

Critical issues in law enforcement



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There are three critical issues in law enforcement

Citizens today look to law enforcement for service and protection. In order for officers to serve and protect, some issues have to be resolved. Remaining stress-free, enforcing the code of ethics and lastly, the presence of female police officers. These three critical issues can quickly weaken a department if left to manifest without any intervention.

Being stress-free in law enforcement is very important. An officer's performance is diminished greatly if he or she has trouble concentrating at work. Law enforcement officers are perceived to be tough, rough, and always ready to protect and serve. Citizens feel safe when police officers are seen regularly patrolling the streets.

When it comes to dealing with personal issues, officers tend to keep to themselves. Sometimes living up to those expectations can be challenging because the general public has a superhero image of law enforcement. Officers regularly deal with the worst of what society has to offer, and make special sacrifices to maintain the peace. In the process, performing daily tasks can be increasingly difficult. Unlike firefighters and paramedics, police officers are not trained to work as a group. Officers are left to work alone or with a partner. As a result, police coverage is often sparse throughout a jurisdiction.

Officers today are in desperate need of a better support system. With the rising crime rate in today's society, officers can only handle so much before reaching a breaking point. As the stress of police duty builds up, an officer may soon experience anger, depression, or

disillusion. Over time, these feelings may cause strained relationships with family and co-workers and in the end lead to suicide (Franklin, 2007).

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Officers need to be in constant emotional control. Law enforcement officers have a job that requires extreme restraint under highly emotional circumstances. Officers are trained to stay calm when excited, to take charge when nervous, and to be stable when emotional. Constantly altering emotions takes a tremendous toll on an officer's mentality. When an officer is emotionally drained, it may make the officer more prone to fatigue, such as not wanting to participate in social or family life. Energy drain can also create job and social burnout (Goldfarb, Smith n. d.).

Another cause of stress is shift work. No matter how many years an officer has been working, a person's body never gets used to fluctuating schedules. The human body is naturally

programmed to eat, sleep, and wake at a certain time. An officer performing shift work never gets a chance to stay on a schedule and in turn upsets the physical and mental balances.

Police have several options when it comes to dealing with stress. One option is psychological therapy. Police officers may be ordered to undergo sessions with a therapist. The sessions can persuade the police officer to identify any problems officer might have with their career and ultimately arrive at valuable solutions. The focus of the therapy session is to teach the police officer in finding out how and why he/she reacts to certain situations. This in

turn can help the officer react correctly to stress factors. Stress management in law enforcement also includes anger management. In anger management, police officers can be taught to identify the triggers that cause aggression within an officer. Anger management also teaches police officers how to detect and prevent hostile situations from ever taking place, which in turn can be applied in

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settling disputes between citizens. Anger management can allow the officer to prevent and manage their stress by themselves, either on the job or at home with their families.

The second critical issue within departments is code of ethics for criminal justice personnel. In order for the criminal justice system to work efficiently a code of ethics is needed. Due to the amount of power criminal justice professionals possess and because of the nature of problems officers encounter every day, employees often face serious conflicts and needs guidance, which is exactly what a code of ethics provides.

One of the main purposes of a code of ethics is to guide a person in making a decision. These guidelines have to be in place in order for law enforcement agencies to operate smoothly and correctly. Superiors have to lead the rest of the department by being an example. If the leaders are corrupt, more than likely the subordinates are also (Peak, 2010).

There are some behaviors which are completely unacceptable in law enforcement: bribery, excessive force, extortion and forgery. At no time

should these behaviors be exercised by officers or any member of law enforcement. Citizens entrust law enforcement to protect and to serve communities.

The lifeline of law and order for any society is law enforcement. It is therefore very important for the police personnel to command the respect citizens, to function effectively. The public-police relationship is vital, for maintaining law and order, and this relationship can be strengthened only when police conduct themselves in appropriate manner. Every police officer

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must realize that they need to be law-abiding citizens also, and be committed to serve society proudly and with morals.

All officers and members of law enforcement should be made to attend a seminar on ethics. And after the seminar is complete, all employees will be tested and trained on all material presented. Testing will help to ensure all employees are on one ethical accord.

A code of ethics can help an officer decide how to act on a daily basis. Ethics is very important for people of power because this type of person has great influence on the public daily. Law enforcement personnel make important decisions every day and the decisions an officer makes impacts the lives of others. Therefore, it is necessary that all members of law enforcement are bias free.

The last issue that needs to address is female officers in criminal justice.

There has been tremendous growth of female officers within the last thirty

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years. Law requires law enforcement agencies to hire regardless of gender or race. Traditionally, the only job a female had in law enforcement was a social worker.

In the past, men have strongly resisted the integration of female officers into police departments because being a police officer was thought to be a “man’s job”. Women have slowly transformed the social worker role because of their determination to overcome the stereotypical barriers and in more recent years, the law. However, a female’s acceptance by males has grown in the past thirty years.

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The first female police officer was Alice Stebbin Wells, born on June 13, 1873. Alice served in the Los Angeles police department. Joining the police department was no easy task in those days. Alice had to send petitions to the mayor, city council and police commissioner. Wells felt women and children needed someone to be their voice and Wells wanted to be the one who stood up for them. In 1985, Penny Harrington accomplished being the first female police chief in a large agency. And in 1990, Elizabeth Watson became the first female police chief of a city with a population of more than 1 million in Houston.

Another reason why police departments have been hesitant in hiring female officers is because women officers are thought of as not being unable to balance their personal and professional lives. Trying to balance child care and work, especially for single female officers, can be a very demanding task. The pressure is on to be a good wife and mother regardless of the job.

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Every day a police officer encounters risks and dangers, including dealing with irate people and criminals. And also, maintaining workplace relationship in a male dominated field is not easy.

Discrimination against female officers can also come from the community. Some citizens believe that policewomen are only able to settle domestic disputes or to deal with rape victims. Some may also think policewomen are incapable of diffusing physical altercations, mostly due to the fact that most crimes are committed by males. There are some female officers try to fit in and go along with the male police culture by acting subservient are quickly written off as not performing to police standards.

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Hiring and retaining female officers offers great advantages. First, women are great communicators. Listening to a woman's voice can sometimes calm an intense situation. Second, male officers are more likely to use excessive force than females, it is only natural. Males are naturally more authoritarian. Third, the presence more female officers will reduce the amount of claims of sexual discrimination within the department.

Women officers tend to use a style of policing that relies more on communication than physical force, and are far more likely to avoid the use of excessive force. Female officers are more likely to have a community-oriented style of policing and females excel in responding to domestic violence situations which constitute a majority of crime calls. Also, female officers trend to have more empathy than male officers in certain situations and the trait could be useful in delicate situation such as domestic calls.

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Inappropriate response also adds to the risk of litigation, as departments are increasingly being held accountable for failing to properly handle domestic violence (Anderson, 1985).

In the past, fitting in a police force has been a challenge for women. Some of the requirements were seen as discriminatory against females. For example, scaling a 6 foot wall and being “able to bench press one’s own weight” was almost impossible for a female to do (Peak, 2010 pg. 132 para. 8). One way to make sure women are not discriminated against is to make departments re-examine physical fitness tests and figure out ways to include females in the tests. And also, “agencies should permit all candidates to practice for the pre-employment physical exam” (Peak, 2010 pg. 132 para. 8).

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There are several issues which need to be addressed in order to help female avoid discrimination in the department. Police departments can hold job fairs at different colleges and pass out flyers, brochures, newspapers, or television advertising (Peak, 2010). Hiring in this manner is instead of randomly hiring brings a more diversified police force. Training males and females together will make female officers feel more equal to males. Female instructors are important also because female officers can look to the instructors as role models.

Sexual harassment is another hurdle for female officers. If an officer is being harassed, the officer may not feel that reporting the perpetrator. The officer may not want to go through the scrutiny and embarrassment. All department need to have written policies informing employees of the consequences of

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harassment in the department. In the written policies, the information should include illustrations and examples of what not to do and a description of the proper protocol of handling complaints. The department will need to promptly file and investigate all complaints and most important of all, keep all information about the case and individual confidential.