

# Police Ethics

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### Introduction

Throughout an officers career there will be many occasion when the officers? ethics will be put to the test and it will be up to the officer not to allow there own ethics to weaken or become compromised. So many officers do find themselves in situations in which they have a serious ethical decision to make and whether or not they make the right decision will depend on that officers ethics. The decision the officer makes can also have drastic effect on how the officer?s career as well as personal life play out.

I have been fortunate enough through my five-year career in Law Enforcement in that I have not been faced with any serious moral dilemmas. By the nature of the job of law enforcement you can surmise that there are many occasions when a police officer can be confronted with a moral dilemma. The question is not will an officer be confronted with a moral dilemma; it is instead when will an officer be faced with one. Throughout my career I have often referred to the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics which is a code that embodies everything a police officer should be. This code was established by the Peace Officer?s Research Association of California in 1956 and since then has made its way throughout the country to Police departments and its officers. Many department mission statement have been derived from the very words that appear on the code of ethics.

### Code of Ethics

As a Law Enforcement Officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality, and justice. I will keep my private life unsullied as an example to all; maintain courageous calm in the face of danger, scorn, or ridicule; develop self-restraint; and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others. Honest in thought and deed in both my personal and official life, I will be exemplary in obeying the laws of the land and the regulations of my department. Whatever I see or hear of a confidential nature or that is confided to me in my official capacity will be kept secret unless revelation is necessary in the performance of my duty.

I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence my decisions. With no compromise for crime and with relentless prosecution of criminals, I will enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favor, malice or ill will, never employing unnecessary force or violence and never accepting gratuities. I recognize the badge of my office as a symbol of public faith, and I accept it as a public trust to be held so long as I am true to the ethics of the police service. I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and ideals, dedicating myself before God to my chosen profession. . . law enforcement. (Dantzker et al, 2003)

### Dilemmas

A common temptation an officer can find throughout there career in law enforcement is that of money. Especially since a large number of officers feel as though they are drastically underpaid and deserve a higher rate of compensation. In September 2003 a former Orlando police officer was arrested for stealing nearly 60,000 meant to help solve Crimeline cases. Charlie Worrell stole the money and using it for child support, his credit card payments and his car. The money was supposed to be used to pay informants to turn in criminals. (WKMG. 2003). Situations like this unfortunaly are not uncommon even today when there is a more professional qualified group of officers on the streets. Due to this being a common temptation and because there are many situations when officers will be handling money, ethics training and awareness becomes that much more important. Under ethics training officers are commonly quizzed on scenario cases to determine what consequences could result. The follow scenario would be a common example pertaining to police ethics.

### Ethical Scenario

A newbie rookie officer right out of the academy arrived at a welfare check call. The reason for the call is to check on an elderly man who neighbors had not heard from in several days. Upon entry into the house the officers finds the elderly man deceased on the floor. While looking around the residence the officer also located 2000 in cash on bureau. The question in the scenario is of course, would you take the money? Given the situation where you have an elderly man who lives alone and the fact that you are alone on the call, who would ever know the money, was missing. Quiet obviously during ethics training an officer would certainly say no to this question, however in the heat of the moment when no one is around it would still be the same situation. Hopefully the officer's morals are strong enough not to even think twice in situation like this one.

### Consequences

Though the officer may get away with taking the money there will be many other consequences to their actions. Once an officer behaves in this manner and lets there ethics and morals weaken, they open themselves up for further temptations in the future.

In addition to that the officer is now damaged goods in terms of honesty and that officer from that point forward does not have a shred of credibility. Officers do not have much to rely on but there word in many cases. There are many occasions in police work in which it will be the officer's opinion versions another individual's opinion. More likely than not it will be the officers opinion which is trusted. This happens in essentially every cases where there are just two people involved, the officer and the accused. An example would be traffic enforcement when the majority of the time only the officer and the other party are witness to the incident. Later on in court the officer's word is accepted as the truth. Those would even show a faint weakness in morals and ethics have no business in police work as there word is trusted by so many others. If an officer does not have there integrity, they have nothing.

### Conclusion

Ethical and moral decision are a big part of the job a police officer has. The officer will likely be faced with decision of this nature over and over again through there career. In most cases the decision the officer makes will either make or break them as an officer and the decision they make will either strengthen or weaken there ethically values. Fortunately over the past several years, the job of policing has become more professionalized and requirement to hold the job as a police officers have been increased. Special attention is also being placed in the area of ethics training and this is resulting in the majority of officers around the county getting some form of this training throughout there career. The results of these efforts unfortunately have not been able to weed out all of the bad apples in the field, but these steps have served to make the officers on the streets more aware of the issue of morals and ethics. This training as shown to be very valuable to the officer, the department and the community the police have sworn to protect.

### References

Dantzker, M. (2003). Understanding today's police. 3rd ed: Prentice Hall, Inc.

WKMG Local 6 (2003, Sep). Former Officer Allegedly Steals From Crimeline. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from <http://www.local6.com>  
<http://www.local6.com>

### Short note about the author

Kenneth R Tapscott is a criminal justice graduate currently working in the law enforcement field. More information can be obtained at <http://www.tapscott.info>.

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