



Officer Survival Approach to Corruption

Skills to rise above unprofessional behavior



Two officers on patrol are focusing their attention on a parking lot that's been plagued recently with window-smash break-ins. A white pickup truck pulls out of the parking lot and turns onto the street.

"Bill, follow that truck. See if we can build some probable cause for a stop."

"You think he's one of our car clouters?"

"No, but I know him. The jerk cheated my brother out of a job. Just follow him. We'll get him on something, and you write him up. I'll stay in the car."

The Role of Leaders

This is just one of myriad temptations that officers can face. Most officers would quickly agree that this scenario should not occur, but clarifying precisely why this is wrong is the responsibility of leadership. Let's consider some of the institutional factors that can contribute to institutional corruption:

1. *No standards:* Standards that provide guidance and parameters for behavior are nonexistent, unclear or impractical. Providing leadership that discourages corruption can be perceived as risky. Some leaders would rather avoid tough decisions on standards rather than provide unpopular, straightforward restrictions.
2. *Lack of communication and training:* It's possible to have clear, practical standards and yet fail to effectively communicate them to all members of the organization. *Remember:* Leadership is responsible for ensuring standards are understood and implemented universally—*communicate*.
3. *Standards not enforced:* It's a fact:

Employees judge their leaders by their actions rather than what they say. Some leaders fail to enforce the standards through rewards and sanctions, and, thus, the standards can be viewed as simply technical requirements.

Officer Survival & Corruption

Most agencies work hard to provide officers guidance for physically surviving the tests of our profession. Special training develops the skills to survive a gun battle, and physical conditioning and self-defense help officers to overcome resistance to arrest. All of this is extremely important. But the data show that more officers don't survive—or complete their police career—due to ethical problems or a failure to measure up to professional standards. The public has high expectations of police professionalism due to the power entrusted to our stewardship.

For officer survival, we provide clear guidance through the law, department policy and moral/ethical considerations. We train on skills and tactics. We look at actual shooting situations under a microscope. Then we encourage partners to try to anticipate possible scenarios and discuss what actions they can take—all before the battle takes place. The same approach can be taken in preparing officers to survive the moral and ethical dilemmas they are likely to face.

- *Legal requirements:* First, provide the parameters required by the law, department policy and ethics. There are many laws addressing corruption. Academy training that addresses legal requirements must be reinforced by regular in-service or roll call training. Additionally, most agencies

require a commitment to a code of ethics. Each officer should sign an acknowledgement statement that they've been provided with and understand these requirements.

- *Operational skills:* Training must address practical skills that help officers avoid even the appearance of corruption. *Example:* requiring a traffic violator to remove their operator's license from the wallet rather than giving the wallet to the officer. Operational training must address every anticorruption requirement to ensure that officers can measure up.
- *Analyze scenarios:* Examine actual cases of corruption, just as we do gun battles. Look for factors that are precursors to the actual act of corruption, and discuss alternatives that officers can employ to avoid the slippery slope. Encourage training officers to go through this process with trainees in the field. A trainee who has discussed and rehearsed proper reactions to the inevitable temptations to compromise will be more likely to make the right decision.

In Sum

Surviving a career in law enforcement demands training, skill and commitment. The possibility of being involved in damaging misconduct and/or corruption is more likely than being shot. Preparing to meet these dangers increases survival. —On Point. **LOM**

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