

I frequently remark about the evolution of the law enforcement profession as I have observed during my time as a member of service. As a result of this evolution, I fully believe that a progressive law enforcement administrator needs to be current on changing laws, best practices, the newest technologies, and emerging trends. Additionally, it's equally important for a police administrator to realize that a broader knowledge of the law enforcement profession is assumed by society, perhaps now more than ever before. This is a direct result of police efforts towards transparency, citizen ride-along programs, citizen police academies, news media, social media, video recording technologies, department websites, and of course television & movies.

The creators of law enforcement based T.V. shows and movies have some excellent consultants on board because in many ways, they accurately depict certain aspects of the profession. Some productions do a better job than others, but suffice it to say, a person with little to no law enforcement knowledge can gain a general insight as to how police function based upon Hollywood's interpretation. The caveat however is that the film industry is geared towards entertainment and because of that, there are a lot of aspects portrayed which are misrepresented. The misrepresentations sometimes create societal expectations that are grounded in entertainment as opposed to reality. This article will look at some of those distortions.

Without a doubt, the first one that comes to mind is based upon forensic evidence and investigations. It is completely true that we in law enforcement have a tremendous ability to solve crimes and identify perpetrators through DNA, latent fingerprints, shoe impressions, tool marks, ballistic evidence, and computer technologies to name a few. Television and movies however incorrectly portray a quick analysis with immediate results in just about all cases. Collecting usable evidence, delivering that evidence to the crime lab for analysis, and receiving word on the lab's findings takes time and unfortunately, all crimes relying strictly on forensic evidence can not be instantly solved as on TV.

Many shows and movies frequently depict investigations in which unlimited resources are at the disposal of the investigating agency. In reality, many law enforcement agencies work with limited resources and high volume, thereby reducing the ability to focus singularly on one particular investigation. Although the best efforts are put forth, the end result is not always an arrest and successful conviction in a timely manner.

The film industry also depicts non-stop action and scenes that leave you on the edge of your seat. In reality, good police work involves a lot of preventative patrols, case follow-ups, community policing, and tedious paperwork. If the mundane tasks that officers perform daily were part of a TV show or movie, you can bet that the ratings for that show would not be very high.

Hollywood often shows gunfights, car chases, and violent encounters with an element of glamour. There is nothing glamorous about any of the above and in reality, many law enforcement officers are sadly killed each year by those methods. At the end of TV shows and movies, the "good guy" usually wins and the "bad guy" is sent to prison. As much as we would always like this to be the case, it simply is not always true.

So the take-away from this is; continue to enjoy the movies and TV shows that Hollywood creates, but bear in mind that they are not always representative of reality. I happen to be a fan of Law and Order, Blue Bloods, and police movies, but I know that they are entertainment, plain and simple. Knowing that there is a difference between Hollywood productions and reality will help to keep expectations in line with actual law enforcement capabilities.