

Police Ethics - Part II

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The following is the second part of a work written by Lt. Steven D. Guthrie of the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy for his Master Instructor requirement and lays the foundation for a discussion on police ethics. It has been edited slightly for length.

What are the Countermeasures?

For law enforcement to be recognized by all as a profession, it is vital that we start addressing critical behavioral problems. The following factors play a significant part in trying to control corruption and misconduct with new police officers:

- **Environment:** a positive work environment will enhance officers to be more productive and upbeat.
- **Training Academy:** plays a part in shaping recruits' behavior, professionalism, awareness and instilling self-discipline.
- **Home Life:** it is crucial to have support of loved ones and an open-line of communication.
- **Individual Beliefs:** police departments need to recruit people with good core values as a person's values are already instilled at an early age. **Citizens:** a strong community-oriented policing program that will enable officers to interact in the community. **Stress:** it is imperative that officers prepare themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally to handle the ups and downs of police work as it can be a roller coaster from day-to-day.

Neal E. Trautman, Ph.D. - (*The National Institute of Ethics*), has also conducted an enormous amount of research and offers these additional countermeasures:

1. Proper Recruitment & Hiring Process

In the area of recruitment, agencies need to raise their standards and make use of all processes available that may aid in determining the integrity and character of prospective officers that includes voice/polygraph test, psychological assessments, and thorough background investigation. Using these processes along with other testing procedures will ensure that the best applicants are chosen, instead of hiring marginal candidates.

2. Top-notch FTO Program

The implementation of top-notch FTO programs has improved new police officers' performance through this training. This program enables new officers to make the transition from the academic setting to the real-life, field situation and other general uniformed patrol duties of the police agency. As a result, this increases the chances of having a positive organization culture within a patrol division and throughout the department.

3. Continuous Adequate Ethics Training

When it comes to ethics training most agencies do very little, if any. Goldstein, writing in the 1970's (*Goldstein, 1975*) noted that most police training avoided discussion of corruption, believing that discussing wrongdoing was inherently undesirable and might even encourage such behavior. He further suggests if agencies do ethics training, it is generally done in a manner that

is unlikely to resonate with new recruits or make much difference to subsequent behavior. For ethics training to be effective, it must be explored fully and realistically; and cover all aspects of corruption from accepting gratuity to the more serious misconduct. In other words, we must understand and accept the moral danger in police work, due to the duties and the inherent power.

4. Professional Pride

Although there is a difference in opinions on professional pride, one would argue that pride comes from within. If officers would hold themselves more accountable, they would realize that lack of commitment, laziness, and mediocrity is unacceptable, pre-empting the opportunity for misconduct and possibly criminal behavior. Furthermore, each would come to realize that this is not a daunting task, as it only calls for one to perform their jobs with a high level of consistency, integrity, and being committed to do the right thing at the right time.

5. Good Leadership

Police administrators and supervisors responsibilities are never ending. The law enforcement workforce is expected to operate in an efficient and professional manner without expressing their personal views and emotions. At times this can be a very difficult task, as police officers are only human. However, to enable them to accomplish this, law enforcement agencies must have a strict and unwavering adherence to a code of ethics and a code of conduct. It is imperative that every organization has a set of values, written or unwritten, which form the underlying structure of all policies, guidelines, rules, and regulations. Subsequent actions, both positive and negative, by members of the department should be judged according to these principles and appropriately recognized. If a department can accomplish this, then they can achieve a state of integrity that is, a consistency of principles and actions throughout the organization. If all decision-making in the department can follow the basic principles, it will make the task of integrity maintenance much easier.

In addition, police officers routinely deal with the worst that society has to offer. This cause's police work to be very stressful, seductive and exhilarating which at times can feel like being on a roller coaster. In an instant, an officer may have to use physical or deadly force against someone or even have physical or deadly force used against him or her. When police officers come into the profession they are trained to be "warriors" and to handle all types of crime and situations. However, most are not trained in how to deal with the draining, often gruesome work they are exposed to day-to-day, coupled with personal stress, the attitudes of the public and the criminal justice system, the sum total of which can create significant psychological stress.

More than 1300 law enforcement officers committed suicide in 2004, according to statistics by the National Police Suicide Foundation. Police are killing themselves two to three times faster than they are being killed. Furthermore, one third (1/3) of all active-duty and retired police officers are suffering from "Post Trauma Stress" and the majority of them don't realize it (<http://www.help4cops.netheaven.com/>). If not dealt with, stress can take a toll on any law enforcement officer that can affect his or her decision-making, or even worse, leads to suicide. That is why police agencies should provide psychological services for their officers and encourage, or perhaps even make use of them mandatory. Having this in place will not only increase morale and decrease unethical behavior; it will enable officers to be in the best mental condition to make the right decisions.

Summary

Police corruption cannot exist long without at least an implied acceptance by the police agency. Therefore, it is the responsibility of police administrators to see that the "barrel" does not leak integrity. Police administrators must revitalize and reinforce the department's core values in the minds and hearts of all their personnel, so police officers understand their responsibility to uphold the integrity of the department.

Furthermore, the department's code of conduct needs to consist of guidelines for all officers to perform their duties. Some of those guidelines should include acting impartially, exercising discretion, using reasonable force, maintaining confidentiality, and displaying a professional image at all times. However, these are just words on a piece of paper. It is important for administrators and supervisors to understand that their actions or inactions are critical, as they can easily create an atmosphere of eroding standards, eventually leading to a significant act of misconduct or corruption by their subordinates. In other words, ethical behavior is not only judged by words, but also by actions.

Law enforcement has changed tremendously over the last fifty years and we have made great strides in the area of professionalism. However, current events and the research support the premises that more work needs to be done. To be recognized by all as a profession, it is essential that law enforcement agencies implement the above mentioned criteria and each state adopt a *"Profession-wide System"* for decertification purposes

(www.hrw.org/reports98/police/uspo28.htm - *Disciplinary actions*). The National Institute of

Ethics has recommended that this system develop the following:

- **Standardize decertification terminology throughout the country.**
- **Set recommendations for guidelines and procedures for decertification.**
- **Maintain state and nation-wide data base to track officers decertified to prevent decertified officers from unknowingly being hired by another agency.**
- **Track and analyze decertification statistics to develop appropriate on-going "Ethics" training.**

In addition, law enforcement needs good leadership that will ensure proper procedures are in place and that partner with their police officers in finding ways to maintain autonomy while at the same time continue accountability within their "community". If this is accomplished, law enforcement will have taken a substantial step towards demonstrating to the public that we are a *"Profession"*.