

Personal ethics assignment

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Answering the calls and prioritizing them for law enforcement officers, emergency medical technicians (EMT), and fire departments requires knowledge, patience, discretion, and ethics. The Job According to Eastside Regional Communications Center (2008), 911 dispatchers answer phones for both emergency and nonemergency calls for not only law enforcement but medical and fire services as well. These individuals work with computer-aided dispatching services as well as computerized phone and radio systems.

Dispatch Magazine On-Line also states that these individuals must prioritize these calls when numerous hone calls come into the center at the same time. Dispatchers must complete clerical work, retrieve information from callers using various computer and phone systems, monitor radio frequencies, and relay relevant information between officers and callers. This is only a partial list of duties for a public safety dispatcher. Dispatchers may be required to assume other tasks as needed because of short staff, budget cuts, and situations that have never before been dealt with.

Individuals seeking a career as a public safety dispatcher need the ability to remain calm and confident, be knowledgeable, aintain patience, calm down the caller, and maintain high morals. A Day in the Life No two days are alike for an individual who works in a communications center dispatching 911 calls. Each day, these professionals deal with a variety of calls from callers seeking a wide array of emergency services. A dispatcher may be answering calls within seconds of arrival to work.

He or she may also go a complete shift without a single emergency call, especially if working in a small community. If two dispatchers are asked what they did yesterday, they will inevitably answer with two different stories. In a recent interview, Keri Knudson from the Beadle County Sheriffs Department stated that during her shift prior to the interview she received calls from several motorists who had difficulty navigating the snow packed South Dakota roadways With drivers engaging in accidents or in ditches. Ms. Knudson also calmed a family as their home was burning.

Keri's job during this time was to get as much information about the emergency while keeping the woman calm. She needed to know if everyone was out of the home, if there were injuries, and where to send the proper emergency crews. Individuals who cannot multi-task could not be a public safety dispatcher. Keri also stated that her prior shift had been very uneventful. She finished her shift by filling out paperwork and taking a few non-emergency phone calls from citizens who wondered if parking on the street would be permitted because of the recent snow fall and the need for snow removal.

Keri finished her interview with a discussion about ethics and how there is no room for criminals or dishonest individuals in a job position that works so closely with certain records and systems of various emergency facilities. Code of Ethics Keri said this position can put individuals into situations where their ethics and morals will be questioned, “ Having strong ethics and high moral standards will help guide an individual” (personal communication, January 12, 2011). The professions Code of Ethics will also help to lead individuals down the most ethical path.

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Communications officers follow the same code of ethics as law enforcement officers although Oregon, Illinois, and Idaho have a separate code specifically for public safety dispatchers (Dispatch Magazine On-Line, 2008). These separate codes do not vary much from the law enforcement Code; they condense what is written and eliminate law-enforcement-specific language and duties. The National Academy of Emergency Dispatch (NAED) is a non-profit agency that sets high standards for safe and effective service from dispatch workers (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2009).

The NAED has created their own Code Of Ethics they believe every dispatch officer should adhere to. The NAED's Code mirrors the ethical standards set forth in the law enforcement Code, but also includes job-specific standards such as improving the knowledge the public has of dispatch employees and enhancing and improving the dispatch system (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2009). Situations may come about that question an employee's ethics and can tarnish the reputation of the agency he or she work for. The Code of Ethics includes ethical standards for behavior outside of work that is unique to the profession.

According to Abuse of Power (2008), the Code states that employees should keep their private lives private, serving as role models to society.

Dispatching professionals are also asked to keep sensitive information confidential, serve and protect the community in which they serve, act in an unbiased manner, and be examples of how to uphold the law (Abuse of Power, 2008). Departments and agencies that hire public safety dispatchers require all new employees to sign a copy of the Code of Ethics. The

employee must adhere to this Code and some agencies even require a dispatcher to be sworn in using the Code.

This legality protects the department from legal action if an employee is fired for unethical behavior. This Code gives guidelines for personal behavior; however it does not specify protocols for handling ethical situations that may occur. Real Life Situations Ms. Knudson conveyed a story that involved a former public safety dispatcher; the dispatcher was relieved of her duty after not relaying information to officers from females who called the county's non-emergency number. This woman had attempted to have relationships with several officers in the community.

When this woman was rejected or no longer wanted by the officers, she retaliated by not relaying messages to them. Phone calls came into the center from victims wanting information about their cases as well as individuals seeking information on their legal rights. The unethical behavior was discovered when a victim scheduled a meeting with the County Sheriff after her attempts to contact an officer were neglected. The public safety officer admitted that she had not relayed the information and was relieved from service (K. J.

Knudson, personal communication, January 12, 2011 This woman used her position to pay back those individuals who had denied her advances. This is an example of a situation that occurs and is not fully detailed in a code of ethics. An ethical individual would know that this type of behavior is frowned upon; he or she would also realize that the Code of Ethics does state that one's personal feelings cannot influence his or her work (Abuse of Power,

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2008). Another example of abusing one's power would be using computer programs at work to gain personal information on an individual.

For example, a new employee starts his or her job at the Sheriffs Department as a 911 dispatcher. When this individual's best friend learns of this position, she asks the dispatcher to find out if the individual she is meeting for a date that weekend has a criminal record. A dispatcher could very easily be placed into this type of situation and could be torn over what to do. The dispatcher wants to protect her friend, but the professional side of the dispatcher knows that this type of behavior is unethical and could lead to the loss of her job.

The Code of Ethics that the dispatcher adheres to is in place to prevent situations like this from happening. Keeping sensitive information confidential is the duty of those in law enforcement. In this situation, dispatchers need to remind themselves as well as their friends that this position is a professional one that requires high moral standards; straying from those standards could cause dispatchers to lose their jobs. Conclusion Individuals who are seeking a career in public safety dispatching need to know that they will be held to the same ethical standards as law enforcement officers.

Following the Code of Ethics ensures that an individual's actions will not be regarded as unethical. No code of ethics will fully cover every situation that may come up for an employee, but they all give basic guidelines. There are several situations that a dispatch employee would have to make a judgment call. It is the duty of each department or agency to educate each employee on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and to provide a working

interpretation of those guidelines. References Abuse of Power (2008). Law enforcement Code of Ethics.