

# LAW ENFORCEMENT SESSION

## YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS – SPACE AGE OR PREHISTORIC?

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Public relations in the Stone Age did not exist and they were hardly necessary. The philosophy of the time was strangely like that of Russia today. "Might is right", said the individual and did whatever he could get away with doing. There was also the philosophy of "eat or be eaten" which made the era somewhat exciting.

Today in our complex society, with ever increasing competition and the spiralling advance in technology, public relations have assumed a pedestal of drastic importance. There was a time when they were considered a type of unnecessary, but harmless, icing on the cake. Times have changed.

Shortly after World War I, the great French general, Marshall Foch, visited this country. A somewhat stupid American held forth on French politeness, saying it was nothing but hot air. To this the Marshall replied, "There is nothing but wind in an automobile tire, but it makes riding in a car very smooth and pleasant."

So with good public relations. If they do nothing else, they can make a deal more pleasant and can make a customer come back for another ride. I say "customer" here because in any field of endeavor through which man earns a living he is selling something to someone else, a customer. He might be selling goods or he might be selling services. But he is selling one or the other.

All of us are selling our services to the people. No matter how efficient and how knowledgeable we might be, we cannot override the value of good public relations. There have been many definitions of public relations. I think they all boil down to something like this. Public relations consist of good manners, a thorough knowledge of the policies and aims of our respective organizations, an understanding as to the diverse ways in which people with whom we deal might react to our actions and unending awareness that the public pays our salaries and keeps our organizations going.

I might add that it is good public relations to know what we do not know. Don't try to bluff. Be honest. But find the necessary answer or information as expediently as possible and do not forget it.

Your primary mission is the enforcement of certain laws. This enforcement is deemed necessary or you would not be here. Make no apology for your enforcement activities, but remember knowing your laws and equipment and using them is not enough.

Enforcement standards in the past were not as high as they are now. Thus enforcement is still struggling to regain lost ground in the public eye. We are all members of a team striving to enhance the images of our departments and of our states. It should be our unending desire that not only are our supervisors proud of us but also the people of the state.

People are important and we work with people. Remember, time is never so pressing that we cannot be courteous. Those in government service, particularly in enforcement endeavors, are often judged harshly by the public.

Governmental employees are paid through the compulsory medium of taxes and the public cannot take its business elsewhere. Unfortunately, many government employees have lived up to a stereotype of slothfulness and inefficiency in the past. Again, we must strive to eliminate this stereotype.

All too often, a citizen expects discourtesy and harshness from an enforcement officer. We must thus ever seek to build up attitudes favorable to law enforcement. The average citizen, unfortunately, does not look upon violations of our game and fisheries or boating laws as a crime. This is similar to the public attitude towards traffic offenses.

This does not call for undue leniency. There is an old expression to the effect that one can be as hard as nails and still be a gentlemen. However, we should do all we can to prevent offenses rather than apprehend a violator after he has committed one.

A high ranking police official tells a story of his rookie days. He was on duty one night at a public gathering. Noting an intoxicated person walking towards his automobile, he went up to him quickly and told him that while he was not intoxicated to the point at which he should be arrested for public drunkenness, he was too adversely affected to drive an automobile. The officer then asked him not to drive, adding that if he did, there was no alternative but to arrest him for driving while intoxicated.

The officer's sergeant heard this and took him sternly to task. The individual had drunk too much and was going to drive. He had made his bed. Let him lie in it. He should have been allowed to hang himself.

I think the young officer made a friend that day and that at least one person looked upon enforcement officers as a group with much more appreciation than formerly.

Enforcement should be uniform and absolutely impartial. I think our State Police express it well when they pledge to enforce our laws "honestly, to the best of their abilities and without fear, favor or prejudice."

We should avoid enforcement "drives". An offense is as bad one time as another. Enforcement should be reasonable and understandable. As an example, enforcement of certain laws might have become extremely lax or might have lapsed altogether. Under such conditions it is hardly fair, and certainly not good public relations, to burst suddenly forth with an all out effort to enforce them suddenly and to the hilt. Give fair warning first that they must be enforced and tell why.

It is a hard fact but a true one that those in enforcement work are going to be judged far more severely as to their private lives, their activities and even their appearances than the private citizen or other type of governmental employee.

An enforcement officer is expected to be clean and neat. He is expected to present a good physical appearance and to exhibit no unpleasant habits. Spitting, boisterous conduct, horseplay, loud talk, touching or unnecessarily handling people quite often bring violent public resentment.

Smoking has generally become acceptable, but it should be avoided when conversing with violators or suspected violators. And I might add here that it is surprising how many people despise chewing gum and all the more when it is loudly "chomped".

Table manners are important and the public use of a toothpick can be most offensive. When dining, having a car serviced, making a necessary purchase or performing any function in public, it is always best to be as quiet and unobtrusive as possible. Don't patronize unsavory places and never loiter around such places as restaurants, filling stations and confectioneries, even if waiting to meet someone. It is best to stay in your car until he arrives. Always avoid the appearance of idleness.

Even in private life, you are harshly judged. Let an enforcement officer who is off duty and in civilian clothes go to a respectable place and order a bottle of beer. He is almost certain to be criticized and many people will go so far as to report the action to his chief.

Controversial questions, debates and arguments should be beyond the pale. They can so often lead to heated exchanges and bitter resentment. One who poses as an authority on a subject with which he is not more than familiar can run embarrassingly into someone who is.

The most prevalent public complaint against enforcement officers is, and I quote from a recent Gallup poll finding, "An overbearing attitude, carrying with it an attempt to deflate the ego of the citizen in public." It is not for an officer to scold, harangue or lecture an individual. If he feels an offense has been committed that merits action, he should calmly advise the individual as to its nature and why it is undesirable. Then he should listen to what the accused has to say, up to reasonable lengths.

There is another old expression which says that it is better to say nothing of

someone if we cannot say something good. This should extend to other agencies. Try to understand their problems, what they face and what they are expected to accomplish. Do not criticize. Remember, no organization, not even the ones to which we belong, is perfect.

All people should be treated equally and with the knowledge that people are individuals. They differ not only innately but according to the moment. One may be ill, unhappy, frightened, apprehensive, resentful or toiling under any emotion that distorts his normal behavior.

Remember, no matter how often the same facts have been presented to you, no matter how many times you might have listened to the same complaint, the problem is a real one to the citizen. Indicate your interest, listen within reason and calmly advise to the best of your ability.

Never be overly suspicious. In saying this, I do not ask that you be naive. Simply look carefully at any situation with an open mind until you have a fair appraisal of the facts. Too often propaganda and rumors are fanned by repetitious gossip and ready acceptance.

To anyone in enforcement work there come times when all self restraint must be marshalled. Here, losing one's temper can be fatal. Try to realize that because someone says something or calls you something, this does not make it true. Consider the source and take pride in rising above an obnoxious individual. Former President Woodrow Wilson said, "There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight."

Have faith in your supervisors. Support them, assist them and give them your loyalty. If you cannot do this, seek other employment. By the same token, loyalty should be returned. A supervisor should not rush madly to bat for a man who is wrong. But if the man is right, he merits the full support of those who direct his activities.

Avoid prejudices. I suppose there are prejudices and biases in all of us, but we must seek to control them. Again, people differ and such of their actions or manifestations as irritate us are utterly normal to them. If we envy, this envy should be a stimulus of emulation.

Be active. Never let things slide because you feel you can get away with it. You are serving the public and the public can be very sensitive as to how public funds are spent. Avoid idle curiosity. You will see everything in time. Remember the old saying that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

Children, our future citizens, offer great opportunities. Unfortunately it is the practice of some parents and other adults to threaten children with police action for puerile indiscretions. This adverse image should be overcome.

Any man in uniform is basically something of an idol to a child. Live up to this admiration, cultivate them with friendliness and understanding. Do this and you are building for the future.

Good public relations are drastically important to you. If we satisfy, and more than satisfy, those who employ us, benefits to us begin to accrue. Job security, opportunity for advancement, increased pay and better fringe benefits all arise with a job well done.

In conclusion, let me make the observation that each of you, in the eyes of the public, is your department or organization. A minute minority or an individual can destroy public confidence and admiration for all associated with either and for law enforcement as a whole.

The Fourteenth Century motto of two colleges of Oxford University in England exists today. It is "Manners Makyth Man". This is as true now as it was when it was first said.