstate, you're welcome. But if the bad thing happens in that period, you haven't got a chance.

**Gina Hawkins:**

You don't have a chance unless you know how to handle the bad thing. Right? Very well. But if you've also never experienced a bad thing in your career, you're going to be shooting in the dark to know who to call, what to do

In favor. For me, I happen to have experienced bad things coming up in my career. So when things are happening, I knew what to do. But there are so many people who have communities that they've never experienced bad things. Just the minimum of a year just to get the trust of the small people who are around you. It may be some of the community leaders. It takes work to build trust every single day, communication actions to build trust. You just cannot be in a spot, have a title and think people are going to trust you unless they see you, unless they can talk to you, unless they can experience you.



**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Should new police chiefs focus more on the community or on politicians or within the department? I mean is it just you have to do everything you're going to say, you're going to say you have to do everything

**Gina Hawkins:**

I'm going to say the top two is going to be internal and the community, the politicians are third hands down because the politicians are hired by the community and the community is going to be the ones that say, no, I've seen her do the work. She showed up. She was honest with me. Even if the answer was not one that I wanted, she told me the why of the decisions that she was making. She held someone accountable or the why that person was doing what they were supposed to do by policy. When the politicians wanted me out, at times it was the community said, no

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Perish The thought. How dare they. Scally wags. That must be when the loneliness of being at the pinnacle of the organization kicks in a little bit. When you know people don't want you there or some people don't want you there.

**Gina Hawkins:**

But you know what? I also a person of faith and a person of ethics and say, I'm doing the right thing even if I don't want to. And as hard as it is, I'm going to hold onto that because my reputation is longer than being influenced by someone else who wants something because of the moment. So you have to be good with understanding. You're going to tell them what is best. You're going to tell them the truth, and you got to be okay to say, if this is going to cause me to have to leave the organization, terminate me, I'll be okay with that. You do have to be okay with that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You are back on great relations again with your daughter and your family side of things.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Both my daughters and we navigated that. I was on good relationship because was a child and she didn't understand and I got that. But she did have to learn a lesson of you always communicate with mom no matter what, no matter how hard it is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And now you're back in Georgia.

**Gina Hawkins:**

I'm back in Georgia.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you are an assistant chief at Cobb County?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Cobb County Sheriff's Office. Yes. And the sheriff I work for, he's a good man. He came from police department and he has been making a lot of changes that are supporting the community and trying to make the organization better, training the leadership. So he's been doing a lot of work.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are you seeing a pattern policing's change since Covid, since George Floyd?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Oh yeah, absolutely. I think 2020 was a key component for that year, not just we had covid, civil unrest, the trauma of it all for law enforcement. I think that's why making sure that we get back to the health and wellness of law enforcement, recognizing that we've navigated so much in the past recent years and you have to face that, but also facing what does that look like as we start recruiting new people to come to the organization, who are you recruiting and what method are you recruiting people for their character, which is what you should be doing versus recruiting someone who's just going to fill a spot.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I worry that a lot of places just filling the spot,

**Gina Hawkins:**

They're filling spots and really taking the effort to know you have to invest in the people and regards to what we talk about, taking care of your family, taking care of yourself, making sure you have continued training. That's the foundation.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's good that your sheriff gives you time to come and do things. Your role is president of NAWLEE. What's next for NAWLEE?

**Gina Hawkins:**

We are expanding

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And just to reiterate, this

**Gina Hawkins:**

National association of women, law enforcement, executive: lead, inspire and mentor. Trying to make sure other women are supported, making sure other women in this profession have resources and access that they don't know about. Think I got involved early on with NAWLEE because I start meeting people who are truly by themselves in a city, by themselves, in a community, by themselves in an organization. And it's very hard to be by yourself as an officer,

sergeant, deputy chief, or whatever the rank is, and no one around you look like you understand. You start sometimes feeling like, am I the crazy one? And letting them know, no, you're not crazy. Let me help you navigate this.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I did some training recently and there were people from a whole range of agencies and one of the few women that was in the class kind of introduced herself. I was the first woman hired by my department. Wow. I have to check my phone to see if it was 2024. You know what I mean? Just slipped into a time machine. What's going on?

**Gina Hawkins:**

And it is kind of normal. And here's the thing, it's hard for the men who don't even know what they don't know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I was about to ask, what is it that male police leaders can do to help women grow within their organization?

**Gina Hawkins:**

I think supporting the women and getting them access to organizations like nali, getting them access to resources when they ask, listening to them or either as a leader, they themselves need to become a member of nali. We're inclusive. And so when the men learn about the challenges or stressors that women face, then they're able to say, oh, I didn't realize that. Let me them not have to ask me for an area to nurse when they become a mother.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Last year I went to the Norley breakfast and I was just hearing some shocking stories about things that male chiefs were asking about. Oh my goodness. The women in their Department.

**Gina Hawkins:**

They don't know. It's sad. They just don't know. Do you realize that's not appropriate? Do you realize that's against the law and they don't know

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The basics? The basics? Let's start with the basics. Just a law. Just don't break the law.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Exactly. So I think for leaders and growing up, my mentors were men who themselves said, my job is to bring up the future leaders. They weren't trying to bring up future women leaders. They were trying to bring up future leaders. And what made it important for me was they were strong mentors. But also when I was honest with them on different things, I was able to tell them, but then they learned off of me as well.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And that might be it, which is we are not expecting that male leaders will know everything.

**Gina Hawkins:**

That's right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But just be open to kind of saying, Hey, you know what? If we had this, it would be great without you having to take a career risk, just going and speaking to them.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Exactly. My sheriff is building a new building, and I looked around, I said, there's not a nursing room. And he was like, oh,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Please tell me. He didn't ask what a nursing room is. No, no, no.

**Gina Hawkins:**

He said, make that happen. No, he said, make it happen. But he was easily saying, okay, make it happen.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yeah. But no one should have to go through what I did, which is find a nasty stall bathroom and keep it quiet. I didn't want no one to know. I nursed both of my daughters one for four months, the one for a year in a nasty room stall, because I didn't want no one to say, you're being treated differently because of this. Which no one should have to feel that. Right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I mean was that the 1990s or was that the 1890s?

**Gina Hawkins:**

Exactly. It was the 1990s and then the second one was in the 2000. Yep.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And we wonder why we can't get above 14% representation of women in police

**Gina Hawkins:**

In the us. Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because other places are doing better

**Gina Hawkins:**

And people need to know that. People need to understand this is just the us.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

They shouldn't think that this is the norm. We should be looking at blood like 36% in the uk, bigger in Europe, and the Kiwis of course in New Zealand doing great.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Exactly. Why is it so different there?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Obviously all the benefits that comes with having a more balanced workforce in so many ways.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Absolutely. And education shows that women are collaborative, more inclusive, over minded. We have to adjust and adapt a whole lot more, so we bring that to our careers as well.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We clearly need, I think, more research to drive this point home, but the existing research we have found is very positive about the inclusion of women in policing across the board.

**Gina Hawkins:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's so little of the job is carrying right shields and running down the road. I

**Gina Hawkins:**

Mean, yes it

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is. So much of it is going in and talking.

**Gina Hawkins:**

You could go through your whole career and not shoot your gun. That's a possibility besides training, and people don't believe that. No,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's right. Television's got so much to

**Gina Hawkins:**

Do, right. I know. Every day you're going to have a shootout. No, not really.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Fantastic. Well, thank you so much for spending some time with me.

**Gina Hawkins:**

It was a pleasure getting on you too.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 81 of Reducing Crime recorded in Boston in October, 2024. Subscribe at Spotify, SoundCloud, apple, or wherever you pod because otherwise I'll get sad. Reducingcrime.com has episode transcripts and if you're an instructor and DM me, I will send multiple choice questions for every episode.

Be safe and best of luck.