

Leadership Spotlight

Above Reproach

No man is above the law and no man is below it, nor do we ask any man's permission when we require him to obey it.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Serving in law enforcement provides officers with many privileges not conferred upon most other professions. The honor of rendering service to fellow citizens in their utmost time of need, the ability to mentor and influence people to better themselves and society, and the duty to protect communities from natural and human dangers are the inherent privileges of the criminal justice profession. Unfortunately, instances occur in the law enforcement community when officers seek additional individual entitlements simply because of the position they hold. These entitlements, beyond the scope of those privileges inherent to the honorable nature of the job, are referred to as professional courtesies.

For many years, criminal justice professionals, academia, media personnel, and the public have debated this topic, broadly defined as the extension of special privileges from one professional to another simply because they share the same occupation. Quite often in the law enforcement setting, the courtesy extended is for leniency on a minor traffic violation or assistance on a personal matter that otherwise would not be addressed if the requestor was not a member of the law enforcement community.

Whether professional courtesies are ethically appropriate, legally permissible, or morally justified undoubtedly will be debated in different forums in the future. By simply avoiding situations where the need to request a professional courtesy will arise, officers can reduce the likelihood of having their actions scrutinized by peers, supervisors, members of professional boards, legal

analysts, media personnel, and public citizens. To avoid these dubious situations, law enforcement officers should be above reproach.

Fidelity is a characteristic affiliated with most successful leaders. The unfailing fulfillment of one's public duties and strict adherence to rules form the foundation of fidelity. Both on- and off-duty law enforcement officers must behave in such a manner that their actions are always within the letter and spirit of the law. For example, if officers obey the posted speed limit despite how fast or recklessly all the other drivers might be traveling, they never will find themselves in the precarious and controversial situation of needing to request a professional courtesy.

The law enforcement profession is highly revered by those employed within its ranks and by the public. Officers, regardless of rank or position, must be leaders in their departments and communities. Most criminal justice professionals, as well as citizens, will follow the example set by their respected leaders. When charged with enforcing the social contract society has with its citizens, officers must realize that their actions must represent, at a minimum, the same behaviors expected by society. Law enforcement officers who hold themselves to a higher ethical standard offer their communities the appropriate example to follow. ♦

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