

Discretion – That Elusive Term

The speed limit is 35 miles per hour. You stop an old ratty vehicle, driven by an unkempt crying woman driving 48 in a 35 MPH zone. She has three scared, crying children under the age of six in the vehicle and she tells you that her husband's boss just called and told her to get to the hospital emergency room because her husband was in an accident and would probably have his hand amputated. How long does it take you to write the ticket? Or what can you do? You have peace officer discretion - what do you do?

Next dilemma: same road, same location, same speed, and a different vehicle driven by your mayor's wife. There are thirty people outside their homes watching you. They know the mayor's wife, and they want to see what you do. It is your call. What do you do? You have peace officer discretion - what do you do?

What is the definition of discretion? How does compassion affect this discretion, and how does equality under the law influence your application of law enforcement discretion?

I hear people state that the job of a law enforcement officer is easy: all they have to do is enforce the law. These people have never been confronted with the previous scenarios - or should I say - they have never been in these "significantly ambiguous situations."

A critical aspect of being a professional is that you are trained and prepared. Be prepared. That sounds like the Boy Scouts. We need to prepare ourselves for the possibility of being caught in one of these "significantly ambiguous situations."

You might ask: "How can I prepare? Where is this situational training? Where can I attend this scenario based training?" The answer is that it may not be available in your city, region, or state, and this might be the time that you need to prepare yourself for these "significantly ambiguous situations."

I'll tell you how you can prepare. It is called cognitive rehearsal. Cognitive rehearsal is mental preparedness. It is a pre-plan. It is envisioning the situation and determining what you will do if you are confronted with situations like these.

Cognitive rehearsal is the pre-planning that prepares your conscious mind and your subconscious with an idea of how you will proceed, if confronted with a situation or a certain set of environmental influences. This pre-plan – this cognitive rehearsal process – becomes imbedded in your mind and your subconscious and will be remembered when the crisis occurs.

These are some interesting concepts, but the idea is that you will play like you pre-plan and practice. Practice is not only training: it can be cognitive rehearsal.

Spend some time thinking about what you would do in different situations. You can prepare a series of pre-plans about what you would do if confronted with certain

ambiguous situations. Pre-plan what external variables you will look for in different types of circumstances. You can do all of this without an instructor – you can actually be your own instructor. Through this process, I know we can all improve our decision-making skills, and we can hone our discretion.

Professionals are persons who know that they are good, know why they are good, and are always getting better!