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**Police-community relations: it’s all about the process**

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What matters more, the process or the outcome? While the concept isn’t new, it’s critical we remember that the means are just as important as the ends—and in policing, this truth couldn’t be more evident. Central to improving police-community relations is fairness in the *process* of policing. When community members see and know that law enforcement operates with [procedural justice](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/improving-safety-the-role-of-procedural-justice-police-community-trust/), they develop greater trust for policing. “We want to make sure that we have real competence and true confidence—not only that, but that we have character behind our decisions,” Sgt. (Ret.) Jason Lehman says about the importance of the process of community policing.

In a recent Lexipol webinar, “[Get Curious Before Getting Furious: 6 MORE Tools to Turn Critics into Advocates](https://info.lexipol.com/webinar-curious-before-furious),” Lehman shares his essential tools of the trade—community policing, that is—to help law enforcement professionals better connect and [build trust](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/a-strong-foundation-community-policing-strategies-to-build-trust/) with those they serve.

**Be Curious Before Getting Furious**

It’s virtually impossible to operate well when we are furious. “Be [curious](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/on-influence-accountability-cultivating-an-outward-mindset-in-law-enforcement/) before getting furious. You can’t be both at the same time,” Lehman explains. Instead of allowing your rage to take hold, turn to the question of ‘why?’ Why is this happening? How did we get here? Ask community members questions about what led to this point and what led to their feelings toward others, toward you or toward law enforcement in general.

In situations where stopping to think doesn’t challenge your safety—when you have discretionary time—you *should* think. When “it does not challenge my safety to think,” Lehman says, “and when we’re in these situations [with difficult community members] …it’s really important for us to engage.” Take a few moments to consider the situation from another point of view. Lehman explains, “The truth is, for de-escalation to occur out there on the streets, I have to de-escalate myself first.” Determine what *you* can do to build trust and provide space for community members’ voices to be heard. Then ask questions and genuinely listen to the answers.

**Answer Questions Before They’re Asked**

In law enforcement, there are myriad questions, concerns, complaints and misconceptions that lead to distrust within our communities. After incidents or certain contacts, you may anticipate questions that subjects or bystanders have about your response and the why behind it. “When you’re in a safe position to do so, bring up some of these ideas in conversation,” Lehman says.

Do your best to answer these questions *before* they’re asked, or even if they aren’t asked. This demonstrates 1) that you understand the concerns of your community and 2) that there are reasons behind officer decision-making. “I believe that if you tell someone why you do something, they can tell others and *they* can tell others,” Lehman explains. “Now, instead of raising a child to be fearful of a traffic stop, you have a child who understands, for example, that officers are turning these lights on for their safety and, in turn, my safety.” Answering questions and dispelling common misperceptions helps community members see you and your fellow officers as approachable, ready to explain and intentional in caring for their needs. In turn, policing can be safer and more effective for all.

**Be Kind & Rethink Policing**

Many law enforcement professionals might consider kindness a weakness. But that is not the case—and you do yourself and your community a disservice if you limit your kindness for fear of appearing weak. “I have to be kind to [build trust](https://www.police1.com/chiefs-sheriffs/articles/taking-a-back-to-basics-approach-to-community-engagement-sxFsFCJY3dEdqOyj/),” Lehman says. The reality is, [kindness](https://www.police1.com/community-policing/articles/building-community-bridges-one-act-of-kindness-at-a-time-AXAA9sTlKPzeEYO9/) is disarming, for both ourselves and the subjects we interact with. When dealing with hostile or resistant community members, kindness is what will drive the process of community policing and build trust. “The more we can impose kindness upon our community, the more they will see us as human,” Lehman explains. “And ultimately, it will keep us and our partners safer in the future.”

Closely tied to the concept of kindness in community policing is the idea of rethinking policing itself. “When we’re kind and we rethink policing, we see these issues more quickly,” Lehman says. This means to be proactive in always looking for ways to improve. How can we make policing better? How can we improve the process? How can we better serve our communities? Lehman offers a clear view: “We’re always looking to improve policing and our [leadership](https://www.police1.com/chiefs-sheriffs/articles/5-lessons-for-police-leaders-who-want-to-make-a-difference-34eq5udzePFLUYQu/)” in the community.

Learn more and find out the rest of Lehman’s tools to build trust and drive community engagement in the on-demand webinar, “[Get Curious Before Getting Furious: 6 MORE Tools to Turn Critics into Advocates](https://info.lexipol.com/webinar-curious-before-furious).”