

The Appearance of the Law Enforcement Professional

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Abstract

The appearance of the law enforcement professional is rooted in a deep, historical association with the military (Weisskopf, 2018). It is our opinion that the “old guard” of law enforcement leaders believes a clean-cut, clean-shaven, and clean-skinned individual is necessary to portray a professional image. Professional appearance could be defined as the appearance, which provides the impression that an individual is fit for and competent in their job duties. Societal beliefs have changed regarding what professional appearance looks like today. Facial hair and tattoos are no longer taboo, but rather more common in the society we serve. This trend encompasses world leaders, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and every demographic makeup in the United States. As adaptive leaders, we believe this trend should include law enforcement. The current push is for law enforcement agencies to be more representative of the demographic makeup of the citizens they serve. Consequently, law enforcement leaders must break the cycle of their hard-nosed stance on what professional appearance is simply because that is the way it has always been done. Recruiting and retention issues, along with militaristic versus humanistic perception environments, that law enforcement leaders currently operate, dictate that now is the time to re-evaluate the “old guard” position on professional image. If a change is not made, we will miss the opportunity to hire and retain competent individuals that do not look like us but do look like a significant portion of society, including the next generation.

The Appearance of the Law Enforcement Professional

Our group is made up of individuals that represent different sized Sheriff Departments in the small range up to the medium/large range. This group's members are comprised of supervision from various law enforcement divisions including patrol, K9, tactical, criminal investigation, juvenile investigation, corrections, and human resources. During our initial group meeting, we identified a current issue in law enforcement that could affect numerous factors related to law enforcement. This issue is the appearance of the law enforcement professional. More specifically, should the definition of "professional" appearance change for law enforcement administrators to include facial hair and visible tattoos?

As part of our research discussion, we organized our capstone in the following way. First, we examined the history of beards and tattoos. Then, we present current societal trends and existing departmental policies. Finally, we assessed how a change in philosophy could benefit agency recruiting and retention. Our purpose, or "knowing our why" (Sinek, 2010), is to develop a new, less restrictive appearance policy that represents a more humanistic and less militaristic persona for today's law enforcement professional. This less restrictive appearance policy could improve morale within departments, and be less restrictive on hiring individuals that do not meet the historical perception of what professional looks like. In conclusion, we will show the need for an open-minded discussion regarding a change in law enforcement policies regarding appearance.

History of Beards

Historically, beards have been around since the creation of man. From an early age, we have been taught that male facial hair is often accepted as a staple symbol of an ethnicity for higher purposes, to keep warm, or simply because a man with a beard is just downright cool. An

example of beards first mentioned in the documental sense in the Holy Bible. In the Book of Leviticus 19:27 (New American Standard Bible) one of God's laws states, "You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard". This insinuates that beards were mandatory for Israelite men during this time. Translations differ as societies progress to target changing times, but the meaning is the same. Although this was directed to the Israelites, Gentiles that worshipped God as well were required to abide by His law.

However, attitudes and times change quite frequently. As early as the 1700's, beards completely disappeared from men in Europe amid new aesthetic ideas about the male appearance (Withey, 2018). The military has not allowed the beard in its ranks since the Navy dissolved it in the early 20th century to boost morale and provide a hygienically sound environment for sailors. Ground fighting forces such as Army and Marine Corps personnel were required to shave with the advent of chemical warfare. To an extent, chemical "warfare" is still applicable to most law enforcement special operation teams across the nation as it is. The reason is that a "gas mask" won't seal to one's face if there is facial hair. Take the Army's regulation for instance. Army Regulation 670-1, Chapter 3-2 (b), (United States Army, 2017) states that beards are not authorized, but there are exceptions to the regulations. Medical reasons that purport a "no shaving profile" is an obvious one. Effective June 2017, the Army has authorized the beard for soldiers who grow and wear them for religious purposes, while in garrison. Also, a commander can authorize a waiver for soldiers working with a local military or law enforcement entity in a country that requires adult males to have them for religious reasons. This exception is typically done with special operating groups to gain the trust of the soldiers or law enforcement they are operating with or training.

There have been some great leaders with beards. For example, Jesus Christ, Moses, President Abraham Lincoln, and Lt. Michael Patrick "Murph" Murphy all sported a beard in some fashion. All of these men fit Robert Greenleaf's definition of a servant leader; "Servant leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world" (Greenleaf, 2016). During an intense firefight in Afghanistan, Lt. Michael Murphy made the ultimate sacrifice by deliberately moving from cover into an open area, exposing himself to increased enemy gunfire. He obtained a clear signal to radio for help (Luttrell, 2013). Moses led approximately 2.0 million people out of Egypt (New American Standard Bible). "A Bible given to Abraham Lincoln in the final months of the Civil War ties together the 16th President's budding views on spirituality and his belief that God was calling him to end slavery" (O'Conner, 2019). Jesus Christ changed the entire world through the greatest sacrifice of all. Whether you believe in His works or not, chapter 29 of the Book of Matthew stated He only wanted people to love each other and treat each other as you would want to be treated (New American Standard Bible). All persons listed have the traits of good leadership: creating a circle of safety, working to see others succeed, offering a tangible vision, accepted responsibility, and put other people's interest before their own (Sinek, 2014). Even Aristotle, who coined the term "magnanimous", wore a beard.

As a paramilitary organization, law enforcement typically mimics military standards for appearance while in uniform. A 2018 article, written by Bob Weisskopf for Law Enforcement Today's online publication, states that you can find pictures of officers sporting beards as late as the early 1800's, but it was not all that common. The article continues that you will not find any from the 1940's or 1950's, and that mustaches only began to show up after this time period. With the authorization of mustaches by departments across the country, policies were developed

with strict standards. These policies mandated that mustaches could not be too bushy, exceed below the corners of the mouth, and could not cover the top lip (Weisskopf, 2018). Enforced standards are preventing beards, tattoos, and religious dress may becoming extinct or, history so-to-speak. Or is it just the next phase in a societal cycle?

History of Tattoos

Tattoos have a long history dating back to prehistoric times. The word tattoo comes from the Tahitian word "tattau," which means to mark. The earliest known examples of symbols on actual people were Egyptians, and the tattoos were located on several female mummies that dated to c. 2000 B.C. Tattoos also date back to 1200 B.C. with ancient mummies, who referred to as "painted people." In the Mid-18th century, Native American women began using tattoos as a way to alleviate toothaches and arthritis. This method of tattooing was similar to acupuncture treatment that people receive today. (Waxman, 2017)

In America, New York City became the birthplace of modern tattoos. Civil War soldiers used tattoos for identification purposes in the 1860's. Sailors would get the name of a particular ship, birthdays, or marks indicating significant travels. Tattoos also became a fashion statement for socialites. New York's high-class society began getting tattoos after learning about British royalty getting body art. The first rotary tattoo machine was invented in New York City in 1891 by Samuel O'Reilly. O'Reilly was inspired by Thomas Edison's electric pen, which brought tattooing to the modern age. Edison possessed a tattoo on his right forearm of a quincunx.

Also, the Mid-19th century women use to make a living in circuses or slideshows with their colorful tattoos known as body art. These shows would sometimes receive a bad reputation for exploiting women, but other people argue that these shows gave women economic freedom at

a time when jobs were limited. Tattoos were also a way for women to feel like they had control of their bodies.

In the Mid-20th century, Musicians began getting tattoos, which in turn made tattoos more popular with society. Tattoos are now more common than ever as history continues to evolve. Tattoos are becoming more popular in the United States than ever before. The younger generation of America is embracing the tattoo culture as more celebrities, and high profile people show off their tattoos, which are making visible tattoos more accepted. An Ipsos poll revealed that three in ten Americans have at least one tattoo, an increase from 21% in 2019 (Jackson, 2019).

Current Trends

Lately, the older trend of the law enforcement professional being clean-cut, clean-shaven, and no tattoos have been are being challenged. With the political climate in the law enforcement profession being less than pleasing, agencies are receiving less and less qualified applicants. The question must be asked, are agencies willing to let a potentially great hire go just because they prefer tattoos or beards?

Over the past several years, agencies across the country, such as NYPD, Detroit P.D., and Houston P.D., have slowly changed their tattoo and grooming policies. Huffman (2019) states in an article, “Detroit Police Department changed its policies regarding facial hair, too, at the end of 2016, and like all things, some approved, others disapproved of the modifications. Luckily for the pro-side, Police Chief James Craig supported the move to loosen regulations stating that these things had ‘no bearing on how good they do their work’” (para. 10). Huffman (2019) also writes about a NYPD officer stating,

Diana Kaouris, a 31-year-old millennial, on the NYPD for nine years, is not an ordinary officer. This female officer breaks the dress codes coming and going.

She sometimes has a blonde streak in her hair, often changing it to purple to match her nail polish. Numerous tattoos decorate her body, but her Deputy Inspector Henry Sautner has no issues with her 'look' saying it is her personal choice. He identifies her as a self-motivated police officer who gets along well with the community; she has a dangerous job with two other cops monitoring a huge park in Queens. Diana sure does not epitomize the traditional police officer, but she gets the job done...and done well. This jazzy lady was named 'Cop of the Month'(para. 11).

These are just a couple of examples of how an officer's appearance does not affect their job performance or change the character of who they are. Even the United States Navy, in recent years, has allowed visible tattoos and is considering allowing its sailors to grow beards. The Navy recognizes the need to change to meet their staffing requirements due to enlistments coming from the millennial generation, and them having a preference to already existing tattoos. In an article posted by USA Today, written by Mark Faram (2016), Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Mike Stevens states,

We just got to the point where we realized we needed to be honest with ourselves and put something in place that was going to reflect the realities of our country and the needs of our Navy. We need to make sure that we are not missing any opportunities to recruit and retain the best and the brightest because of our policies (para. 3).

Numerous veterans that retire from their military careers go on to consider law enforcement for their lifelong careers, with most of them having some sort of body art. In the article, *A Short History of Military Tattoos*, written by Kelly Gibson in VFW.org states,

In 2009, the Army reported that some 90% of combat soldiers had at least one tattoo—a much higher percentage than the one in five people in the general population with a tattoo. Themes typically included pride in service, patriotism, unit identification and memorials (Gibson, 2016).

Police agencies must understand this and consider changing their policies so that they do not miss out on potentially great hires. A change in policy does not mean that agencies should just throw all caution to the wind. There should be policies in place, so that rude, offensive, or

racially motivated tattoos are not permitted or visible, and these policies must also ensure beards are trimmed and neat.

Existing Policies

Here are a couple of existing policies for personal appearances in law enforcement. Our main focus will be on the wearing of beards and policies prohibiting the wearing of beards by male officers in uniform. We have used two agencies regarding beards being worn in law enforcement, with the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office directive, prohibiting the wearing of facial hair, besides a mustache in uniform and the Baton Rouge Police Department policy, which allows the beard to be worn in uniform. We will also touch on something that is not a policy per se, but a fundraiser that allows the wearing of beards in uniform by the St. James Parish Sheriff's Office as well as the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office.

The St. Charles Sheriff's Office directive on "Employee Grooming Standards" was issued to all employees on March 18, 2020. The St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office directive states that mustaches are discretionary, but when worn will be kept well-trimmed, and not exceed the corners of the mouth with the top lip visible. The directive continues and gets more specific for uniformed deputies, stating they shall report for duty clean-shaven. The directive states that beards shall not be permitted except for health reasons, and when required, the employee shall obtain medical documentation from a licensed physician. Written approval of the employee's division commander is also required. The directive further states that the department can require the employee to be examined by the department physician for confirmation of the diagnosis. The directive also includes that if authorization is given, the facial hair shall be kept trimmed, not to exceed ¼ inch in length. The directive goes on that a modified assignment may be considered, outside of public's purview, until the condition has abated. The last thing stated in the directive is

that in any case, deputies are not authorized to work paid details/assignments unless clean shaven (St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office Directive, 2020).

When it comes to tattoos, the directive is more accepting of body art. The directive states that tattoos/body art /branding that display offensive designs, logos, or wording is prohibited. Furthermore, the directive states that tattoos/body art /branding that display any offensive design, logos, or wording and are not concealed by the authorized uniform or plainclothes shall be covered through the use of flesh colored bandage or wrapped when representing the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office (St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office Directive, 2020).

Moving on to another agency that allows the wearing of beards in uniform, we explored the Baton Rouge Police Departments policies. Regarding facial hair, the policy states that male officers are permitted to wear mustaches provided they are neatly trimmed, tapered, and tidy. The mustaches shall not present a chopped off, or bushy appearance, and no portion of the mustache will cover the lip line or extend sideways beyond a vertical line drawn upward from the corners of the mouth. Beards and goatees are allowed, and must be well-groomed, trimmed, and cannot exceed a half inch (1/2") in length. Beards and goatees will be traditional and conservative in appearance, and beards will follow the line of the jawbone and not proceed to the neck area (Baton Rouge Police Department Policy, 2019).

The policy becomes more specific under the terms, "failure to comply." The approval to grow facial hair does not grant an employee permission to grow handlebar mustaches, designer beards or "chin strap" beards, or to display words, images, patterns, logos, or designs in their facial hair, all of which are strictly prohibited. It is also stated that officers not adhering to the guideline set forth in the policy, shall be subject to immediate loss of said privilege as well as disciplinary procedures (Baton Rouge Police Department Policy, 2019).

The policy for tattoos in the Baton Rouge Police Department states that officers are not permitted to have facial or neck tattoos. Officers are permitted to have tattoos elsewhere, visible to the public, if the tattoo is not objectionable or demeaning to the image of the department. The policy continues to say that the nature, number, size, and location of the tattoo are all factors in determining whether such tattoos are objectionable or demeaning to the image of the department. Examples included tattoos that are racist or sexually suggestive. It is noted that the Chief of Police shall have the final authority in determining if the tattoo is objectionable (Baton Rouge Police Department Policy, 2019).

The St. James Parish Sheriff's Office along with Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office suspend their normal grooming policies for charitable reasons during certain times of the year. As is commonly recognized, November is also known as nationwide "No Shave November". The goal of "No Shave November" is to raise money that officers would typically spend on shaving and grooming and donate that money to a charitable cause most commonly for cancer research and awareness. The St. James and Livingston Sheriff's Offices have both successfully participated in this endeavor the past several years. St. James has had such success that they have since continued the effort and donate to different charitable organizations each month.

Recruitment

The traditional look of the law enforcement officer is calling for a change in modern times. The pool of candidates wanting to work in a physically and mentally demanding job is growing less and less by the day. What agencies should focus on is can a person do their job and is their character up to the standard of the position they are applying. We should no longer allow personal choices to hinder our thoughts on hiring someone for a particular job. Having a tattoo or beard may not necessarily impede someone's ability to do their job. By not allowing a more

relaxed work environment, we are possibly preventing some of our most qualified candidates from employment. Just looking back over the past three years, St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office has not received any complaints from the community about our officers regarding their tattoos or grooming. While policies need to be more relaxed, we understand there does still need to have some parameters. Vulgar or gang-related tattoos, for instance, should not be allowed. Considering that a majority of our candidates are veterans, the need for a policy change is warranted.

We know that law enforcement officers do not like change, and tend to be creatures of habit. A change in policy which allows beards and visible tattoos is something officers would be interested in exploring. It may cause some disequilibrium in the organization, but that could be a good thing. According to Tobias (2017), "Organizations that are adaptable tend to view change in a positive light. Those that cling to the past tend to view change negatively and can get run over by it as it speeds by." Allowing the beards, with limitations, would be a huge morale booster for the employees. It is a known fact that people that come to work in a better mood tend to spread that mood throughout the whole department. Employees that are allowed to be themselves are happier people. It would also allow for the community they serve to see the law enforcement officer in a more humanized way. Employees that are happier in the workplace also are less likely to want to leave. These policy changes could be a huge retention movement. It could also help in succession planning for the organization. Employees that we can retain due to a happier work environment will stay longer and can be groomed for promotion. The agencies that are willing to change and embrace the next generation of law enforcement officers will be able to adapt to the changing dynamics of policing. "Finding people with the right combination of skill, interpersonal ability, cultural fit, diversity, and professionalism is key. The right people

as leaders do not need to all look alike, and they do need to have similar values and morals” (Scott, 2017).

Retention and the Role of Leadership

How many times have we said and heard that applicants for law enforcement have decreased over the years? With events happening today and the social views changing faster than agencies can adjust, we understand why. In today’s leadership, we must realize that the retention of our officers is essential. When your pool of recruitment decreases, we must improve our retention to obtain quality service to the community.

Agencies today are more active with recruitment practices and even considering lateral transfers in attempts to gain skilled and developed officers. Agencies understand the competition of resources we face with today’s generations. Generations are more apt to transfer their residency to obtain their desired style of living (Snyder, 2017). More today, we see officers not staying with the same agency for their entire careers. As leaders, we must understand that some departures are against our ability to prevent, but we should do what we can to avoid and not encourage this transition.

Reevaluating appearance policies will benefit the agency in morale boost and retaining today's generation with the agency. When the recruitment ability decreases, agencies must improve the aspects of retention in significant ways. Many studies reveal that employees leave organizations due to how they feel rather than how they benefit. Captain Michael Abrashoff stated, “My years in the Navy taught me that the art of leadership lies in simple things—commonsense actions that ensure high morale and increase the odds of winning” (Abrashoff, 2012). This idea of concentrating on the small things provides members of an organization with confidence that leadership understands their needs and wants. Agencies must ensure that the

policy and procedures are created with logic and meaning and not opinion created from egos.

Dr. Larry Long stated, “Must realize and accept when your values, knowledge, and roles are no longer a match with the needs of the outside world” (Long, 2017). Agencies that shape policy and procedures with risk management and away from perceptions create a culture that is desirable and attractive to today’s generation. This focus on the small things will give members a sense of being part of a great team that has a purpose and has evolved from the ‘do as I say, not as I do’ leadership. Adaptive leaders of an organization must be reactive to current situations, required to anticipate, and be proactive in influencing the outcomes they want (Spain, 2017). Organizations need to revisit outdated policies that do not relate to current generations. Leaders of organizations will also be displaying authentic leadership principals by applying emotional intelligence to policy and procedure. This change involves positive relations with followers, adaptation to followers, and identification with followers on a personal and social level (Normore, 2017). When members understand and agree with the logic of policies an organization implements, they feel respected and not unjustly treated. When organizations treat their members with respect and without prejudice, they will treat the customers in the same manner.

As previously mentioned, the Baton Rouge Police Department has recently relaxed its policy on officer appearance by allowing beards to be worn by uniform officers. The reason for this relaxing was in the prevention of apparent lawsuits for religious discrimination and to improve officer morale. Officers with the agency say an increase in morale was created, but short-lived due to overwhelming dissatisfaction from more significant issues within the agency. While improving the small problems will increase morale, agency leadership should not expect it to outweigh the more significant concerns at hand. Improving on policies that provide officers

with a sense of self-identity and the community to feel a humanized connection with law enforcement officers at no cost can benefit all.

In a similar vein, the St. James Parish and Livingston Parish Sheriff's Offices have recently relaxed their policy, allowing officer's participation in "No Shave November" for charity. This program was so well received that St. James Parish Sheriff's Office decided to allow the charity options to continue for the other months. Each month a different charitable cause is chosen by staff to receive the donation made by participants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we as servant, authentic, and adaptive leaders have recognized the need to be receptive and open-minded regarding the topic of professional appearance in law enforcement. Leaders who adopt these characteristics can lead to policy changes and shifts in empathy towards the new generations within agencies nationwide. While policies are continually being developed and implemented, the consideration for tattoos and beards are gaining much-deserved attention. The traditional "old guard" beliefs are now being reconsidered, which goes against the traditional views of professional image in law enforcement.

With the decreased desire to become a law enforcement officer in present time, we can improve our agencies recruitment, retention, and community charities by allowing beards and tattoos. Today's societal tempo is constantly evolving into new "norms". It is vital to any organization to be able to relate to these changes and embrace them to create harmony between the organization and the communities they serve. If we eliminate bias perceptions by not judging a book by its cover, we can provide equal service to a diverse community.

The change in policy can give deputies a definite feeling of contributing to, as well as growing with the community. In turn, the community observes a more humanistic view of law

enforcement. This adaptive and transforming style of leadership from administrators provides understanding and reasoning in the treatment of their employees. This positive display of leadership will cultivate officers in their development as leaders. When deputies feel appreciated and justly treated by the organization, they will address the community they serve with the same respect they receive. Policy changes are a no-cost change that will benefit the organization regardless of size, its members, and the community by providing benefits that outweigh any negatives.

Agencies wishing to create a more accepting and attractive culture to encourage recruitment of new and retention of existing officers must use change agents to enact these changes. Agency leaders should obtain buy-in from the leaders of an organization and communicate the reason for increasing community relations as well as improving the morale of the officers. This effective communication with members understanding the reasons behind the change will create acceptance and supporters of the improved changes. This positive culture will provide leadership with the time needed to implement deep change and improve emotional intelligence that will benefit the organization and community (Long, 2017).

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