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# Leadership Spotlight

## Spiritual Wellness in Law Enforcement



Working in a police career, whether as a sworn officer or professional employee, brings many challenges that affect a person's well-being. These trials include the physical demands that accompany shift work, long periods of sitting, a poor diet, and involvement in altercations. Law enforcement personnel also deal with emotional trauma that comes with their work, which can include frantic 911 calls, death scenes, line of duty losses, natural disasters, and myriad crisis events.

The past two decades have seen a tremendous response by police departments in addressing the physical and emotional well-being of employees. However, another dimension of individual health—spiritual wellness—often goes overlooked, but plays a vital role in the condition and balance of an agency and its personnel. Research has shown that spiritually healthy persons experience less stress, avoid negative behaviors, and have more commitment to their workplace and colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

### Understanding the Concepts

Many people hear references to spirituality and recoil with such thoughts as “We cannot discuss religion or bring it into the workplace.” However, it has nothing to do with religion. Spiritual well-being addresses the motivation behind a police professional or organization to face danger, protect the innocent, respect everyone, remain free from corrupting influences, and have a strong sense of empathy and service.

Hopefully, individuals enter the career because they have a purpose and a desire to do good, fight evil, and defend others. In essence, they want to serve and protect against the dangers in this broken world. Law enforcement employees' spiritual well-being focuses on their drive to fulfill a higher purpose that provides them with personal and professional gratification, giving them self-actualization and a realization that they make a difference.

Police personnel shield their communities from the depravity, ugliness, and dangers always lurking. They stand ready as sentinels and remain on watch to keep fellow citizens safe. Law enforcement professionals provide comfort in the midst of despair; security in the face of fear; strength among the weak; compassion for those at loss; and, when needed, defense against violence.

Acting as guardians exacts a toll on police employees. Though they gladly afford safety from evil in this world, who tends to these protectors? The constant infusion of negativity and toxicity impacts their spirituality because after an overload of these dangerous elements, some law enforcement professionals start to question if they truly make a difference. Such thoughts can lead to apathy, cynicism, lack of compassion, and loss of motivation to protect and serve.

### **Addressing the Issue**

What can agencies do to meet the spiritual needs of their personnel to guard their sense of self? Police leaders need to view their employees as spiritual beings with spiritual needs to acknowledge and nurture. The agency's executive managers, as well as those at all other levels, should remind their personnel continually that what they do makes a difference for themselves, the community, and the agency.

Departments also can help ensure that their employees keep the motivation they had when they began their career. For example, leaders could use public forums and social media to acknowledge the honorable works and actions by personnel, provide them with ways to serve their communities on and off the job, offer employees opportunities to care for themselves (e.g., peer groups, retreats, volunteer activities), and conduct annual training (at a minimum) on spiritual wellness.

### **Conclusion**

Spiritual well-being holds just as much importance as physical and emotional health in law enforcement professionals' careers. This proves true not only for personnel but the entire organization. If agencies can effectively meet the spiritual, as well as physical and emotional, needs of employees, they will provide them with the tools to find balance in their personal and professional lives.

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Joan Marques, Satinder Dhiman, and Richard King, *Spirituality in the Workplace: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Make It Work for You* (Fawnskin, CA: Personhood Press, 2007).