



VALOR **Spotlight on Safety**

Officer Safety, Wellness, and Resiliency



LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALISM **SET THE STANDARD** **OTHERS WILL FOLLOW**

"As law enforcement officers, we can be agents of change. Being a professional law enforcement officer requires commitment to yourself, your fellow officers, and your community."

Written by
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SET THE STANDARD. OTHERS WILL FOLLOW.

Mahatma Gandhi is credited with saying, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” I remember reading this quote many years ago as a young army lieutenant stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the message has stuck with me. As a practicing police officer and the beneficiary of many years of experience, I find these words ring truer now than they have ever before, especially in public policing. We can recount the many incidents over the past 20 or 30 years that have impacted officer safety. As law enforcement officers, we recognize and accept challenges such as:

- » Critical incidents
- » Shift changes, irregular work hours, work demands
- » Bureaucracy, politics, laws, court systems
- » Scrutiny, criticism, media
- » Exposure to human misery
- » Expectations of others

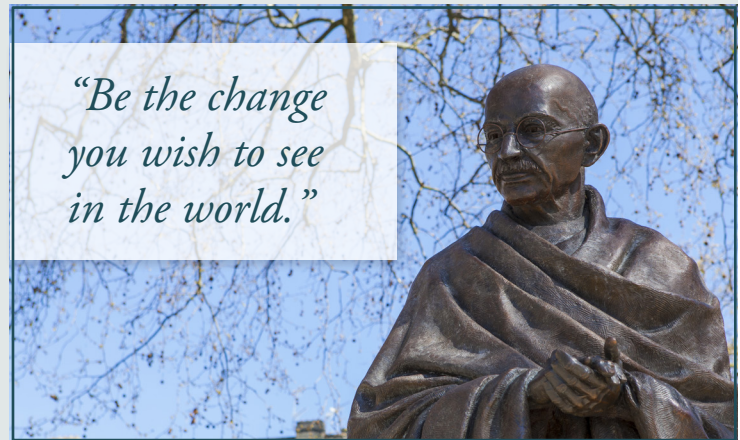
As law enforcement officers, we can be agents of change. Being a professional law enforcement officer requires commitment to yourself, your fellow officers, and your community.

IT'S NOT JUST A JOB

While some might consider law enforcement as “just a job,” we know that it is so much more. No one can argue that the almost 900,000 law enforcement officers¹ in America are expected to be professionals and to consistently perform to the best of their abilities. **There is an inseparable connection between your professionalism, your continued development, and your safety. Professionalism leads to officer safety.** This is the oath we all took when we became law enforcement officers. When someone in the community calls 9-1-1, he or she expects a competent and professional law enforcement officer to arrive in a timely manner to address whatever issues present themselves. A professional officer is well-trained and mentally and physically fit to do the job. Law enforcement officers must be committed to:

- » Being **physically fit**. Appearance matters!
- » Looking and dressing professionally. **First impressions make a difference!**
- » Being moral barometers for other officers through behavior that demonstrates **LEED—Listen and Explain with Equity and Dignity**.
- » Setting the example by **obeying departmental safety practices**, such as always wearing their vests, regardless of their ranks.
- » Participating in **training that goes beyond the basics**, such as using casualty care and rescue tactics, practicing techniques used to defuse difficult encounters, and recognizing pre-incident indicators.
- » Participating in **officer wellness programs** designed to help officers survive and thrive.

Each officer has incredible influence over what citizens think and feel about law enforcement officers. To have a lasting, positive impact on citizens and communities, a law enforcement officer must be intentional about his or her professional development.



LEAD BY EXAMPLE

From my time as an army officer, I also remember another quote that has helped me understand the world around me and has guided me well. Morihei Ueshiba, the Japanese founder of the martial art aikido, once said, "Iron is full of impurities that weaken it; through forging, it becomes steel and is transformed into a razor-sharp sword. Human beings develop in the same fashion."



Forging a path of strength, competence, and skill empowers us to overcome roadblocks and enables us to lead by example and to become professional leaders in the 21st century. You can become a scholar, a statesman, and a guardian.

SCHOLAR

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Knowledge is the cornerstone of being a professional and has its foundation in constitutional policing, which recognizes the importance of treating all citizens we serve with dignity and respect during all law enforcement/citizen interactions. The factors that matter are knowledge of the law (statutory and judicial), policies and procedures, interpersonal communication, and tactics. Lack of knowledge on the part of a law enforcement officer could result in diminished officer and citizen safety.

STATESMAN

COMMUNICATION IS POWER

Individual law enforcement officers must form the bridge between the community and the law enforcement agency. This bridging is accomplished by asking questions and treating citizens better than they expect to be treated, while maintaining officer safety. Citizens expect officers to enforce the law, and they expect to be treated fairly and with dignity. All law enforcement officers should understand four universal principles: (1) everyone wants to be important; (2) everyone wants to feel respected; (3) everyone wants to be appreciated; and (4) no one likes to be criticized, demeaned, or condemned. Violating any of these universal principles could result in diminished officer and citizen safety.

GUARDIAN

PREPARATION IS POWER

As law enforcement officers, we have taken an oath to protect and to serve our communities; as such, we must be ready for any and every situation we may face. Preparation requires training in weapon systems and tactics. Do you know how you are going to respond in a situation? It depends on how you were trained. Does your agency provide the training you need? If not, then get the training on your own. This is what professionals do—they invest in their own training and development. Preparation requires training in unbiased policing, constitutional policing, and de-escalation. The guardian, while skilled at fostering deliberate, measured actions to restore order, also knows when and how to defuse a difficult encounter by using verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Officer and citizen safety can be gained using de-escalation methods in many cases. Preparation requires self-coaching and mental rehearsals for situations that may happen unexpectedly. Preparation requires the discipline to wait for your cover element to discuss how a situation should be handled and to brainstorm "what-if" scenarios. Preparation requires each individual officer to know the difference between being confident ("I think I can") and being competent ("I know I can"). Competence results in increased officer and citizen safety.

Expanding your knowledge, communication, and preparation demonstrates commitment to professionalism and, in turn, your safety, the safety of your fellow officers, and your community. The path to strength is never easy, but it is the path to a rewarding and fulfilling career in law enforcement. Set the standard. Others will follow!

SET THE STANDARD. OTHERS WILL FOLLOW.



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Resources

Additional resources on law enforcement professionalism and other law enforcement safety, health, and wellness topics are available on the BJA VALOR Spotlight on Safety page.

- » Please visit www.valorforblue.org/s/sos.
- » To listen to the VALOR Voices podcast Professional Policing in the 21st Century, visit <https://www.valorforblue.org/Home/VALOR-Interest/Podcasts>.
- » To watch the VALOR webinar Professionalism in Law Enforcement, visit https://www.valorforblue.org/eLearning/Webinar_Professionalism.aspx.

Endnote

¹ <http://www.nleomf.org/facts/enforcement/>.

For more information on **Spotlight on Safety**



Media



Training



Resources

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This project was supported by 2013-MU-BX-K001 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Stay Safe!

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