



Annual Lecture
Sir Ian Blair, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police

Wednesday 12 October 2005
Institution of Electrical Engineers

MARTYN LEWIS:

Well ladies and gentlemen as most of you know, the aim of The Windsor Leadership Trust is to bring together prominent leaders of today with people who have been identified by their own organisations as having the potential to be leaders of tomorrow. And for all of them to learn from interacting with each other in a highly focused way.

Now, many of you here I know have attended the special courses that we run at Windsor Castle, so you will know that we want to encourage exceptional leaders who will bring success not only to their own organisations but to the wider society as a whole. And together we want to reflect on the many different facets of leadership in ways which will help and inform those new leaders as they tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The purpose of this annual lecture is to listen to an outstanding leader talk and discuss leadership at some length, and we are delighted that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, is tonight picking up the gauntlet that we have thrown down for him.

Now, Ian Blair joined the Metropolitan Police in 1974 after graduating from Oxford University with a Degree in English Language and Literature. His first posting was as a police constable in Soho. He moved up through the ranks to CID and was responsible for the identification of those killed in the Kings Cross disaster. He headed the team that redesigned the purpose and structure of local CID officers right across London. He wrote a book which had a major impact on the way that the police investigate offences of serious sexual assault. He worked at the Home Office. He ran one of London's biggest enquiries into police corruption. Then as Assistant Chief Constable of Thames Valley he took charge of policing the Newbury bypass protests. He became briefly Deputy Chief Constable there before being appointed Chief Constable of Surrey in January 1998. Two years later he returned to the Met as Deputy Commissioner where he had lead responsibility for change management, anti-corruption work, diversity and information management. He has been one of the foremost advocates within the development of police community support officers. He was awarded a knighthood in 2003 and two years later became Metropolitan Police Commissioner or as the tabloids put it, Britain's Top Cop! It is a truly remarkable career and we are delighted that he has not only agreed to talk to us this evening but remained determined and keen to do so as he and his Force face the considerable challenges that began with the suicide terrorist bombers earlier this year. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Sir Ian Blair. [APPLAUSE]

SIR IAN BLAIR:

Martyn, thank you very much indeed. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen good evening. It's a great pleasure and a great honour to be here. I know of and support the work of The Windsor Leadership Trust and indeed I think in some of the remarks I shall make during the course of the next few minutes you'll see why I support the kind of multi-disciplinary approach to leadership that's represented in this room.

I set out before you not as a leader talking to people who don't know how to lead but as a leader sharing some experience with other leaders.

What I thought I might do is to reflect on my own leadership journey but also in a moment because I think you'd be surprised if I didn't, on the events of the last few months. But perhaps I should start first with just a word or two about the Metropolitan Police Service. It is

at 49,000 people that happens to be now the largest single employer in London, with a £3 billion budget it's a FTSE 100 company by any other name, and as a result of that it suffers from all the other issues that very large companies suffer from. Huge silos, feudal barons, long hierarchies. It also I think justifiably has a huge proud history and recently before my appointment which occurred on 1 February, I think in the previous five years it had come back from a very difficult situation and felt very successful. It had been rebuilt in terms of resourcing, astonishingly 40% additional resources into the Metropolitan Police Service which is unique in the public sector. Even a greater percentage than the NHS, and it would have to be almost a start-up organisation to get that kind of extra activity coming in. Crime has fallen continuously over the last few years. Public satisfaction, victim satisfaction are very high and just as a measure of it thousands of people waiting to join us including people who have waited three and four years to become police officers in London.

Now that sets a new leader an entertaining challenge, because the - all the traditional virtues and wisdom is the time to put change into an organisation is when it thinks it's in trouble. You know we'll hang separately if we don't hang together line. And I actually stood in this room which is quite a familiar place to me now on the 1st February, it was the first time the Met had ever used this room, at 10.30 in the morning talking to a group exactly this size, of the senior leaders of the Met. And we used, instead of having The Windsor Leadership Trust we had a particular phrase up there about building on past success and reshaping ourselves to face the future.

And what I did was to lay out five challenges to my colleagues. They were very specific challenges about the Met but as you'll see later on my object this evening is to see how one leadership experience looks from the perspective of others because I think they're all very similar. The first was to tell the Met that they had a widening mission. That they had to deal with a spectrum from the most serious end of counter terrorism and serious crime, to the very local-ness of policing. And the way I described that is to say that there are officers as we speak now doing, or not necessarily this time of night, doing anti-truancy patrols in Barking and in Kingston but the Metropolitan Police also has offices on the ground in Baghdad and Kabul, and that is a pretty significant mission for one organisation.

Secondly I did point out to them that though we'd had all this money we were massively inefficient and that we had a huge job to do to make ourselves efficient. That the Metropolitan Police for instance are divided into a 132 separate units and we have a 132 HR departments, and a 132 finance departments. This is the result of a very clear policy of devolution. It's a good policy but it's a very expensive policy and something has got to change.

Thirdly I pointed out that successful as we had been, it was a very uncomfortable journey for some people and that there was a class divide in policing, that there were a set of people with blue uniforms or warrant cards as we call them, and they were up here. And then there was a whole bunch of people who also were in the organisation but who didn't feel part of the team. And so part of the effort that I'm making is in relation to enabling an organisation to be full of people that work to the best of their potential because they feel very thoroughly valued.

And the story I told on that morning in this place was that famous story about the woman pushing the coffee trolley along in the NASA headquarters in the 1960s and being asked by a time and motion man, what are you doing? To which she answered, I am putting a man on the moon! Now that is an organisation that knows what it's mission is and everybody feels that they are doing that.

I also said to the Metropolitan Police and if many of you are Londoners will I think accept this, are good, in fact probably superb at the big job and I think we've just proved some of that. And we're not so good at routine encounters, and changing that was a big issue for me. And lastly we had some issues of performance where although we said we were London and we were different, we were not performing as well on some of the targets that we had in relation to how West Midlands or Merseyside or West Yorkshire or Greater Manchester which are our comparative forces were performing.

So five challenges. Lots of stuff about widening mission, working smarter, go thou, a group of 200 people if you can imagine it, go thou and sort this out. And what we set up was two

major programmes, a route and branch review of the service that has never been done before and secondly what was effectively, but I never use the term, a cultural change programme that we called Together. Because I changed the logo on that day of the Met to 'Working Together for a Safer London' which was part of the partnership vision, citizen vision of what we were trying to do. And in particular that cultural change programme was aimed at a new set of values for the organisation which would be created by the people inside the organisation and our stakeholders, as opposed to imposed by a small cabal at the top. This was a bottom up values process.

The object of the exercise was to produce this September, a month ago, a corporate strategy which would lay out the future of the Metropolitan Police for three years. However, then came two days. The first day and actually a very important day, and I want to return to it at the end, was the 6th of July. And we tend to forget the 6th of July, but we did actually win the Olympics on the 6th of July and one of the pieces that I hope many of you have seen is the presentation done by the bid team in Singapore. Because it sets out a vision of London as an open, diverse, modern, transparent city. A very challenging vision and one that clearly caught the imagination of the world. And whatever happens we have to create a police service and we were embedded in that presentation and all of the bid. A police service that's capable of producing the Games in that visualised, diverse transparent, open society.

And then comes 7th of July, and 21st of July, and 22nd of July, and 28th of July, when we arrested the people from the 21st. So a lot of dates come in. Huge events. And of course whatever I'm going to do and my colleagues are going to do with the Metropolitan Police is affected by those dates equally as much as any cultural change programme or any corporate strategy and we've got to build all of that in.

I do believe on the 7th in particular it was a fantastic team Met, team London event. And I was hugely privileged to be part of that and if I just give you one story, one anecdote, it's about Russell Square, which is the deepest of all the scenes. It's probably the deepest tunnel in London, and among the first responders to that scene, among the first police officers who had to go down - those of you who know it will know it's lifts. Well there isn't, there is actually a stairwell as well, and they had to go down that stairwell in the darkness, on to that platform. All the lights are off of course. They are told that the trains have stopped but anybody who has walked in a tube tunnel, it leaves you with a very cold feeling because there's nowhere to go if there's a train arriving, and having walked down that tunnel, because it's so close to Kings Cross you can hear the other trains still running. They walked down there, or ran down there into the back of the train, 300 yards up that train to where the carriage was, a scene of medieval carnage and half of the first ten people who got there were members of what we call our street duties course, which means they had left our training schools three weeks before. They are not entitled to work by themselves, they were in a training group but still they thought it was their job to go and do that. So however much I'm rebuilding the values I think I'm rebuilding them on a pretty firm foundation. But. We no I think have to take that into account in the way that we shape the organisation.

Let me take you if I may on what I, the second part of what I said I would talk about which is a sort of leadership journey. I joined the Metropolitan Police in 1974 and I went to the Peel Centre at Hendon and what I particularly remember is in the lectures about leadership it was all military. And as far as I was concerned as a 21 year old in a rather ambivalent world of the late 60s, early 70s, being told by what appeared to be very old men, they weren't of course, I now know how old they are! [LAUGHTER] Very old men, who showed me pictures of people in brown uniforms, in sepia photographs and told me that Slim and Montgomery were the leaders who we had to admire. And I completely rejected it because it seemed to me that the singularity of the military objective about you know taking that hill and at all costs and all those things that we absorb, doesn't work.

But of course it does work and one of the things I'm going to come to you and say now is we can't reject military experience of leadership because actually all leaders are broadly the same group of people. They all face the same dilemmas. There are leadership roles in all professions. There's no such thing in my view as police leadership or NHS leadership, or M & S leadership, or private or public sector leadership. There is just leadership. And if I take a military example I had the privilege a couple of years ago of going to what must be the greatest recruitment possibility imaginable, which is to dine in the ward room of HMS Victory.

And it's absolutely wonderful and one of the things I learned about it, apart from the fact clearly how the hierarchy worked, because it's a big ship, it's about the size of this room, there's 750 people in the two thirds there and there's one bloke here! [LAUGHTER] So he's not doing too badly. But the one bloke did something night after night, month after month, he brought what he called his band of brothers together till they knew him, they believed in him, they knew each other, they believed in each other, and at the moment when he then produced the famous piece of paper that said, we're not going to attack in the normal way, which is that way, we're going to attack that way, in a line rather than - or rather in a column rather than in a line - which was revolutionary tactics, they all said, yes, what a good idea. And I think there's something there from that lesson about how you mould a team.

But when I say of course there's no such thing as police leadership, there are skills the police are required to bring to the party. I mean there's no point in us turning up and saying no actually were just leaders, we don't do investigation or we don't do public order or whatever. We don't responding to the 7th of July. We're expected to know how to do that. But what you're expected to know how to do if you're in a command position is to lead people in those circumstances in the same way as my colleagues in the NHS, or the ambulance service or the fire brigade, on the 7th of July were leading people, in the same way as M & S would lead people or any other sector. You know your skills. But the leadership piece it seems to me is the same.

I didn't attend, I never have attended I should confess The Windsor Leadership Trust's programme. But what I did attend, probably about 15 years ago, was something slightly similar, it was run by an organisation which still exists called The Office For Public Management and it was a two year learning set, in which we had people from local government, from the BBC, from housing, from the voluntary sector. And each couple of months we met and we co-worked our way round a particular individual's problem. And by the time you've been doing that for two years you recognise the problems are all the same. There were problems like, how do you deal with budgets? Which is always an interesting one. How do you motivate workforce through change? How do you manage upwards to politicians? They were the same issues. And that was a huge piece of my understanding about how to learn.

And so while in a minute or two you'll hear we're going to set up a Commissioners Leadership Programme, the one thing it will not be is silo based. I have never understood why local government, I can only talk public sector here, why local government, health, civil service train leaders by themselves. I just don't understand it. And if I've got my perfect example it is that there is a strategic command course at the fire college at Morton under Marsh. I just don't understand why do we not put everybody together at that level when they're leading because that's where they'll learn from.

Now, when I saw Marty he did say that the one question I had to answer which of course I haven't done yet is, what do I see as - what are the tricks of leadership? I don't think there are any tricks. But I've tried to sort of think about this over the last few days about what would I say. And I've put six strands together, they're not in any particular order. The first one which I think is the job of leaders at almost every level of the organisation is to invert the view. To view whatever service, whether that's public or private sector that you are delivering, through the eyes of the customer, the citizen. I believe the Metropolitan Police has for a 170 years done a very good job, but I think it's largely producer shaped. It's not citizen shaped. We deliver a job in the way we believe and we have got a reason to believe is the way that we ought to do business. And it's very convenient to us. It's probably economically effective to us. But we're not as good in some ways as the way the citizen would like to receive it.

Inverting the view is also internal and it's the remarks I made about one team. I've talked about the class system. But if we look at 7th July, those police officers doing the jobs that they did could not have done them without the radio engineers, without the forensic scientists, without the drivers, without the builders. We built the largest mortuary in Europe in three days. Without the caterers, who went through 24 hours a day feeding people. Without the occupational health workers who are now supporting the officers who saw things that actually people should not see.

So, citizen focused, team focused. But perhaps something I have been very keen on for a number of years, perhaps a concept which I described and people never quite understand what I mean but then they get it slowly is about followship rather than leadership. Because anybody can be a leader, but if they're not following you it doesn't work. And if they're only following you in that famous, I think it's the famous army description of somebody, that they're only following him out of idle curiosity, that doesn't work either! [LAUGHTER]

And I came across some rules about followship. And there's six phrases, they're not all absolutely correct, but they're very interesting. If you've got followship you've answered this. You've got to hear me and understand what I'm saying. Even if you disagree with me says the follower, even if you disagree with what I'm saying, don't make me feel that I'm wrong to have contributed my view. Please acknowledge the greatness that lies within me. Remember to look for my loving intentions about this organisation. And tell me the truth with compassion. If you could do that, and I certainly can't, if you can do all those things in a kind of Kipling-esc way, you can do it all. Then you would be a leader that anybody would follow. But I think sometimes we do still see leadership in the wrong way in the triangle. It's all about the person at the top. And actually it's not. It's about whether or not he or she can communicate. So this business of inverting the view seems to me to be very important.

Secondly I think there has to be in all leadership positions a courage in setting the direction of travel. I think that is a very, very important point. You've got to be prepared to seek out new ways, new territory. For me perhaps the piece that has been most clear in the last few years was the journey on which I set out with a number of colleagues around creating a new tier of policing called community support officers. In the absolute bitter rejection by the unions, the federation in this case and with a deep scepticism I think it would be fair to say of almost every chief officer in the country. But we went down that route and it, so far it seems to have worked very well.

I think secondly in that kind of new direction of travel the emphasis I have been placing on values this evening is really important. The issues of, what is transformational leadership? And you will all have been through those phrases about accountability and transparency and honesty and a communication. But it does seem to me that transformational leadership is another work for value driven leadership and I will over the next few years be putting a huge amount of emphasis on the values of the organisation. I learned some of that from the chief executive of HSBC or rather the First Direct division of HSBC. And I think it would be fair to say the First Direct changed banking and he said that the first couple of years were a real struggle because they really talked about structures and processes and they kept losing people at this huge rate and then he started talking values. And he went on delivering conversations around values and suddenly the organisation came together.

And courage also sometimes is about taking time. My management board consists of some 12 individuals and when we were starting off on the 1st of February, I insisted that day after day we kept talking about how we were going to do business, not what we were going to do. And I could feel their frustration, because they wanted to get on with it. I mean sometimes I may have over-egged that, but I knew I wanted the constructive tension that would come from them being so insistent that they were a team, that they wanted to go and do it and then it was fine. So taking time is part of that courage piece.

I think the next bit is one that I don't think our organisation is particularly good at. I think it finds it very difficult. Which is about communication. This gigantic organisation, 24/7, 365 days a year, 256 outlets as we might describe it. Getting a communication process across that is a job of leaders. That's why we did this thing on the first day, 200 senior staff, first afternoon, so that that was the morning, the first afternoon, 500 staff drawn from all over the organisation and repeatedly again and again, we've done these big meetings where we've put the whole of the management board on the stage face to face. We do, I do monthly broadcasts. I go out and talk to people, so do my senior colleagues. But it's very, very hard. And in particular the hard bit is getting the feedback. I mean getting the whole organisation engaged I think, a huge job for leadership and very difficult.

The fourth for me is the passion. Leaders have to have passion for the mission. Passion for the organisation. Passion for the people in it. Passion for the people we serve. And as an example of that one of the things for which I have been most criticised by one wing of politics

and media and supported by another, is the whole issue around diversity and the importance of diversity in the organisation and being able to serve diverse communities. And for me it was really reinforced just this week. I went to a piece of London called Shadwell down by the Isle of Dogs and I happened to be walking along with an officer at the time that the schools were coming out. And just to see the multiplicity of languages and faces and people and head gear of these 12 year olds heading towards me, and realising that in five years time you know they're going to be 17 and 18, we were in a different city. So passion for something like that seems to me to be important because diversity is not just a moral good or a business benefit. For the Metropolitan Police service it's a brutal business imperative. We have to understand this city and if we don't understand it [if we don't know?] the people who understand it, then we fail.

Right, fifth point is optimism. I turn back to a, I suppose more than a military figure, Napoleon. I think his phrase is that leaders must be dealers in hope is a fantastic phrase. If you're not optimistic about what you're doing, even if you're taking people through the most difficult of change programmes, or some very difficult issues over the last few weeks, if you're not optimistic then I think you fail.

And I think last for me, and potentially the greatest and again it does not matter at what level you are leading, is that the job of leaders is to seek out, to encourage, to develop the next generation. And one of the pleasures for me is to find people that I knew when I was a relatively junior manager who I saw and thought that one, that man, that woman is going to be great one day. And now I'm the Commissioner so they might have made a mistake there but this person [LAUGHTER] this person has come through to a high level in the organisation. And that potential has been fulfilled.

I talked about the NASA story, but of course the London one is the story of Christopher Wren looking for his master mason after one of them unfortunately fell off the scaffolding. And he asked three men, and they were all men I think, what were they doing and one of them said he was cutting stone, one of them said he was building a wall, and the third one said he was building a cathedral. And again, it's the same answer, and it would seem to me from what I understand Martyn, there are probably quite a lot of cathedral builders here, not just bricklayers.

Thank you very much. [APPLAUSE]

MARTYN LEWIS:

Well Ian, thanks very much indeed for that. This as I said is not a news interview, it's really about exploring leadership. But I think it's probably an understatement to say that you've been under a considerable amount of pressure over the last few months. I wonder does that affect the way that you do things? Does a relentless build up of pressure actually affect your approach to leadership?

SIR IAN BLAIR:

Well I think it would be foolish to say that it doesn't, I mean you are in the eye of the storm, you're going to have to take decisions quickly. But I think what it does do, it probably reinforces a couple of issues. First of all the nature of teamwork, that you have to be doing this with a team of people and secondly, you have to rely on other people and you have to trust those other people. And I think although the pressure has been great, I can say to you Martyn that the privilege of meeting some of the people I've met over these last few months who have done jobs beyond the call of any duty that can be imagined, is enormously building up of your own strength and reserves

Because I would go out and I would visit the scenes or I would visit the investigators or the mortuaries or whatever else and I would just be inspired by the stories that I heard. I mean we've all been in some of that position, but this was day after day, meeting just extraordinary men and women and them being very pleased to see the Commissioner turning up. I mean I had that chance as it were that I could look some of them in the eye because as you read out, I had done the identification of the dead at Kings Cross, so when I was down the bottom of Russell Square talking to the people who were taking bits of bodies out, I could look them in the eye [I know that?].

MARTYN LEWIS: Is that important, do have actually done yourself what you're asking people to do?

SIR IAN BLAIR: Yeah. Only to the point that you, I think you have got to have done some of it. I mean I think it is, it's what I say about bringing things to the party. I mean in my organisation and I imagine in many, you cannot do the whole spread. I mean it's just not possible. You can't - I mean I've never been on traffic division, I've never been in Special Branch, I mean there's all sorts of things I haven't done, but you have to be able to say about some things, yes I know what that feels like.

MARTYN LEWIS: You've taken quite a bit of pressure from the media. Is that a distraction from the job in hand?

SIR IAN BLAIR: I think it's just part of the job in hand.

MARTYN LEWIS: I mean you talked about events affecting corporate strategy.

SIR IAN BLAIR: Yeah, yeah.

MARTYN LEWIS: But you have to deal with what the media says because the media is if you like part of a perception that the world at large might have about what is going on.

SIR IAN BLAIR: Yeah. I mean I was asked at a public meeting whether I was very upset with the way that the media had acted. And I reminded them of the words - well, what I was asked was ... piles of media there, was I going to criticise them? [LAUGHTER] And I reminded the person asking me of the alleged dying words of Voltaire, which he was asked whether he was going to renounce the Devil and all of his works, whereupon he replied, it didn't seem to be the time to be making new enemies [LAUGHTER]. I thought was a great comment. And the thing with the media is there is no point in arguing with them. As somebody else, another good comment is that arguing with the media is like having a picnic with a tiger, it's good fun but the tiger eats last every time [LAUGHTER]. And so to me it's just part of the process.

What was a challenge and I think is a challenge is something different, it's just a new perspective, which is that 24 hour rolling media on the biggest story in the world is a challenge in itself because the demand for information, the speculation, the hanging on every single word that is said and the endless recharging of that, not to mention some people sitting in studios commenting on things that they couldn't possibly have known about, is quite difficult. But I think being criticised by the media or being praised with it, comes with the turf. You just have to live with it.

MARTYN LEWIS: Is that a challenge for today's modern leaders and tomorrow, the fact that - leaders of tomorrow - the fact that in days gone by when you didn't have 24 hour rolling news you would have had a few hours at least, but sometimes maybe 24 hours to actually think about a considered to response. To consult with people. But now a lot of your reaction to events has to be on the hoof because you have this insatiable, another tiger if you like, this insatiable tiger that is just waiting to Hoover up as much information as it can and has got this incredible appetite [for it?].

SIR IAN BLAIR: Yeah, it is a challenge and one of the challenges particularly perhaps in my profession but it would be anybody in a crisis I think, is that we have to be very careful about what we say. And there's a danger about becoming pedestrian in what you say, in comparison to the commentators. I mean I think if one thought of things like, what it would have been for the Chief Executive of Shell with a Brent Spa events going on, on a 24 hour rolling media. I think he would have struggled. I mean it's a difficult issue.

MARTYN LEWIS: Is there ever a reason for saying nothing?

SIR IAN BLAIR: I think it's very difficult, you know. I mean some of the conferences we went to in the days after 7/7 were this size. And you know the back row, the whole of the back there is a series of film crews from everywhere from Japan to Jakarta. And all points west of there. And then to sit there and say we've got nothing to say I think is probably [LAUGHTER] -

MARTYN LEWIS: Not a good move, not a good move!

SIR IAN BLAIR: Probably unwise at that time, yeah.

MARTYN LEWIS: How would you sum up? Is there, are there - I mean you've given us you know the six characteristics and with plenty of you know sub-clauses in there. The characteristics of leadership. But how would you sum up the characteristics of a good leader under pressure?

SIR IAN BLAIR: I think a good leader under pressure is behaving in exactly the same way as the good leader who is not under pressure. Because if - I mean you obviously have to speed things up. I mean on the morning of the 7th of July, what I did was I summoned my management board into emergency session and we certainly weren't going to sit around discussing the values for too long at that point [LAUGHTER]. We were clearly in a very clear set of directions. That's what we're going to do. You're going to do that, you're going to do that - you - so you've got to do it at speed. But for the rest I think somebody once said that leaders are like teabags, you can't tell how good they are until they get into hot water [LAUGHTER].

MARTYN LEWIS: What do you think - I mean you've in a sense answered this question, because you think the qualities of leadership transcend all professions and all kinds of areas. But what do you think policemen in particular look for in a leader. And how, I mean there must be something that is different from leaders in other spheres?

SIR IAN BLAIR: Well I am going to make my diversity point to you now because there's policewomen out there and they need the same thing. The policemen and policewomen and police staff I just think they need good leadership, they need visibility, I think they need a lot of face to face, a sense that you understand what they're doing. Because they do, they have a concept which not many organisations have. Maybe we share it with the immigration service, some parts of the prison service ... part of health service of the unwilling customer. I mean it, we can talk customer values till you know the end of time but if one of the customers happen to be, being sick on your shoes or pointing a sawn off shotgun at you it is difficult to reconcile that with customer values [LAUGHTER]. And so therefore we've got to give them professional values to understand what they do.

And I think they do require a great deal of understanding that you've been somewhere where they are. Or if you haven't you know somebody who has. So I think there is a bit of that and I think one of the jewels in the crown of policing is the fact that as things stand at the moment every senior officer has started as a constable and therefore has an understanding of what it feels like at 3 o'clock in the morning walking down the street with the rain dripping down your helmet thinking you could have done something more interesting like accountancy or whatever [LAUGHTER]. And then be confronted instantly with a moral judgement which will take months if not years to unpick. You've got to understand what those people feel like. And that seems to me to be part of it.

But I don't think that's fundamentally different I would have thought. It would be very difficult to be a general who had never been fired at it seems to me. And I think it would be - how are you to be leading, I don't know, in the NHS without spending some time on the wards or some - I mean there's got to be something where you do some of that.

You, I don't think - and I think some of the things that we've seen in the BBC have been bringing back people.

MARTYN LEWIS: I left the BBC six years ago ...

SIR IAN BLAIR: No, no, I know, I know, but the people who have been successful Director Generals you know have been editors of Panorama or whatever else.

MARTYN LEWIS: Yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah. What leadership books have you read?

SIR IAN BLAIR: None! [LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE]

MARTYN LEWIS: None at all? None at all?

SIR IAN BLAIR: I genuinely, genuinely do not believe in them.

MARTYN LEWIS: I mean come on, you must have picked up a book at an airport book shop and ...

SIR IAN BLAIR: I have - I mean I - that's not - that's - I wouldn't want to mislead you, I have certainly picked up a book at the airport. I have looked at it and went, whoaaa!

MARTYN LEWIS: But not on leadership then?

SIR IAN BLAIR: No, no, not even on leadership and thought no - I mean the seventeen rules of engagement or something. I don't think it works that way. I think you learn leadership and I know what your next question's going to be! I'm [inclined?] to say you learn leadership from watching other people. Your next question is going to be, well which other people? And I'm actually going to say, dozens of them. The good or ill.

MARTYN LEWIS: Any one or two heroes that - the people who would sum up your concept of leadership as perfect.

SIR IAN BLAIR: I don't think so. Because I think my concept is myriad. It's mosaic of people. What I am absolutely certain is that there is no perfect leader. I mean whoever you are you have the bits that you don't do as well as other people do. And in fact I think one of the pieces like any other skill is that you have to try and do harder the bits you're not so good at. Every now and again though when you're the top leader you decide that you're not going to do those bits any more and that's just great [LAUGHTER].

MARTYN LEWIS: Ian, when terrorism strikes a city, people look to the police as the first line of defence and we have now what is for Britain a new kind of terrorism. The, with the suicide bomber. And some say that it can only be tackled with a new kind of law enforcement which might not sit too easily with the open society to which we have become accustomed. Hence the debates in parliament that are going on at the moment. How difficult is it to lead when the changes in the rules that you want for an organisation to make you really effective are being challenged by elements in the wider society that you are trying to protect?

SIR IAN BLAIR: Well I think we live in a liberal democracy, the liberal democracy is under threat, but it's not under threat so much that it needs to you know throw away every tenant of its history. What I am pleased by in the current debates is that some voices coming from the police service, the Crime Prosecution Service are being listened to. They're not necessarily being agreed with, but there's room for the argument. And that seems to me to be right.

But I actually go back Martyn to something I think fundamentally more important than the structure of the law or important though that is going to be and I am - this isn't the time for it - but I am a proponent for the changes that are being put forward, you know I've been part of those conversations. And I go back to the 6th of July. By the time we reached 2012 this is going to be a city even more extraordinarily a world city than it is now. 2012 will be whoever is sitting in my seat, the most difficult challenge of a professional life imaginable. And you're not going to do that by a structure of laws, you're going to do that by the communities deciding to protect themselves and part of my mantra is that it isn't the police service and it isn't the intelligence services that defeat terrorism, it's communities that defeat terrorism. And if we cannot get those communities to believe in the police service, to join the police service that's going to be protecting them in 2012, we will be in deep trouble.

And so for me, while the debate on laws is interesting, the debate on what kind of police service this is, is a more interesting and more fundamental one.

MARTYN LEWIS: And what skills will the police leaders of tomorrow need?

SIR IAN BLAIR: I think they'll need the same as they need now. But it's difficult to tell. I don't see that the skills that I and my colleagues, and there are some of them in this room, have - are that much different to the ones that were there ten years ago. But we have to adapt. We have to adapt to new circumstances. I suppose there is an issue around open-mindedness and an issue around understanding that the threat has changed and is likely to continue to evolve and adapt so that that's part of it.

