Never sacrifice safety for rapport.

Robert King

Very early in my career, I was stabbed during a traffic stop. The stop was for a minor violation; unbeknownst to me, the occupants had recently committed an armed robbery. That day, I learned a valuable lesson: there are no low-risk stops, only unknown dangers. I was forced to use deadly force that day to defend my life. On this day, I experienced how deadly my new job could be.

A year later, I attended a peer support conference, and a psychologist offered Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDRT). During this treatment, I learned that this life-threatening event caused me to experience vulnerability and loss of control issues, two elements of trauma. I recall saying, "it doesn't weaken my resolve." The stop only served to strengthen my resolve. I then committed to protecting and serving my community in the face of danger, no matter what.

Despite deep polarizing division in our nation, our communities need the police to protect and serve; the need is more critical today than ever. To be safe and effective we need community trust. We cannot ignore the harmful consequences of inhumane officers who violate their policies and training. We are answerable for each other's actions.

During my police academy, I was taught to "ask, tell, make" as a form of gaining compliance with my directions. I did exactly what I was trained to do when I graduated from the academy. I expected the public to comply and do what they were told. Over the years, my attitude has changed. In many cases, "ask, tell, make" resulted in force applications and injuries to citizens and officers. With better tactics, some of those injuries may have been avoided.

To survive a shift and career, we must be willing to adapt to the realities of the current situation. Here is how to survive today.

NEVER SACRIFICE SAFETY FOR RAPPORT. The job on the street is more dangerous today than ever before; never forget that. However, most police calls conclude without having to use force. To be better supported by our communities we must embrace using **TIME**, **TALK**, and **TACTICS** whenever possible.

In years past, I was not fond of the word de-escalation. However, today it's expected and, within many agencies, mandated.

To increase our safety and public support our profession must become willing to shift our attitude away from "ask, tell, make" policing when possible.

I know first-hand that deadly threats are sudden and unexpected. So, everything that follows is suggested only **WHEN POSSIBLE**.

- When it's time to be a warrior, be a warrior, and when it's time to be a guardian, be a guardian.
- Whenever possible, we should envision the end state we want to achieve.
- Ask ourselves what success looks like for individual calls and careers? What does failure look like?
- Avoid becoming action imperative. It can be appealing to act precipitously, but this approach has risks.
- Keep your emotions in check and maintain reasonability. Be strategic.

- Monitor your partner and help each other, as we can all be triggered. Recognize when your partner is in crisis and intervene before it is too late.
- Remember, under law, we have a "duty to intervene" when officers cross the line, so be proactive.
- Always have a sound legal basis for police action, either reasonable suspicion or probable cause.

So, why don't people do what we ask? Most do but when committing crimes people resist accountability, or if in crisis they may not be able to comply. But if believed to be unarmed, take time to talk while also being safe. Always have a leader, a plan, and communicate. Say and do things designed to achieve positive outcomes for everyone, including the subject.

- Always act reasonably, being able to articulate what you are doing and why.
- Use Active Listening Skills as your go-to tactic. They're practical and have been proven to be effective. Empathy, compassion, and respect are powerful.
- If it's safe to do so, you should continuously pursue de-escalating efforts. Graham v Conner is all about totality, reasonability, and proportionality.
- The power to arrest allows us to use objectively reasonable force to achieve a legitimate purpose. Disregarding these rules can subject officers to administrative consequences.
- Know the law and policy and articulate and justify the reasonableness of your actions.
- Consider the cost-benefit and view a career as a marathon, not a sprint.
- Pause when agitated.

During an arrest, only use reasonably necessary force to overcome resistance. If applying a takedown, limit the time you apply pressure on the subject's body. Knees on the back, chest, stomach, or neck can take one's breath away, causing severe injury or death.

Once handcuffed, a subject is in our custody; they are in our care. Monitor airway, breathing, and circulation. Always place a person in a position that promotes proper breathing, such as the Lateral Recovery Restraint (LRR), and call EMS when needed.

Humanity is important! Be compassionate, and be humane, even after the application of force. Deliver the subject safely to jail or hospital. Stop fellow officers when you see them unnecessarily escalate situations. The duty to intervene protects everyone.

Explain your actions to family or witnesses when appropriate. Everyone is watching. Do the right thing. It protects you and your fellow officers.

Today, people regularly play the blame game, scapegoat, and finger-point rather than thoroughly investigate the root cause and then be truthful about what happened and why. Most police departments need to do more to adapt to changing community expectations. As officers, we have no control over these things, so we must commit to controlling what we can, which is our attitudes and our actions. When we reasonably follow our policy and training, we protect ourselves, our fellow officers, our families, our profession, and the community.

I want every officer in our country to survive the streets, have thriving careers, and one-day retire to enjoy the fruits of their labor. To do this, we must be willing to adjust our attitudes, adapt to new tactics and recognize the need for change in our culture.

The reality is that we police dangerous streets. Be resolved to care for ourselves, do the right thing, and help others with compassion and humanity. Let's work together to earn trust in our communities to increase safety for everyone.

The heart of our profession is to help people. While bad examples of policing impact trust, communities nationwide continue to call 911 at an increasing rate. We must be here to answer their call.

Be well and stay safe.

Robert King retired as a commander from the Portland Police Bureau after serving 30 years in policing. In 2021, he joined Con10gency Consulting as the National Director of Training.