



THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

Newsletter article February, 2021

Things were a lot different in March of 1998, weeks before columbine. Things were a lot different in August of 2001, just days before the attacks on the World Trade Center. Things were a lot different in July of 2014, before Ferguson Missouri, and things were very different in July of 2018, when I wrote a newsletter article titled "Raise 'em right" before any of us ever knew the name, George Floyd. The world may look completely different between the time that I write this article in the waning weeks of January 2021, and the time The Blue Family Tree publishes it in the first weeks of February.

In July of 2018 my message was simple. Feel free to look back in the archived articles on our website and refresh your memory. In that article I expressed that changing public perception about police was paramount to saving police lives, and the lives of those we have contact with throughout our shifts. Smiling at a little boy at a stoplight could mean the difference for an officer not even born yet, who contacts that man in 25 more years. We never know the impact we have, and on who we have it, but I can promise you this: We have an impact. Whether that impact is positive or negative is entirely up to you. I know. I hear you screaming at your computer screens now, but it does not matter if the violator is a raging jerk. It does not matter if they call you every name in the book and spit in your face. If anything, that helps. When that violator is sitting in booking waiting for their lunch tray and thinking about the contact that landed them there, and they just keep thinking to themselves, 'I can't believe how professional and polite that cop was even after all I did to pull him offside.' you've just won the greatest support we can achieve. That cop-hating citizen may turn, at least a little, and when he tells his friends who know him to detest cops, they will turn a little, and little by

little with contacts like these we will turn public perception and secure a safer work environment for ourselves, perhaps decades down the road. It's death to violence and ignorance by a thousand paper cuts. If you're looking for a quick fix to the nation's problems, you will not find it. If you're looking to our politicians for answers, you most certainly will never find it. But if your looking at every single contact you have with the public from arresting a violent felon to smiling at the person in the next lane over at a stop light, there you will solve our nation's problems.

We can all agree that in today's climate, how we are perceived, and how we actually are, are two very different things. Unfortunately, perception wins every time. Sometimes perception is beyond our control. The other day I was working a stretch of highway between two cities with another trooper. He was a couple miles down from me; the old, "See if they slow down and speed back up" trick. A nearby agency had a car traveling through, and like happens all too often, the police car was speeding as he passed by us. Now, neither myself or my partner actually noticed this, but a man who had been cited in this area weeks before sure did. He was certain the police car was speeding and that we knew it too. He even accused me of giving the old "cop wave" to them as they went by. I don't even recall seeing a police car from outside the area pass through, nonetheless, that citizen's perception is that we gave him the good-ol'-boy wave and allowed him to speed on through.

because incidents such as this are beyond our control, we should make every effort, when we can, to influence public perception to our favor. Granted, the officers in the speeding patrol car could have done this as well. We often talk about professional courtesy, and there is some debate about what that looks like now vs a decade or two ago. Instead of making this article about the ethical standard of professional courtesy, I'd like to focus on the need to receive it. When we are off duty people are still watching us, and in the world of dash cams, extending a simple courtesy can become extremely tricky. Nobody should be placing their on-duty cohorts in such a position to have to make these decisions.

When the public believes we are on the take something as simple as letting a speeder go that we might have written otherwise, is held in a very negative light, and in the interest of everyone doing their part to turn the ship of public perception around, we must maintain the highest standard of integrity both on and off duty.

I am not suggesting we write every cop we stop for minor traffic violations. I am suggesting we don't commit traffic infractions and put our fellow officers in this position during a time of such great turmoil.

Why is public perception important? If this question is on your mind, then you have not been a regular reader of The Blue Family Tree. In the words of Sir Robert Peel, "The police are the public and the public are the police." We are absolutely ineffective without public support. More important, you may never be harmed by the arrestee who you left with a sour taste for law enforcement because you just didn't care, but an unwitting officer years down the road may receive his wrath; a boiling negative perception set in motion by your actions years before. Every contact and every action we take matters if we are going to win this fight and save police lives today, tomorrow, and far in the future. Much like how The Blue Family Tree supports families of fallen peace officers not through a few rich donors, but through dollars and cents of thousands of donors across the country, we will only accomplish our goals of saving police lives if everyone contributes on every citizen contact.