



FORCE SCIENCE[®] NEWS

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Favorable public opinion of cops more than triple that of news media

I. Favorable public opinion of cops more than triple that of news media

Despite the frequent negative portrayal of police by much of today's news media, cops significantly outrank the media itself in terms of public approval.

In a recent poll by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal, roughly half (51%) of Americans surveyed said they have a "great deal" or "quite a bit" of confidence in law enforcement--up from 39% a year ago. Only 14% said they have "very little" or "no confidence" in cops.

Police were topped only by the military in public esteem, according to the poll, and their approval has improved "among all demographic groups, including African Americans, Hispanics, and young people," making law enforcement "one of the most trusted institutions in the country."



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In contrast, the news media emerged from the survey as a "particularly reviled group." Only a "dismal" 14% of those polled gave the media high marks, compared to 48% who said they have "little" or "no faith" in national news reporting.

That skepticism had cause for reinforcement recently when a fresh case of faulty journalism and law enforcement surfaced, involving the New York Times.

Under a byline shared by reporter Matt Apuzzo, the newspaper without attribution claimed that one of the terrorists behind the lethal attack in San Bernardino had "talked openly" about jihad on social media, and blamed the failure of law enforcement to discover her dangerous remarks for allowing her to enter the US to carry out the attack.

FBI Director James Comey said that in fact neither of the husband-and-wife terror team had ever posted their views publicly on social media. He dismissed the Times' report as inaccurate "garble."

The newspaper's executive editor acknowledged that the report was "a really big mistake." It was the second such stumble lately by Apuzzo, who earlier coauthored a story that was found to contain false information about a presidential candidate and criminal accusations.

"Journalism is about free speech," notes Force Science instructor Chris Lawrence. "However, speech in that context should not be unattached to the truth. Publishing inaccuracies permits those with an axe to grind to use the press to sharpen their blades."

II. Keynote topic: Will science or emotionalism drive future policing?

With the turbulence in law enforcement intensifying with each new controversial shooting, major changes in police practices seem inevitable.

In an upcoming keynote address at a PBA event, Dr. Bill Lewinski, executive director of the Force Science Institute, will address this timely question: Will science win out over emotionalism in the new era of policing?

He will explore the critical role that scientific research into issues of human performance, if supported, can play in training, tactical decision-making, use-of-force investigations, and deadly-force policies for the protection of LEOs and the public alike.

"This is a message that can be a tough sell even within some factions of the law enforcement community, not to mention the activist protest movement," Lewinski says, "but it will be fundamental in shaping the future of policework."

Lewinski's presentation will be Feb. 20 at the 10th annual Officer of the Year banquet for the North Carolina Police Benevolent Assn. in Cary, NC. Several hundred attendees are expected, including elected officials, prosecutors, and judges. The event is also a fund-raiser for the Police Benevolent Foundation, which aids families of fallen officers. For further information, contact PBA division president Randy Byrd: rbyrd@sspba.org or call 800-233-35606 ext. 311.

III. 6 key tips for advancing your goals for the new year

To mark the month when many of us make earnest resolutions for self-improvement, we recently picked the brain of a human performance guru for practical tips on how to set goals and achieve them.

Drew Mikita is an associate professor of psychology at Colorado Mountain College in the ski town of Breckenridge and trains high-performance athletes in the Rockies' challenging environment. He offers six insights on achievement that may help you overcome obstacles and advance your personal and professional objectives in the year ahead.

1. Just having goals in itself brings you significant benefits.

"Even if you aren't always successful, specifically articulating what you're looking to improve on will reap important personal rewards," Mikita says.

"This mindfulness helps expand your expectations and push your limits. It brings about more self-awareness of your strengths and areas needing improvement. It encourages accountability by allowing you to measure progress or lack thereof. And when you are successful, it provides a sense of accomplishment and pride."

2. Your pathway should be challenging but realistic.

"If your goal is too easy, you will not grow and improve, but if it really is beyond your capabilities, you'll bail out or damage yourself trying," Mikita says. "Attainability is key."

He recommends mapping out a step-by-step "behavior modification plan," a ladder of short-term goals you need to climb to reach your ultimate long-term objective. "Every month or so, revisit your plan, assess your progress--'What am I doing, what more could I be doing to make my goal?'--and tweak your pathway accordingly."

He cites a former student who is now a rookie patrol officer. "His primary, long-term goal is to be out of uniform and in a suit by the time he's 40. One thing he identified as being necessary to get there is to improve his writing skills, and that's something he's focused on now as a first step."

3. Make goal setting a daily exercise.

Apart from his long-term effort, Mikita says that before going on duty each night his former student "picks out three specific things he's going to do well during that shift. It might be, 'I'm going to go out of my way tonight to help a person in distress,' or, 'I'm going to make all my reports clear and clean,' or, 'I'm going to communicate better with my partner.'"

"Setting goals just for the next eight hours keeps you tuned in to improvement and is one way to cultivate and strengthen a general goal-setting habit."

4. Cover both the Qs.

"There are quantitative goals and qualitative goals--fundamentally different, but equally important," Mikita says.

"Quantitative goals are mathematical in nature, easily measured, very concrete. They can be measured with a stopwatch, calendar, scale, measuring tape, or by counting steps or reps. You either make them

or you don't: losing 10 pounds, working out four times a week, running a marathon.

"Qualitative goals are more subjective. They're usually sensed more than seen or measured. You may want to exercise more to feel better about yourself, or learn more about mental illness so you can deal better with some of the people you encounter on the street, or be friendlier to build better relationships. You feel whether you're achieving these goals or not.

"Law enforcement people, who tend to be very rational and logical, gravitate more to quantitative goals, often exclusively. But both kinds of goals need to be part of your goal-setting, because quantitative goals may not tell the entire story of improvement. If you promised to bike 35 miles a week but only made 20, you're likely still far better off than where you were before setting the goal.

"A combination of both qualitative and quantitative goals will improve any effort at behavioral change, whereas just a quantitative goal can become a source of major discouragement if missed."

5. Share your aims.

Telling others about your goal commitment can help hold you accountable for sticking with it, Mikita says. You may also be able to solicit friends or colleagues for information or suggestions on how to achieve your aim. "But be selective. You want support, not an undermining of your determination. But in the toxic environment so many law enforcement personnel operate in, they have to be especially careful who they pick as their listeners."

6. Analyze excuses.

"Excuses for not following through on what you need to do to reach your goals can be harsh things to deal with," Mikita admits.

"First, be aware that you are making excuses. Don't be so good at rationalizing that you can't honestly admit what you're really doing.

"Then try to figure out why you are making excuses. Is it fear of failure? Fear of success? Is your goal unrealistic? Why are you blocking yourself from improvement? In making this analysis you'll learn more about yourself and your behavior.

"Finally, come up with a plan that will 'outsmart' your excuses and keep you moving forward."

Drew Mikita, a licensed clinical counselor and a specialist in sports psychology, can be reached at: drewmikita@gmail.com He maintains the website: www.freepsychologyhelp.com

IV. What works to motivate officers to report peer misconduct?

Want LEOs to be more diligent in reporting misconduct by their fellow officers?

Make it the law.

That's the conclusion reached by Drs. Stephen Maguire and Lorraine Dyke of Ontario's Carleton University, after surveying more than 10,000 officers and supervisors from 31 Canadian police agencies on whether they would report professional misconduct by their peers.

A variety of hypothetical transgressions were posed to the survey participants, including

providing confidential police information to outsiders, cheating on expense claims, declining to arrest another officer on domestic assault charges, and habitually treating civilians rudely.

The strongest positive response came from members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: 78% of RCMP respondents "agreed or strongly agreed that they would report" the misconduct described, the researchers found. This compares to only 52% of respondents from other agencies.

In analyzing this disparity, Maguire and Dyke note that the RCMP is the only Canadian agency in which federal legislation mandates that members report violations of law or policy. This legal "duty to report seems the most likely explanation" for the significantly higher willingness of the agency's members to expose peer misconduct, the researchers write.

Under law, they report, "a failure to report can be considered a neglect of duty. Such legislation lessens the burden on officers of deciding whether or not to report, and that reduction in discretion can also potentially reduce blame and reprisals" from peers angered by being reported.

"The second largest reporting impact," the researchers conclude, comes from agency programs "supporting professionalism," specifically ethics training, a positively regarded professional standards office, and an early-intervention process to provide remedial help to errant officers.

"[N]ot just any kind of ethics training" is influential, Maguire and Dyke caution. To make a difference, this training must be highly interactive and job-specific, with

thought-provoking discussions of "the meaning and application of ethical values," collective reflection on "appropriate conduct in specific scenarios," and participant feedback to "skilled facilitators" with expertise in both ethics and policing.

Regarding a professional standards office, the researchers found that respondents who believed their standards staff was fair and open-minded, expedited investigations, understood the challenges of [officers] in the field, and welcomed feedback...were more likely to report professional misconduct."

Similarly, those who believed their agency's early-intervention program "was designed to help officers improve their performance rather than discipline poor performance and who thought the program provided beneficial training to those who needed it were [also] more likely to report professional misconduct."

A serious limitation of such programs' effectiveness can be inadequate communication about their "purpose and procedures," the researchers report. "[A]lmost half of respondents did not know whether their agency had an early-intervention program," they write, and over one-third "had not participated in an information session regarding the role of professional standards...."

"[A]gency programs may have a larger positive effect on integrity where more extensive communication about them [is] provided." A more extensive report and analysis of the survey can be found in Police Chief magazine, under the title "How to Encourage Reporting of Professional Misconduct." [Click here to read it.](#)

V. Timely posting on crisis communications

In Force Science News #299 [12/15/15], we reported recommendations from Force Science instructor Rick Rosenthal of RAR Communications Inc. for how to manage the media in the wake of a controversial OIS. Among reader responses, Rosenthal received this message:

Thank you for your outstanding information ref. media and crisis situations. We're undergoing one right now.

The cellphone video of two officers shooting a mentally ill man who had a knife was posted on Facebook before assisting

officers could even arrive to secure the scene. Our chief went TV station to TV station in a polo shirt for live interviews. I think we're using your template to the tee for this one.

I hope you continue to provide information to Force Science for years to come.

Sgt. John Arvin
Internal Affairs Investigator
Indianapolis (IN) Metropolitan PD

Written by Force Science Institute
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