



## **THE MIDNIGHT TEAM:**

*A program of  
Crisis and Counseling*

*And*

*The Waterville Police Department*



# **MIDNIGHT TEAM TRAINING PROGRAM**

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# Introduction to Police Culture, Authority and Discretion

- » Police officers experience things that no other group of professionals ever will.
- » They must be able to rely on each other for help and support in situations where their lives and the lives of others could be at stake.
- » The camaraderie of police is probably most similar to that of soldiers in the military.
- » Many officers use “gallows humor” as a way to deal with the stress of situations they encounter.

## Police Culture



- » Police officers are fiercely proud of the honorable work they do, and at the same time are aware that many people – even those who are “supporters” of law enforcement – are uncomfortable around those who might be helping them one day, but could just as easily be arresting them another day.
- » Google Paul Harvey’s “Policeman.”
- » Many officers use the analogy of the sheepdog to describe their relationship with the community they serve.

## Police Culture



- » Sheepdogs exist to protect their flock. They must be ever vigilant, and are generally stationed at the outskirts of their flock in a position that allows them to watch for danger. For that reason they are slightly apart from that important group whose safety they would die to protect. The flock needs the sheepdog, but they are never truly comfortable with it’s presence among them.
- » Dave Grossman explains further in his essay “On Sheep, Wolves, and Sheepdogs.”

## Police Culture



- » Like soldiers, police often engage in boasting, teasing, joking and other forms of communication that establish fraternal bonds and reinforce the norms of our subculture.
- » Because law enforcement has traditionally been a male-dominated culture, this communication has, at times, become sexist and profane. As our profession evolves and grows, this has become less frequent and less acceptable.
- » Any behavior that makes a member of the Department (like you) uncomfortable will be addressed appropriately.

## **Police Culture**



- » Police Officers are the only citizens of the United States that are lawfully able to use force – including deadly force – against other citizens in the scope of their employment.
- » Police Officers receive their authority from Federal, State and Local governmental laws.

## **Police Authority**



- » Waterville Police Officers are hired to enforce the laws of the State of Maine and to charge – by arrest or court summons – those who violate the laws.
- » In addition to state laws, officers' actions are guided by WPD's Standard Operating Procedures, which prescribe our actions in some circumstances.
- » In many cases, officers have the ability to exercise discretion.

## **Police Discretion** >

- » Discretion, in this context, refers to the decision of whether to charge a person who has committed a crime or civil violation.
- » In some cases, the laws or policies require an arrest to be made, and officers have no discretion at all.
- » In most cases, discretion could be considered to be inversely proportional to the seriousness of the crime: as the seriousness of the crime increases (like murder, for instance), discretion decreases – officers have no discretion about whether to arrest a person who has committed murder.

## **Police Discretion** >

- » As the seriousness decreases – a simple traffic infraction, for example – then an officer's discretion increases. An officer has wide discretion about the enforcement of traffic infractions.
- » Discretion should be used in cases where voluntary compliance is likely to be gained without the enforcement of the law. An example would be a middle-aged motorist with a clean driver's record who committed the infraction of speeding by travelling 10mph over the limit. If an officer believed that infraction was accidental and minor, a warning could be issued instead of a ticket.

## **Police Discretion** >