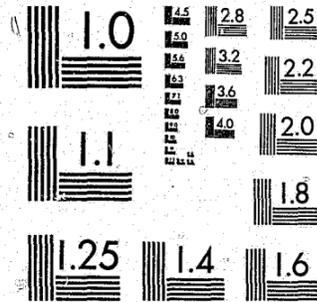


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THE COVER: No elephant crossing! A Salt Lake City officer does his duty, citing the transgressing trunks as Orville Wilson, a crime laboratory photographer, captures the moment.

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Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

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Personnel

Police Cynicism A Cancer in Law Enforce- ment?

By KENNETH R. BEHREND
Chief of Police
Lewiston, Idaho

What is cynicism? Where does it come from? How do we guard against it? Are there law enforcement personnel who are cynics? The answers to these questions are of primary concern to all peace officers, regardless of rank.

Cynicism, like cancer, does not respect rank, status, or position. It can frequently grow within individuals or within our organizations without us realizing its presence. Other parallels can be drawn between the disease and the cause and effect of police cynicism. If both are detected in the early stages of development, they can be cured. If left to nurture to their potential, they can and frequently do become terminal to our careers, our lives, or both.

Cynicism can be defined as a means to display an attitude of contemptuous distrust of human nature and motives. When we hear the term "police cynicism," it frequently creates visions of something evil, dark, foreboding, and diabolical. It corrupts and destructs the total image of a police officer or organization.

Numerous studies have been conducted on this topic, and excellent research material is available based on sound empirical data. However, this article approaches the subject from a police administrator's viewpoint, with the hopes of providing useful information to other police officers, as opposed to an academic or clinical review of the subject.

Cynicism does exist in law enforcement and perhaps is more widespread than many of us realize. The symptoms are frequently overlooked, and people are generally not referred to as "cynics" until they exhibit the advanced stages of the problem. It should be realized, however, that before reaching the advanced stage, there is an incubation period that produces early warning signs as to the presence of attitude disorders that can culminate in cynicism. The inherent stress and frustration found in the law enforcement profession provides an ideal breeding ground for the disorder.

Young officers entering law enforcement frequently have deep feelings of commitment and a sense of entering a field of endeavor which is worthwhile and meaningful to society. Many of them notice a gradual change in their relationship with friends or even relatives. How often has it been said, "Now that Jim is a cop we gotta be careful or he will arrest us." As seemingly innocent as this may be, it may cause the officer to withdraw and minimize his association with past friends. Conversely, he usually increases his association with other law enforcement personnel. The result is the officer unknowingly starts a slow withdrawal from society. As contact with peers increases, both on and off the job, the main topic of discussion becomes the

job. The officer hears colleagues tell of their experiences and he relates his own experiences in the same fashion. He listens to the frustrations other officers encounter with the job and in society and starts to identify those frustrations as his own. Early in his career, he is eager to return home after a tour of duty and recount the new and exciting experiences he has had. As the excitement wanes and bizarre experiences become commonplace to his world, questions from his spouse as to the occurrences of the day are frequently shrugged off with a reply of "Nothing much, a couple of stick-ups, that's all!" The officer faces a continual exposure to the worst of society—homicide, suicide, violence, rape, broken homes, shattered lives, transients, alcoholics, delinquents, addicts. He witnesses daily man's inhumanity to his fellow man and the inability of numerous residents of his city to cope with the pressure of society. Without knowing what is happening to him, he starts to withdraw from society. He begins to reach a point where it becomes an "us against them" world. The "us" are his fellow police officers, the only friends he believes he has, and "them" becomes the remainder of society. Throughout his early development as a police officer, he is constantly reminded there are those in society who would take his life. He is constantly taught to be on his guard, to be suspicious, to trust no one. Thus, the withdrawal continues. He discontinues old haunts and habits because they place him in a position where he is exposed and vulnerable. Instead of responding favorably to a request from his spouse for an evening out, he replies, "I'm not going to go down to the local nightspot and associate with the same people I throw in jail."



Chief Behrend holds an informal rap session with members of his department.

The virus of cynicism has been nurtured, and if allowed to remain untreated or unchecked, can become terminal for the officer's career and perhaps even to his life.

The foregoing is a graphic description of one form of cynicism. There are other ways it can flourish, and cynicism is not restricted to entry-level personnel. Take, for example, the older, experienced officer who is frustrated by the American system of criminal justice and becomes disenchanted with what he sees as roadblocks to prosecuting criminals—prosecutors who refuse to accept cases, side deals made outside the courtroom with defense attorneys, plea bargainings, and court decisions that appear to protect the criminal at the expense of society. All of these elements have a tendency to break down the officer's regard for the system and can cause him to withdraw from the established norm and move toward a cynical or distrustful attitude.

Another common form in which the hydra-head of police cynicism may materialize is the officer who becomes frustrated after numerous attempts to be recognized, to have his work praised, or to receive a promotion. After repeated tries to grab the golden ring, he becomes frustrated with the system, withdraws from competition,

exhibits feelings of bitter contempt, and ridicules others who continue to try. His world becomes one of existing and trying to provide a defense against the system he sees as threatening; he withdraws from the system and finds fault with it at every opportunity.

The administrative ranks or the top police administrator himself are not immune to cynicism. Continual criticism of his endeavors, combined with the frustration of attempting to deliver police services demanded by the community while being restricted by inadequate resources, can cause police administrators and entire law enforcement organizations to assume a cynical attitude toward governing bodies and the community at large. The administrator complains he is not furnished the resources he needs to obtain the expected results and eventually recedes into the "us against them" syndrome. In this case, "us" is the police agency and "them" becomes city hall, the county commissioners or another funding authority, and more importantly, the community.



A newspaper editor addresses officers at a police department training session.

The administrator places the fault of his plight on citizens for their inability or unwillingness to support his budget requests and on the governing body for their lack of sensitivity to his needs. The agency withdraws from the community under the leadership of the administrator and becomes wrought with self-pity and apathy—incompetent to the delivery of quality public service.

The first and perhaps best line of defense against allowing police cynicism to infect you or your agency is simply acknowledging that it does exist. It is real, and as such, can be prevented or corrected. Being aware of what it is in layman's terms is an asset in identifying the symptoms and taking corrective action or instituting procedures which will minimize its occurrence.

Training bulletins or sessions for all ranks within an organization which address the topic are of considerable benefit in educating personnel as to the meaning of the term and the symptoms that identify it. Some agencies make available competent professional assistance to conduct periodic training sessions which use self-analysis, group settings, and other recognized techniques to reveal latent tendencies in participants that harbor the potential of future cynicism. Considerable skill and knowledge are prerequisites to conduct successfully such a training session. However, most departments possess qualified personnel who can discuss the subject in meaningful terms. By educating our personnel that cynicism is a reaction to conditions that can strike anyone and expose the phenomenon so that it can be understood, we have taken the first step toward preventing its occurrence. Training sessions which use community resources outside the department, such as social service agencies, community organizations, etc., are beneficial not only because of the subject matter under discussion but also because they place the officer in contact with other segments of the community.



A stop and talk program can keep an officer in touch with the community he serves.

They expose him to other viewpoints and values that are usually different from those of a police organization and help the officer understand his role in relation to society.

When demands for service permit, a "stop and talk" program is an excellent method of placing an officer in touch with the community. The program encourages a one-on-one dialog between a law enforcement officer and a citizen in a nonenforcement setting and exposes an officer to the side of society from which he normally drifts in his daily duties. Usually, his contacts are with victims, witnesses, suspects, or traffic offenders and are conducted in an official capacity. If a stop and talk program is encouraged, the officer has an opportunity to contact citizens on their terms, and the feedback he receives can be a valuable experience for him and important to the organization as a whole in measuring the community's perceptions of the police.

Individual counseling or instruction remains an option for an employee who may be experiencing difficulty in defining his role in society as a police officer. In serious or advanced cases, professional counseling may be required to help an officer adjust his attitude; however, in the majority of instances, well-oriented, competent supervisors can furnish the necessary assistance.

Practically all law enforcement agencies use some form of performance evaluation forms. The existing systems differ widely, and some serve a multiplicity of purposes, such as determining merit increases, promotion, evaluation of job performance, and other factors. Some systems are designed with the total objective of improving job performance. In either case, the system can be remodeled to provide a vehicle for periodic feedback to an officer concerning his relationship with the community and his commitment to the department's mission.

Occasional, informal "rap sessions" between the top administrator and members of his organization are another tool that can be used to provide information, dispel rumors, and establish the philosophy of the administration. Such sessions are voluntary and informal in nature, with rank being set aside while items of general interest are discussed. The administrator has an opportunity to establish rapport, dispense his philosophy, and receive feedback on individual attitudes at the same time. Through the informal session, the administrator has the opportunity to present an experienced, well-oriented viewpoint on the role of the police in society, as well as influencing individual lifestyles through his opinions and comments. An administrator may believe his time is too valuable for such a limited participation; however, it must be remembered that it is a communications process and the administrator is receiving as well as giving. In addition, word will rapidly spread in the organization concerning what the chief thinks about a particular subject.

Creating an environment that encourages officer involvement in community events and programs is another method of insuring officers are exposed to the community they serve. Every community hosts social events, sporting events, community projects or appoints boards, commissions, or committees which serve the community. By encouraging officers to assume an active role in community events, a two-fold purpose is accomplished. Officers stay in touch with the community, and an opportunity exists to expose

"Recognizing and understanding cynicism is the first line of defense against its continual growth."

citizens to department members. Additionally, another benefit is derived from such a practice. Through their association with other people, officers develop friends and acquaintances who are not members of the criminal justice system. Such contacts are valuable to an officer in maintaining a healthy perspective of his role in the community. The same purpose is accomplished by encouraging and supporting the enrollment of police officers in service clubs and civic organizations. The concept behind these endeavors is to break down the barriers of provincialism and encourage law enforcement personnel to be an active party of society, as opposed to the smaller arena of circulation available when contacts are restricted to other law enforcement personnel. Assuming such a role places an officer in touch with the positive elements of society, instead of continual exposure to a small, negative, and sometimes violent segment of society.

Police administrators should review the internal policies and procedures of their respective organizations to insure the philosophy of the organization advocates an awareness of community values and does not foster an isolationist attitude with respect to the department and the community.

The internal integrity of the promotional and other "systems" within the agency is also of paramount importance in creating an atmosphere that prohibits the spread of cynicism. Employees must respect and believe in each system's design, particularly the promotional system. The opportunity to compete in a promotional system that is viewed as fair, impartial, and identifies the best-qualified applicants is a prerequisite to avoiding deep frustrations which can result in prejudices, disenchantment, and a predisposition toward cynicism.

Police cynicism is not viewed as an evil, diabolical corruption of police personalities and organizations when we understand what it is, its causes, and its treatment. Instead, it becomes a human reaction to stress that can invade our attitude just as cancer can invade our body. However, action can be taken to safeguard ourselves and our organizations.

Recognizing and understanding cynicism is the first line of defense against its continual growth. Establishing an organizational philosophy that advocates close ties to the community can minimize the opportunity for cynicism to develop. When detected in the early stages, corrective measures can be applied to insure that the attitude of the organization is in concert with delivering quality public service. Measures can be taken to insure the health, safety, and physical well-being of our personnel. Can we afford to do any less for their important mental well-being which affects not only the individual officer but the agency and the community as well? **FBI**

END