

Guest Column by Chief Dennis R. Naylor – Personal Responsibility is all too rare

Recently, in a meeting with some young adults from our community, I was asked if I had noticed any specific crime trends occurring in our region. My initial response was that I really had not noticed any new trends as of late; overall, the Uniform Crime Report Statistics which I compile monthly remain relatively consistent. Sometimes I'll see a decrease in one crime type or an increase in another, which helps me better direct the police department's resources, but overall things are within expected ranges. The conversation moved on to another topic, however I was still thinking about this question. As I thought about it, I realized that I had in fact been noticing an emerging trend. The trend however wasn't in regards to an increase in a specific crime-type or crime pattern, but rather a societal trend that I could readily observe as a member of law enforcement.

I then explained that there was a disturbing trend which had become quite observable, and that trend is an overwhelming increase in the failure for many people to accept responsibility for their actions. Obviously this is not something completely new, but more and more this trend has become the norm versus the exception. Nowadays when I learn that an individual has taken full responsibility for their actions, I am rather stunned. Unfortunately, it seems that more people are quicker to deny responsibility, threaten legal action, tell you who they know of influence, or simply blame someone or something outside of their own actions for something which they knowingly did. In law enforcement, we have many instances in which someone is confronted with video evidence of themselves involved in a criminal act, yet they still deny responsibility.

Clearly this problem does not only occur on the local level, but we also frequently see it on the global stage. We observe celebrities, those in positions of power and authority, sports figures, world leaders, and so forth claim successes, but blame others for mistakes, wrong doings, or criminal activities. We have become a "quick-fix" society where many avenues exist to make it very easy to reduce and deflect responsibilities for one's actions, so much to the point that it has become a standard practice. This practice is not acceptable, and we really need to place a greater emphasis on personal responsibility if there is to be a safer environment and a better world in which to live.

Our mission in law enforcement is to promote safety within the communities that we serve, but until personal responsibility is ingrained on a broader basis, upholding our mission will continue to be an uphill battle. You see, we as police are often called to fix problems that have been years in the making and those who call us expect that within a short time we can fix everything but we can't. Part of the issue is that not only has a problem developed over a long period of time, but many times people with whom we encounter have never taken responsibility for their actions so creating positive change is quite difficult. Some of those whom we encounter have been enabled to deny accountability and responsibility through the support of others. That support may be an effort to help that person get out of trouble, but unfortunately their actions reinforce denial and create more serious problems in the future for our society and the person who they are trying to help.

We are all human and we are all susceptible to making mistakes. It's a fact of life and owning up to those mistakes and accepting the consequences of one's actions is important for growth and development. Blaming others or finding ways to shirk responsibility simply compound the problems which we all must live with. Law enforcement, even with all of our advanced technology and training, simply can not create a better society alone. We all have a social responsibility to help create higher levels of personal responsibility to bring about positive change. As we look ahead to the new year, let's all make this an endeavor worth pursuing. I wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season and a great new year ahead.

"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."

