

Integrity, morality, ethics and the law essay sample

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Being a police chief or a county sheriff in today's society is not an easy job. Society is already over-critical of law enforcement as a whole and being the person at the top of the chain of command unfortunately places the burden of responsibility of any and all actions on him/her. Society demands a higher level of professional conduct, ethical and moral standards than any other profession. I attribute this to the fact that these individuals are the ones responsible for making on the spot decisions as to what is right and wrong and acting upon these perceptions.

Webster's dictionary defines integrity as a firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, or incorruptibility. Integrity is one of the essential qualities for law enforcement officers and even more so for a police chief or county sheriff. The reason that the police chief and county sheriff must maintain such a high level of integrity is because we expect and demand that they will be able to effectively uphold the law and do what is right in a case where one of their officers does something morally or ethically wrong. We look to them to be incorruptible, to always do what is right no matter what the circumstance. If integrity didn't exist, our whole justice system would fall apart and become null and void.

Webster's dictionary defines ethics as the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group. I think that sound ethics are also important for a police chief or county sheriff. In the public's eye, if the police chief or county sheriff is not adhering to a specific code of conduct, they will assume that all personnel under them are also not in compliance and corruption will become the buzz word. We all expect our law enforcement officers to perform a certain way and do the right thing whether they are in view of society or not.

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Making good ethical decisions INTEGRITY, ETHICS, MORALITY AND THE LAW 3 gives law enforcement credibility among society.

I think that ethics and morality are very similar. Both involve adherence to a set of principles of conduct. I think that ethics are considered more institutional and morals are more internal to a person, but the end result is whether or not one adheres to the code of conduct as set forth by their position. Morality serves as a regulator of one's internal motives as well as their external actions. Law is different in that it both regulates and controls human conduct. It does not take into consideration what ones motives were. Law only comes into play when actions have translated into something illegal or have caused harm to someone. Laws are upheld the power of the state, while morality is supported by society and individual conscience. The focus for law enforcement officers is to apprehend those who have broken laws, but their conduct while exercising their authority must adhere to sound ethical and moral principles.

When making a decision, a police chief or county sheriff must always ask themselves if what they are doing is in line with their code of conduct. This must be at the forefront of their decision making process. They must also consider what society will think of their decision. I understand that there are instances where one would not have time to make any considerations before making a decision, but if time and situation permit, they must always consider their code of conduct and question whether what they are doing is morally and ethically right. Instances where morality and ethics are not considered have resulted in situations such as the police beating of Rodney

King. Do you think that those officers took morals, ethics or even the law into consideration before they acted?

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, justice is defined as the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments. So what does this mean? It means giving each person what he or she deserves. Justice is usually associated with standards of rightness and fairness. There are different kinds of justice. Distributive justice involves how society ensures that benefits and burdens are distributed among its members in a way that is fair and just. Retributive justice, also known as corrective justice, ensures that punishments are fair and just. Compensatory justice ensures that people are compensated fairly for injuries by the person who caused them (Velasquez, et al 1990). Justice is a central part of ethics and weighs heavily in our moral lives.

There are, however, instances where the principles of justice may be thrown aside to favor other claims such as peoples' rights and welfare. Justice is what makes the criminal justice system fair and impartial. It serves as a system of checks and balances to ensure that criminals are treated fairly and punished adequately for the crimes they commit. Additionally, victims are made to feel whole again when they see that punishments are being administered that fit the crimes being committed. Justice is the foundation for the criminal justice system. Without it, the integrity of the system would collapse and chaos would ensue. We all expect law enforcement officers to be our first line of defense. They are expected to know the law, when and

how to enforce it, and to do it fairly. Society puts them under a microscope and is quick to shed light on anything that is considered questionable. Law enforcement officers take an oath to uphold the law and to do it in a moral and ethical manner.

The intense focus on these values results in mass media coverage when these principles are violated. When evaluating a young sex offender, you can utilize Kohlberg's stages of moral development. I would label a young sex offender as being at Level 1, Stage 2 : Instrumental Purpose and Exchange Orientation. This stage is characterized egoism and self interest. The goal of a person at this stage is to advance their own desires; and the pursuit of this is understood in their mind as " right". They would be considered to be at a moral age of 5-10 years old. The most common and effective method of deterrence for a convicted sex offender is the requirement for them to register. They have restrictions as to where they can live and anyone in the general public can look them up. It becomes humiliating for them and thus becomes an effective deterrent.

The Kohlberg stage of moral development that applies to a juvenile who is a member of a gang would be Level 2, Stage 3: Interpersonal Expectations and Conformity. This stage is characterized by the desire to please others and gain their approval. The thinking turns to what can be done to win the support of others. A gang initiation or probationary period is a good example of this. An effective and ethical deterrence method for gang violence is to have the criminal perform community-based service in the area where the gang he is from hangs out. This humiliates the gang member as well as

showing the other gang members what the punishment is for gang violence. A third type of criminal that Kohlberg's stages of moral development can be applied to is a drug addict who committed robbery to support his habit.

The stage I would consider applicable to this criminal would be Level 1, Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience Orientation. This stage is characterized by perceptions of right and wrong. Thinking does not go beyond associating behaviors with rewards or punishment. The offender is only concerned with the consequences attached to the behavior, not the actual behavior itself. An effective ethical deterrent for a drug addict who has committed a crime would be incarceration. They are removed from the temptation of continuing to use drugs, often times offered a form of drug rehabilitation, entered into a step-down program and then returned to society as a rehabilitated offender.

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