

# The Human Element of Policing Must Always Exist



BY: CHIEF (RET.) DENNIS R. NAYOR, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND TRAINING; NYSACOP

In my capacity as the Director of Research, Development, and Training for this Association, all the articles which I have authored for the monthly e-Newsletter and the quarterly Chief's Chronicle magazine have focused on highly relevant and contemporary issues regarding professional 21st century policing. Whether the article's emphasis was on building trust and legitimacy, policy development, technology, social media, community policing, safety and wellness, tactics and training, or specific key issues within modern policing, the primary goal was always to provide insightful and thought-provoking information to assist law enforcement leaders during these challenging times.

There is however another extremely important topic in addition to those mentioned above which is worthy of its own article, and that subject is "the human element" in policing. Every member of every department, from the newest officer through the highest ranking official, has an incredible amount of power vested in them and the way in which that authority is used and the way in which they treat those with whom they have contact, oftentimes can have much greater impact than any ticket or criminal charge. This article will provide some important points of considerations into this sometimes-forgotten topic.

The reality is that policework, by its very nature, involves daily human interaction which includes seeing life in its raw, unedited, and most unfiltered form. As we know all too well, a typical day for law enforcement exposes officers to not only harm, but to seeing people at their absolute worst. Whether it's because of a bad situation in which a person finds themselves, or an issue of substance abuse, or any of a myriad of other reasons, people are usually not in a good place when law enforcement arrives. Regardless of whether

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that person is the subject of an arrest, a victim of a crime or accident, or the target of an investigation, it is fair to say that the event is something which will remain with him or her forever. For this reason, the way in which law enforcement responds and reacts to every call for service is of extreme importance.

With the above being said however, there is an important distinction to be made; we know unquestionably that true evil

exists in our world. There are individuals predisposed towards committing heinous acts of despicable violence upon others, there are those who prey upon the weak and the innocent, and there are those who simply lack any reverence for human life. The most suitable place for these individuals is prison, and they are certainly not the category of people to whom this article refers. This article's reference is that of the average citizen of any community who may find themselves on the other side of the law.

When law enforcement officers work in areas of high-crime density and / or see criminal acts and victimization multiple times per day, it's easy to understand how every interaction and every call for service can simply meld into the next. This same idea holds true if an officer is burned-out, bitter, or struggling with personal issues of their own. In these situations, responses and reactions may occur from a place of apathy or complacency, both of which are devastating for all involved. The ability to view each situation as

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unique is essential, and to know that all arrestees are not necessarily career criminals and that all people who commit a crime are not necessarily bad people, is something that must remain within the hearts and minds of every law enforcement officer as they perform their duties. Having a keen sense of humanity and empathy are crucial for this to occur.

As police leaders today, it's therefore not only incumbent that a culture is created within every Department whereby the officers are tactically sound and properly equipped to deal with all situations, but at the same time, an organizational culture must exist in which an understanding that all persons through a series of bad breaks in life, poor decisions, poverty, mental health issues, or life-changing events (divorce, death of loved one, health issues, loss of job) can find themselves in a place in which police intervention is required. The ability to maintain empathy and consideration towards that truth must remain constant.

Modern law enforcement leaders work diligently towards ensuring that only quality people are hired and trained to take on today's tough policing challenges. It however also becomes the

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responsibility of today's police leaders to verify that these officers do not become jaded and negative in their treatment towards the public, or forgetful of the significance of the power that is vested in them, throughout their careers. Early warning systems that track use of force, citizen complaints, and personnel issues should be in place so that an officer who may be heading in the wrong direction can be brought back on track. Sometimes this may involve switching shifts or patrol zones, especially if the officer in question has worked the overnight shift or a high crime zone for an extended period, other times it may involved offering Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) based counseling for issues that may be occurring within an officer's personal life. Sometimes it can be a matter of providing sensitivity-based training, and other times it may be as simple as talking to the officer to see what may be affecting their attitude, and collaborating on a possible remedy. If a solution is not achievable, then progressive discipline up to and including releasing that officer from employment may be the necessary course of action.

YouTube and numerous other social media platforms contain examples in which an officer is found to have lost his or her temper and the related footage of the officer's treatment towards the public with whom he or she is interacting reflects that. Whether from a gruff or demeaning traffic stop to an instance of excessive force, the perception of the entire police profession can become tainted when these things occur. Clearly this is the exception and not the

rule because there are countless instances whereby officers go well above and beyond the call of duty every day, while treating even the most belligerent of persons with the utmost of respect.

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Since perception is reality however, we all must work extra hard to continually demonstrate that elevated level of professionalism.

Having cutting-edge technology, high tactical standards, great equipment, and sound policies are tremendous assets for every law enforcement agency, but these assets can quickly lose their value if the human element is not equally maintained along the way. Treating people respectfully and always maintaining wisdom towards the innate foibles of humanity will never go out of style. Ensuring that all members of every department, from patrol officer to police chief, maintain a sense of empathy and understanding in the way in which they perform their duties will always be a benefit to the department, the community, and the legacy of the entire policing profession.

*I have tremendously enjoyed the opportunity to serve as your Director of Research, Development, and Training. I've met some amazing people along the way and have had many great experiences that I will always value. I will be moving on from the Association however to pursue other interests, but I will always be a resource for you. If I can ever be of assistance to anyone on any contemporary law enforcement issue, please don't hesitate to contact me at [nayor61@yahoo.com](mailto:nayor61@yahoo.com). In the meantime, please stay safe and keep up the excellent work that you all do for this noble profession! -Dennis Nayor*



***Pictured in the photo above are the members of the Town of Colonie Police Department's Special Services Team (SST) after completing a full day of training on February 13, 2018. In June of 2017, the Town of Colonie Police Department SST received NYS DCJS certification as a SWAT team, making them one of only 11 teams throughout New York State to receive such notable distinction. (See full article on page 4)***