

Ethics in policing essay

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Law enforcement officers are under constant scrutiny because of the few officers that are unethical and have a lack of character while performing their duties as a police officer. The media seems to be constantly showing video footage or reporting stories of a police officer that is involved in some form of misconduct.

This really didn't seem to be that much of a problem 10+ years ago, or maybe it was just that we as a society did not pay that much attention to the misconduct, therefore the media did not report it. All law enforcement officers should undergo an ethics training course, along with an extensive training on policies and procedures. I conducted interviews with Detective Oliveras from the 30 pct. NY, NY and with Detective Rouzinas from Narcotics, Brooklyn South, to get their views on law enforcement ethics and misconduct. I asked Detective Oliveras, " Why are ethics and character so important in law enforcement? " The Detective answered with: Any person that becomes a law enforcement officer immediately becomes not only a role model, but they are also put on a pedestal for everyone to view.

Everyone in the community that they are serving will look at them for guidance and support. We, as officers, are there to serve our communities, we must be ethical and a person of support, otherwise, how will we ever gain the trust of our community? (Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007). When I asked Detective Rouzinas the same question he responded with: A law enforcement officer must abide by ethics and rules for a number of reasons.

We serve an entire community and have people looking up to us (young and old) on a daily basis. We also have to live in these communities that we serve, if we start to corrupt the system then our families are in jeopardy as well. In addition, we have to be trustworthy. Our court system has got to be able to trust us as officers when we get on the stand to testify against a drug dealer or a child molester. If we begin to damage our character and defy the rules of ethics, No Court will trust our testimony and a number of criminals would be walking the street. (Det.

Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). I would agree with both detectives on this issue. I think law enforcement officers are role models in our communities; therefore we are always going to be looking at them and critiquing their actions. I also agree with what Detective Rouzinas said about giving a testimony in Court. If I were a juror and I knew that the officer had been involved in a misconduct incident, I would not be able to trust his testimony and would probably lean towards believing the criminal.

The two detectives had different views when I asked them if they felt that the police are more ethical today than the officers of 10 years ago. Detective Oliveras said that police are more ethical today than they were 10 years ago. " I say that even though you hear a good number of stories about corrupt officers today. However; I feel that there are more officers today than there was 10 years ago, therefore the ratio of corrupt officers to good officers would be lower today than 10 years ago. In addition, I feel that people are more aware of the corruption now than that of 10 years ago. So, every little corruption story is going to hit the news, where as 10 years ago, over half of

these stories may not have been told because no one really cared about it. ” (Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007).

However, Detective Rouzinas said that the officers 10 years ago may be a slight more ethical than those officers of today. “ I think that the departments of today are not, or at least were not, hiring the most reputable officers. This could be in part because of the pay that officers receive. A department is not going to recruit an officer out of college with a 4 year degree at the city or county level in most places. Everyone knows that law enforcement officers do not get paid very well. Therefore, you are going to get officers that never went to college and are straight out of high school. These officers are there for what little money they can make and if they can get a little on the side, then great.

In addition, police corruption is put front and center in today’s media. The community pays a lot more attention to the corrupt officer’s today, than they did 10 years ago. ” (Det. Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). I have mixed feelings on this question. I really don’t know if the police 10 years ago were more ethical or is it just that we are paying more attention to the incidents today as a society. The detectives raised great points and both hold merit.

I just think that both points of view could hold true. I really think it comes down to how society reacts, and thinking that way, I would have to say that the officers 10 years ago were more ethical than those officers of today. The detectives have already stated that police officers do not make very good money, especially when you consider that they are putting their lives on the

line for our safety every day. I was keeping that in mind and speculated what the detective's answers would be when I asked them what causes police officers to get involved in misconduct. Detective Oliveras said that money is the root of all evil. " Money! What drives anyone to be corrupt? This is in any field, whether it be law enforcement, politics, or the private sector.

Most people are driven by money. Police Officers do not make a lot of money, therefore; a corrupt officer is going to look for other ways to make extra money. If that means taking money on the side and letting a criminal go, then they will do it. Or they may decide to withhold the dope and money they confiscated off of the dealers and sell the dope for extra cash. I remember hearing a story about an officer that got involved in misconduct when he went on a drug bust with his Department. The officer raided a drug store owner at his house.

During the raid a large number of autographed baseball memorabilia, a couple of guns, and a large sum of cash went missing before it ever reached the evidence room. After an investigation, the officer admitted that he had taken all of those things because he did not think anyone would miss it. All corrupt officers do it for the money.

Period"! (Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007). Detective Rouzinas had similar beliefs on why police officers got involved with misconduct. " The number one reason for misconduct would have to be money, in my opinion. As I said earlier, police officers do not live a lavish lifestyle, due in part because of the low income they receive. Therefore, the corrupt officers, that is there for the paycheck and not because they love

their job, is going to be looking for extra revenue streams. This may come from keeping confiscated money, selling drugs on the side, taking bribes, or a number of other ways an officer may decide to cheat the system. I heard of an officer a couple of years ago that involved with corruption on an actual traffic stop.

The officer pulled a driver over for speeding and instead of just taking the drivers license back to his car and run the number, he instead took the drivers entire wallet back to his car to call in the number. When the officer gave the wallet back to the gentleman and advised him to slow down and he was free to go, the driver realized that there was approximately \$1, 000 missing from his wallet. The officer later admitted to taking the money from the driver's wallet because he needed some extra cash". (Det. Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). After listening to both detectives give their answer to this question, I felt the same way. We have heard the saying " Money is the root of all evil" many times before.

I think that many officers get involved in the wrong things while on duty because they want to live a better lifestyle. They see how they can make a good bit of extra money (possibly even more than they make on duty) really quick by doing something unethical. I would like to think if the Departments could pay the officers more money, then the officers would not have a desire or need to get involved with misconduct.

I can sense, just from the few questions that I have asked the detectives thus far, that they strongly believe in police officer ethics and its training. I do know that the Departments that both of these officers work for has ethics

training in their academy. However, I was a little surprised when I asked them the next question. I asked the Officers if they thought there was enough training on ethics at the academy or was that a subject that was just skimmed over.

Detective Oliveras stated: “ I would say that there is an adequate amount of training on the subject of ethics at the academy level. However; I would question how many officers actually listen and retain the information. I know for myself, I paid a lot of attention to the topics on ethics as well as the policies and procedures. I want to make sure that I never put myself, my family, or my department in a situation that the Courts or the Community would question our integrity.

I think that is what it is really all about. The good officers have a lot of integrity and they are proud of it. However; the corrupt officers could care less about how the community views their integrity. Therefore, no matter how much ethics training you offered at the academy level, it would not sink in for them. They are more concerned of getting through the training to get on the road with their gun. However, I feel that the academy does a great job on training the ethics for police officers and the policies and procedures we are to follow”.

(Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007). Detective Rouzinas had similar thoughts: “ I think the academy spends a great deal of time on ethics training. I don't know that spending more time on that subject at the academy level is going to help matters. Why? Well, I think the officers

that are going through the academy are more concerned with getting passing grades, so that they can get their badge and gun and hit the streets.

I don't know that they would pay that much attention to anything else about ethics. However; I do think that more time could be spent on training the policies and procedures. The officers should have that subject hammered into their brains, so that when it comes time to make a decision, they can base their decisions on the policies and procedures. Rather than making a decision based on what will benefit them".

(Det. Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). I was surprised to hear that both officers felt that the lack of training was not in ethics but in the officers retaining the information.

I was also surprised to hear that they somewhat questioned the policies and procedures training, rather than that of the ethics training. After hearing their answers on the ethics training course offered in the academy, I was sure that neither officer would be interested in an on-going training process for ethics. However, when I asked them if they thought an on-going ethical training course would be beneficial, I was pleasantly surprised. Detective Oliveras said: " I do think that ongoing ethics training would be beneficial. It would be great to have an eight hour in-service training course on ethics every year. I know that ethics do not change that much.

However, it would be great to have a class once a year or so base on new ideas or new policies. We hear about police corruption just like every other person hears about it. However, it would be a good idea to have an instructor

to take those incidents that have happened in the past year and teach a class that shows how we could avoid those incidents if they arise in our communities". (Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007).

Detective Rouzinas voiced similar concerns for this thought, just like on the previous question.

The officer told me: " Again, my concern with this idea is that the officers that are going to be corrupt are not going to pay attention to the in-service training on ethics. I think that the idea of an in-service class on ethics is a great idea, however; the end result may not pay off for the class. The good officers would want the class, so that they could learn of new ways to stay away from problem cases.

I also think that a policies and procedures in-service training would be great. We have an eight hour in-service training on policies and procedures every year, so that we can be updated on any new procedures we need to utilize. I think every department should implement this training. Our department will have an in-service training class on ethics if a problem arises in a nearby area that the supervisors think we need to know about".

(Det. Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). I was pleased to hear that both officers would like to have an in-service training on ethics every year, but they also added that they think that more training on policies and procedures (in-service) would be a great benefit as well. Looking at this from the outside, my personal opinion is one that would side with Detective Rouzinas. I do not think that the officers that need the training would pay attention and actually use the information given in the training course. They

are already corrupt, therefore it would be hard to get them to change their ways.

Similar to when they get that free cup of coffee from the corner store, which has no meaning behind it, just a simple thank you, it is hard for them to not expect that free cup of coffee every time they visit that store. I concluded my interview with the two Detectives with a hypothetical question. I asked the officers if they felt that the training and education on ethics would decrease the number of incidents we see and hear about involving officer misconduct. Detective Oliveras said: " I think that you would see a slight decrease in the number of corruption cases you hear about. However, you would not see an overwhelming number of corrupt officers turn good. The corrupt officers are going to stay corrupt.

You may, however; have one officer out there that is in a situation where had he not had the ethics training, he would make a stupid decision and put himself, the department, the community, and his fellow officers in harms way, but since he had the training, he makes the wise decision. The only problem with that is the fact that you would not know it happened. You are not going to hear the officer stating he was about to make a decision to steal the dope and money from the drug dealer, but he remembered his ethics training and decided to arrest the guy and turn the evidence over to the department". Det. Oliveras, personal communication, March 19, 2007).

Detective Rouzinas had a different view on the question. " That is a hard question to answer. We would like to think that if every officer went through

a strict ethics training course the number of incidents related to corruption would drop drastically.

However; I don't think you would be able to see much of a difference at all. I honestly feel that if an officer is going to be corrupt, he will be corrupt no how much you educate him on ethics. It is kind of like that saying, " Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic". I think that you would have an occasional incident that would have occurred, however; the officer thought about all of his training before he acted. I remember my father telling me years ago, when I was in high school, " son, if you will just take five (5) seconds to think about what you are about to do, you might save your self a lot of heartache and embarrassment from making a bad decision".

I have tried to apply this lesson my father taught me in all facets of my life, including on the streets during my shifts". (Det. Rouzinas, personal communication, March 19, 2007). I really don't know how I would answer this question. I would like to think that the incidents would drop drastically. However, I also know that I must be realistic at the same time. I think I would side more with Detective Rouzinas, just because I do not think you can change someone that is already set in their ways. If an officer is going to start doing things that are unethical and damaging to their character, I don't think a little training on the subject of ethics will cause him to stop the misconduct.

We have learned a lot about police ethics and character in this class, and these officers have proven that some of those things we have learned are actually occurring in the real world of law enforcement. I believe that all law

enforcement officers have to use discretion on an everyday basis. Every situation that an officer is confronted with requires that officer to make a decision based on his training.

Even on the most minor of traffic stops the officer is required to use his discretion and decide whether to cite the driver or not. I also believe that police officers need to remember that they are in the public's eye every day. The public puts a lot of trust into these officers until they do something that is morally, ethically, and/or criminally wrong. Once that happens, the officer may as well forget about getting the public back on their side. The public/society will remember that incident for as long as the officer is wearing the badge and any time the officer brings a case to Court for a jury trial, the public will have a hard time believing the officer's testimony. I asked both detectives, off the record, about how they use their discretion when it comes to force and deadly force.

One of the detectives was telling me how his Department had hammered "liability" into the officers' heads. The Department wanted them to remember the liability they, as an officer, and the liability that the Department would face if they had to face a deadly force incident. However, the detective told me that the majority of the officers in his Department had the same beliefs; they would rather be tried by 12 jurors than carried by 6 pallbearers. Therefore, he advised me that most all of the officers use a great deal of discretion anytime they are facing a threat of bodily harm or a possible escape from the suspect. The officer that I spoke with told me that the only time he would ever consider using deadly force, would be if the offender

pulled a gun on him. He advised me at that point he would not think twice about pulling his weapon and shooting the suspect. In conclusion, I gained a great deal of information from both of these officers. After interviewing the detectives, I have a newfound respect for the decisions they are required to make on a daily basis.

The society does not consider what the daily routine of a law enforcement officer consist of. For the most part, an officer's daily routine is anything but routine. Their days are never the same. Yes, they may have the same duties everyday, serving and protecting the community, but they face different problems and people every day. I got a little concerned when I started thinking about how I might act if I were to pull over a possible suspect and the suspect were to step out of his vehicle with a gun. I wondered to myself how hard it might be to actually pull my weapon and shoot and possibly kill a person. It was at that point that I realized why the law enforcement officers feel that they are viewed wrongly by our society.

The things they are required to see everyday would make the average civilian cringe. As I said earlier, this project has really opened my eyes too what our law enforcement officers are going through everyday. I do think that the Department's management could step in and help these officers by providing as much training as possible. I realize that the detectives felt that the training might not go over so well. However, if the training were to help one officer make the right decision, then the training was well worth it. I really enjoyed doing this project, as it has helped me connect the things from class to the real world of law enforcement. In addition, the main point that I

gained from doing this project is that a good police officer must love his job. The detectives really hit on that point a lot while I was talking to them.

They both said that the good officers, the ones that do not get involved with misconduct or unethical habits really love their job. They do not do it for the money.