

LIABILITY IN THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER



Ideas and thoughts on how to protect your team and encourage them to make sound decisions with liability in mind.

LIABILITY OVERVIEW

Liability is the state of being **responsible** for something. This presentation will focus on the following aspects of liability:

CYA

Protecting your agency or a member of your team from being sued.

Carrying the burden for your team

Know what they don't and shield them with that knowledge.

Eliminate bullying

Senior dispatchers/call takers can get complacent and try to bully new hires to make decisions they don't agree with.

CYA-COVER YOUR AGENCY

WHY?

- ❖ So you can be proud of where you work. If the agency looks bad, you look bad.
- ❖ Recruitment is easier when the agency has a good image.
- ❖ Retention (helps to maintain employment).

HOW?

- ❖ Be able to explain and stand behind why you did what you did.
- ❖ Ensure the team knows and operates within the parameters of established policies and does not rely on “common practice”.
- ❖ Don't do what is easiest, do what is right. If the right thing is easy, then you just won at life.
- ❖ Strive for consistency.

CYA-COVER YOUR AGENCY

Examples:

Document, Document, Document

- ❖ This may seem redundant, however, if something gets questioned in the future, your documentation will help you remember your thought process.
- ❖ With proper documentation, you will be able to support what you did.

Example: “Per Sgt. Smith, cell phone was pinged” or “Per Sgt. Smith, attempting contact with suicidal subject via phone.”

Start Early

- ❖ Introduce new employees to liability while in training. Teach them how to cover the agency according to policies and procedures.
- ❖ Teach CTOs to always follow policies and procedures instead of teaching how or what you were taught. There will be gaps because things are always changing.
- ❖ Stress the importance of staying abreast of changes.

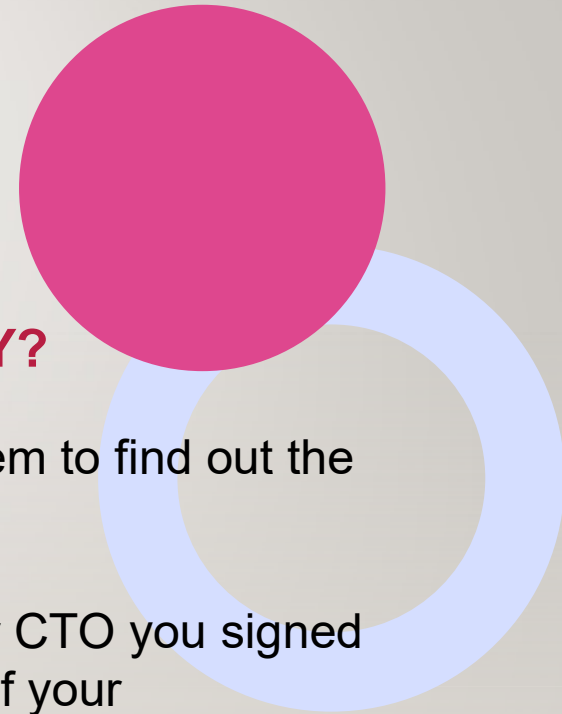
CARRY THE BURDEN

HOW?

- ❖ Avoid passing on the “that’s how we have always done it” mentality. Encourage adherence to policies and procedures.
- ❖ Fight for consistency amongst all shifts and individuals.
- ❖ Don’t fall victim to the “this road supervisor wants us to do it this way”. This undermines the goal of consistency.
- ❖ Voice to your team that you are looking out for them and explain why you make the decisions you make.

WHY?

- ❖ You don’t want them to find out the hard way.
- ❖ As a supervisor or CTO you signed up for this, apart of your responsibility is to protect them.
- ❖ If they look bad, you look bad.



CARRY THE BURDEN

Examples:

Ask Yourself...

Scenario

A road supervisor calls in and wants your shift to do something different than what is outlined in your SOP/Policies because it works out better for them.

- ❖ Does that road supervisor dictate your policies or procedures?
- ❖ Is this going to happen across all shifts?
- ❖ Does this put liability on your dispatcher?
- ❖ Are you able to fulfill the request without violating policy or taking on extra liability?
- ❖ Can you tell the road supervisor to have their chain of command submit a proposal for policy change via the correct channel.

ELIMINATE BULLYING

WHY?

- ❖ It causes fear in newer employees and may make them question what they know.
- ❖ It may cause employees to not be able to explain/doubt their course of action.
- ❖ May trigger a routine or familiar response to gray areas without considering each circumstance on its own merit.

HOW?

- ❖ Intervene when you see a senior dispatcher making anyone feel bad about their decisions.



ELIMINATE BULLYING

Examples:

Scenario

A 911 hang up was received from a cell phone at console 12. The call taker dialed the number back and received a voice mail.

Ask Yourself

- ❖ Does your agency have a policy for these types of calls?
- ❖ If a policy exists, does it allow discretion or is there specificity on how to process calls of this nature.

Encourage the call taker to make confident decisions and not to do what is “easiest” for the officers/deputies.



LIABILITY CAN BE SCARY

For any new dispatcher/call taker, the last thing we want to do is scare them away or have them afraid to do their job.

- ❖ Encourage newer employees to act with careful thought and to exhaust all their options and resources whenever a situation gets dicey.
- ❖ Complacency kills. Lead your team to be the best they can be while trying to avoid becoming complacent. Promote operating with confidence recognizing that this could possibly lead to complacency.
- ❖ Consistently hold yourself and your team accountable for all actions taken or inactions. Accountability should not always lead to discipline or termination. Take the opportunity to foster relationships while encouraging adherence to policies and procedures. This can look like additional training, explanations, or even a performance improvement plan.

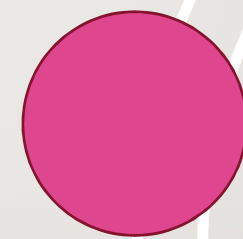
GOOD MANTRA...

If you cannot explain why you did what you did to the local news,
you should re-evaluate your decision and/or action.

P.S. This presentation is only a tool to help guide you. This is not a catch all as agencies operate differently. Please do not negate your agency's policies or procedures based on the content of this PowerPoint.

THANK YOU

Content submitted by Heather Myers St. John's County SO.



FLAPCO TRAINING COMMITTEE

