

The role of integrity in criminal justice



Police Officers and Integrity Integrity in the criminal justice system is incredibly important. All professions within the criminal justice system require integrity because everyone is working in pursuit of justice for all individuals involved in the system. A lack of integrity creates a situation where the cause of seeking justice is compromised. Justice in the abstract and the concrete is dependent on the integrity of those working within the system. This is especially true for police officers.

A police officer interacts with the public on a daily basis. In this way, for many people, police officers represent the whole of the criminal justice system. Most people will never be involved directly or indirectly with district attorneys, judges or probation officers. Police officers are therefore the “face” of the criminal justice system for most people. Integrity in their actions is necessary so that the credibility of the criminal justice system in America can be maintained (Klockars, 2006). Corruption, cronyism and a lack of integrity plague police forces around the world. In some countries, the last person you want to interact with is a police officer because any interaction will include threats of imprisonment or the solicitation of bribes.

Police officers are charged to do the right thing according to duty. Everyone working in a professional capacity within the criminal justice system needs to uphold their duty in an ethical manner, but police officers have a special responsibility to do this. The enforcement of laws needs to happen in a manner that is fair and unbiased. Any lapse in integrity makes this impossible. A breach in integrity creates an inherently unjust situation. Police officers are often forced to make difficult decisions. Acting with integrity is a sure guide when the time comes for making hard choices.

A lack of integrity for a police officer can be manifest in many ways. One way

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is through a biased application or enforcement of the law. Holding different groups within the community more accountable for breaking laws than other groups is unethical and lacks integrity. These divisions can be made along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, income level and age. Police officers need to keep in mind that proper enforcement of the law can not be dictated by membership in a certain group. When laws are enforced this way, integrity is lacking.

Another profound breach of integrity police officers may be involved in is through the taking of bribes or hush money. While this is the norm in some cultures, it is not accepted in the United States. Gaining income through the uneven enforcement of the law is one of the worst things a police officer can do. It destroys the public trust in law enforcement and creates a situation where the entire criminal justice system becomes suspect. The taking of bribes is closely akin to tampering with evidence and with making false statements during an investigation. All create a situation where justice cannot be served and where the validity of police forces and the criminal justice system is called into question.

Work Cited

Klockars, Carl B., Ivković Sanja Kutnjak, and M. R. Haberfeld. Enhancing Police Integrity. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006. Print.