

Police: Profession vs. Blue Collar

I just finished reading a digest list of Police-L posts, which I enjoy, doing on a daily basis, then deleted everything and went on with other everyday tasks. I kept thinking about one post that talked about police work as a profession vs. police work as a blue-collar type job. It was a good post and I enjoyed reading it. The post also mentioned NYPD list members, especially the two with the same first name of Sean. It also referred to the level of writing skills possessed by members, with some members having excellent writing skills, and some whose skills challenge the best grammar / spell checker known to man or woman. It may have suggested, I say may, that the most professional and articulate among us have other professions and only dabble in law enforcement or are full time law enforcement, but of some substantial rank (in this context a noun meaning grade of official standing) that their responsibilities are purely administrative. Furthermore, the line officer is of the blue-collar type, not so much that articulate when it comes to writing, but gets the job done. It is this premise, that law enforcement personnel need not be true professionals to get the job done, that I would like to explore further.

I was barely a teenager when I decided that I wanted to be a police officer. It was the example presented by my uncle, who was a NYS Trooper that helped mold my desire to enter law enforcement. It became apparent to me, at the time that I needed to meet certain standards. I needed to stay out of trouble, be in excellent physical condition, and have good communication skills. The first two were no problem, but the last one concerned me greatly. Communication skills, well I may not have tagged it as such, but I knew I would be dealing with people. That meant talking and conveying to them what needed to be done. Why such a great concern? Well, you see, I stuttered. People would pay more attention to my stammering than to what I was trying to say. I may have all the best ideas, but who would know if I could not convey them properly. I soon overcame the problem on my own, but that's another story, and today have no hint of a stammer. The point is that poor writing skills are like a literary stammer, most people are not going to try and figure out what it is that you are trying to say.

I was not long in the profession when it dawned on me that not only oral skills were important, but good writing skills were just as important. Along with that, let me add critical thinking skills. What all of these have in common is that they are skills. A skill is a developed or learned ability. Some of us will be better at it than others, but it is important in police work to strive to keep the highest level of proficiency that each of us can muster. The most obvious way to develop these skills is through a formal college course of study. Many departments now are requiring at least two years of college for entry-level police positions. This is good and it provides a way of documenting skill development, because a degree is conferred. This is the first element in meeting the definition of professionalism. But it does not stop there. Keeping abreast of the latest ideas and trends by reading professional journals, on going in service training, and forums such as Police-L are all part of the equation.

We deal with professionals everyday such as attorneys, judges, psychologists, and social workers. Should we not also be professionals? It starts with a professional appearance (command presence), but don't let it stop there once you start to communicate, whether oral or written. The people we serve will draw conclusions about those who are chosen to hold their trust. Let it be the best possible. Let those that lead us come from among us. An effective leader

is one that can instill motivation. He or she must be a people person with excellent communication skills, all the more reason to require these skills from a line officer.

I believe it is Deb S. who ends her posts with, "Do not enter a battle of wits unarmed." Well, let this be a call to arms, arming ourselves with skills enough to win the battle without firing a shot.

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