

Guest Column by Dennis R. Naylor
Police Work Requires Unique Personal Skills

It may come as no surprise to hear that police work is an extremely unique profession, unlike any other. It's deeply rooted in American culture, it's glamorized in the movies more often than any other profession, it's enmeshed into every high profile incident which occurs around the world, and in many ways is exciting and adventurous. For these reasons, many people are drawn to it, but the truth of the matter is that it takes a very special type of person to be part of this business. As a police chief, it is therefore my responsibility to sort out the properly suited from the improperly suited and only hire those who will serve in an honorable manner. To me, being part of law enforcement is a career which only a select few have earned.

The men and women of law enforcement need to be a lot of things: They need to be physically, morally, and emotionally fit. They need to be quick-thinking, creative, observant, intelligent, and well-spoken. They need to give direction, but also take direction. They need to emotionally connect to others, yet remain detached. They need to be even-tempered during times of emotion turmoil and remain professional and courteous during times of verbal and physical assaults. They must respond towards danger while others flee and must continuously react with sound judgment. Officers work long hours, holidays and weekends, and regularly miss family events. They work under a zero-acceptance rate for failure and if they perform their jobs well, they must accept that it will generally go unnoticed. As you can see, there are few people capable of meeting these standards, yet the allure to apply still exists for many.

Law enforcement officers are called upon whenever someone has been victimized, traumatized, or violated in some way. If every reader were to think of the worst thing that could possibly happen to them, the images would be different but the common theme is that each person would dial 911 and ask for help. The reality for law enforcement is that we respond to people's worst moments and as a coping and survival mechanism we are a bit different; oftentimes more skeptical, guarded, vigilant, and as a result, sometimes even isolated from society.

Officers routinely go into unknown situations multiple times per day and to stay safe, must remain guarded and alert. Sometimes an officer is perceived as cold, when he or she is simply trying to determine whether the person with whom they are dealing is friend or foe. Sometimes they have to raise their voice to be heard, because if they didn't they'd be ignored by the quarreling parties. Other times an officer is required to use force to control a violent and dangerous person who is intent on causing harm to themselves or others. And other times, an officer may appear skeptical of what they are told, due in part to the fact that officers are often lied to on a daily basis. Even with all of this, most officers truly love their jobs and would sacrifice their lives to save that of a stranger's.

When you have contact with an officer, please bear in mind the above to create a better perspective. If however you are not satisfied with an officer's response to your situation, then by all means please contact the agency of that officer and ask to speak to a supervisor to discuss the situation or file a complaint. In law enforcement administration we realize that a bad experience with an officer, coupled with a traumatic event to begin with is not good and we as Chief's, Sheriff's, and Commanders want to know about it so that we can properly address the situation and take corrective action. Likewise, if you are pleased with how the officer treated you, then please let him or her know this because it would mean a lot to them. Remember to also contact their supervisors and advise them too because supervisors very much like to hear about a positive experience between an officer and a citizen.

Open communication is a vital component to strong police-community relations and we welcome questions, comments, and concerns to improve our product. I sincerely hope that this article helped to better describe the law enforcement profession, and if after reading this you believe that you have what it takes, then sign up for the next civil service examination.

"It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta."

