

Guest Column April 2014 By Chief Naylor- Self Control is Key to Avoid Jail Time

In law enforcement, there are obviously many things which contribute to the perpetration of criminal acts. One of the most significant contributing factors is a lack of, or loss of self-control. One of the truest statements that I have ever heard is that the "prisons are full of people who simply could not control their emotions." Moments of rage, jealousy, greed, lust, vengeance, consumption, frustration, etc., often form the foundations for criminal acts. Even a momentary lapse in judgment can have life-changing effects. To put this in context, consider how often you hear on the news about a person who is charged with a crime only to further learn that the individual is a well-respected and upstanding member of his or her community. Chances are that most people hear these stories and think that "getting arrested" would never happen to them, but the reality is that it can happen to anyone.

As I've often stated, it's well-established that there are people on this planet who are simply human predators. Regard for others and reverence for life are not tenets to which these individuals subscribe. These people eventually end up in prison and as a result, our society is a bit safer. There are other people who are not violent predators, but are simply repeat offenders who have demonstrated that they will not follow societal rules and therefore usually end up in prison too. Lastly, there are those who are responsible individuals who have established themselves as contributing members of society, yet end up in prison for an act which nobody would've expected. This last group of people can be anyone who loses self-control or control of their emotions.

Some examples of this last group which we in law enforcement often see are as follows: The person who exchanges words with another, and then proceeds to escalate a "war of words" into a serious physical assault; or the person who has access to another's property or money and decides to steal it for themselves; or the person who over consumes alcohol, then operates a motor vehicle; or the person who engages in any act of rage based upon jealousy, vengeance, or frustration; or the person with addictive behavior who gives into their addiction (drugs, drinking, gambling, etc.) and as a result finds themselves in legal trouble. These examples represent things which responsible people would normally not do, but a lapse in judgment or self-control can easily change that.

Conflict resolution training is a great way to minimize issues that could otherwise develop from rage or frustration. Many situations which turn violent could be avoided if one of the parties involved worked towards diffusing the situation. Additionally, taking time to consider consequences before one acts can be a huge element in preventing oneself from becoming an arrest statistic. If you're drinking, plan for a ride home. If you see something of value, don't take it because the costs of a defamed reputation, prison sentence, and attorney bills are much greater. If emotions of jealousy or anger are driving you to commit a criminal act, take time to cool off or speak to a friend or counselor for support and advice before you act. If you or someone you know suffers from addictive tendencies, seek counseling and/or treatment.

If those reading this article remember one thing from it, I hope it would be to realize how important it is to stay in control of your emotions, especially during the times when it is most difficult. Anger and temptation can affect everyone; it's human nature. Those who have a moment of weakness and give in to it can easily find themselves in trouble. Think before you act and consider possible consequences. Keep in mind too that when someone is arrested, it could very well be the result of an instance of poor judgment and does not necessarily define the person. The longer one works in law enforcement, the easier it is to see that there are predators, habitual repeat offenders, and then there are those who simply make mistakes. We hope the last group learns from those mistakes.