

What Future Officers Can Do To Support Equity

Society is once again demanding overt changes to various criminal justice legislation, law enforcement departmental policies and current procedures used in hiring future law enforcement officers. The senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, Ahmad Maubury and others are patent evidence that strongly suggest police department culture can no longer be ignored or passed off as a glitch within the criminal justice system. Our society has reached a breaking point and is making an unwavering push for a comprehensive overhaul in a new direction.

Finding the right police recruit to become an exceptional officer for diverse communities hungry for change requires a great many social and cultural nuances, one being the ability to interact and positively communicate with members of a multicultural society. Because law enforcement officers have traditionally rejected the voices of marginalized communities, current and future officers can no longer ignore systemic racism that exists within the rank and file of their agencies. The coexistence between law enforcement and diverse communities demands law enforcement officers first acknowledge that problems exist, remove said problems and then repair any harm caused. For decades, the character of an officer was based on man-made stories of heroism, courage and law enforcement myths. But in reality, an officer's character is determined by their personal level of emotional and social intelligence. Exceptional officers work well within diverse communities because they have respect and care for community members, assess social relationships, utilize situational awareness when needed and employ conflict resolution and de-escalation strategies to maintain public trust.

In order for law enforcement officers to genuinely empathize with the pain incurred by racial/ethnic minorities, they must now transform from a "warrior mentality" culture to an emotional intelligence leadership strategy to engage diverse populations. By evaluating the successes and failures during community engagement responses, officers and the community can develop greater people skills that allow both sides to learn and help mend relationships and protect public safety. Retooling a non-inclusive criminal justice system is only a portion of the process. A sincere re-evaluation of what public safety means for all of us must occur as well for our common humanity. Changing how police interact with communities starts with culturally-mindful officers who are able to make emotional and social connections with their communities and to protect and serve them with care. If we can begin to steer in the direction of our shared humanity, we can drive forward with a vision towards a future where we want to go, together.

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