Brian O'Hara

Keynote Speaker · Crisis Leadership · Organizational Turnaround



Former Chief of Police, Minneapolis
Former Deputy Mayor & Public Safety Director, Newark

Founder & Principal, O'Hara Leadership Group · Distinguished Fellow, Rutgers Center on Public Security
Boards LNW Public Safety Summit at Harvard · NYU Policing Project · Community Based Public Safety Collective
Past executive board service: Major Cities Chiefs Association · Police Executive Research Forum

The only chief who has led court-enforced reform in two major American cities, taken over a department in freefall, and driven violence down in both.

Brian O'Hara spent 25 years inside two of the hardest police departments in the country. In Newark he rose from patrol officer to Public Safety Director and Deputy Mayor and led the department's work under its federal consent decree. In 2022 Minneapolis recruited him as its first outside chief in 16 years, confirmed him 13–0, and handed him the most scrutinized department in America with sworn staffing down roughly 40 percent. Violence fell, clearance rates reached their highest levels in decades and the ranks grew again, while he commanded the Annunciation Church response, led his department through the murder of one of its own, and helped keep the city from a repeat of 2020 during a 12-week federal immigration surge. He speaks about what those years demand of a leader, and what to build before the next one.

33%	347	½	550 → 648
drop in Minneapolis homicides, 2021–25	fewer shooting victims, 2021–25	robbery & carjacking roughly halved	sworn officers during his tenure

Signature talks

Twenty Hours, Two Mass Shootings: Command Lessons from the Annunciation Church Attack

On August 27, 2025, a gunman fired more than a hundred rifle rounds into a school Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church, killing two children and wounding eighteen, twenty hours after a shooting outside a nearby high school. Brian takes leaders inside the first hour and the first week: who decides what while the scene is still active, releasing only verified information, caring for families and for the more than seventy first responders relieved and debriefed that day, and telling the truth about what the agency could not do.

Takeaways *Decide command roles before the call. Verified beats fast. Family support and responder recovery start in the first hour.*

Two Officers for the North Side: Rebuilding a Department in Freefall

The Saturday after his confirmation, Brian rode along and found the day shift for all of North Minneapolis was two officers and one squad car. On Monday, no one in the leadership meeting knew. This is the playbook he used from there: three obligations (fewer victims, earned trust, restored pride) and the discipline to measure everything against them; weekly MSTAT accountability; recruiting rebuilt until the ranks grew again; and backing officers while holding the line on standards under the most intense scrutiny in American policing.

Takeaways *Learn what is true before you plan. Name early priorities out loud. Daily practices, not announcements, restore confidence.*

After the Scene Clears: Leading People Through Repeated Crises

In three and a half years, Brian's department lost an officer from his first recruit class to murder, answered two mass shootings in twenty hours, and worked a 12-week federal surge that flooded 911 and put an exhausted, short-staffed force in the middle of a national storm. Officers kept showing up. He explains why: consistent communication from the top, catching strain before it becomes attrition, wellness built into command planning rather than bolted on after, and a chief who is visibly present at roll calls, at scenes and at funerals.

Takeaways *Communicate consistently. Catch operational strain early. Make personnel support part of command planning.*

Formats

Conference keynotes
Executive and leadership workshops
Panels and fireside chats
Leadership retreats and command training

For associations, conferences, corporate leadership teams, universities and public agencies. Every talk is shaped for the room.

Audiences have included

LNW Public Safety Summit at Harvard · FBI National Academy Associates · IACP · National League of Cities · PERF Senior Management Institute for Police · Penn Carey Law's Quattrone Center · National Public Safety Partnership Summit

Executive education

FBI National Executive Institute · FBI National Academy (Session 240) · Harvard Kennedy School, Senior Executives in State and Local Government

National voice. Interviewed on The New York Times' The Daily, 60 Minutes, Face the Nation, PBS Firing Line and CNN. Profiled by the Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and The Atlantic. Published in Newsweek, The Hill, Governing and Route Fifty.

Watch Critical Conversations: The Minneapolis Story (2024) · The Daily: "A Breaking Point" · **Full media list →**

"Crisis is not an interruption of leadership. It is its ultimate test."
— Brian O'Hara

Book Brian
info@oharaleadership.com · 908-312-3909
oharaleadership.com · LinkedIn