

OFFICER-VIOLATOR CONTACTS IN TRAFFIC  
ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

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The United States Park Police of today find their most important and responsible role in the area of park traffic enforcement activity. This professional obligation is realized in the course of the many daily, individual contacts of park patrolmen with local and nonresidential motorists, who drive over the roads and highways of National Capital Parks, and who occasionally receive warnings or citations for violations of the park regulations or traffic laws. While faithfully accomplishing our daily program of traffic regulation and enforcement, we are incidentally afforded many valuable opportunities for building up the good name and reputation of the force through friendly and favorable personal contacts with the motoring public. The daily assignments of a large number of field personnel of this force to traffic enforcement creates a rather high contact rate with the public. When the volume of enforcement activity increases, the contact rate with the public likewise increases.

The great majority of the persons who are contacted by park police officers in connection with traffic enforcement actions are not in any sense criminals. On the contrary, these people are generally conceded to be a very respectable segment of the population. We want the goodwill and friendly support of all respectable citizens in order to ensure the continued effective functioning of this force. It is highly important that we should not deal with motorist violators too severely, as might otherwise be the case when dealing with known criminals. We aim to deal firmly with respectable citizens who err as motorists, but never harshly.

There is present in every officer-violator contact an opportunity for the police officer to create a favorable or an unfavorable opinion toward himself and his calling. The motorist's opinion of the individual officer, as formed by the violator at the scene of an enforcement action will later become the same citizen's criterion for estimating the performance of the entire force. It is essential that we make none but firm, courteous, intelligent, and friendly contacts in the field, if we are to cultivate credit for the force. There is always the possibility in each contact made by each policeman of winning a friend or making an enemy. Every zealous and dedicated member of the force will want to handle his enforcement actions in a manner best designed to gain future compliance with regulations, as well as the respect and goodwill of traffic offenders. In order to achieve such a goal, it is necessary first to understand a few of the attitudes and reactions commonly attributed to policemen and to motorist violators, which can be expected for good or ill to influence future force-public relationships during officer-violator contacts in the field.

### THE FIRST SIXTY SECONDS

The first sixty seconds of a police officer's conversation with a motorist violator prepares the ground for the establishment of either an amicable or a hostile type of relationship. The opening remarks of the traffic officer must be firm, friendly, and businesslike. They must be carefully phrased and delivered in such a tone as to inspire confidence and command respect. Opening remarks must be proper, courteous, and accurate. The violator almost always responds in an agreeable fashion, if the officer has employed "the friendly approach." In instances where the violator becomes unduly excited or belligerent, the arresting officer cannot afford to lose his own temper and thereby allow the situation to get out of hand. At a time like this, the officer should be prepared and ready (as a result of his pre-knowledge of human reactions) to employ whatever psychological influences may be indicated in order to turn the tide of the conversations so as to accomplish his own aims. It is not always possible to effect a sudden change in the attitude of a violator at the scene of enforcement, but if the officer has demonstrated good judgment and has acted in a firm, courteous, and understanding manner, he may feel assured that he has left a good impression with the offender regardless of the eventual disposition of the case. A very substantial aid to creating and leaving an abiding good impression is the smart appearance of the police officer and his equipment.

### CATCHING THE VIOLATOR'S REACTION

It will not do for an officer to become upset and irritated merely because the violator's first reactions to an enforcement incident indicate that for some reason or another he is uncooperative or scornful. Anyone can handle an incident with poise when everything runs smoothly. It is when highly-charged, emotional situations develop that a policeman is put to the test. It is at such times that a policeman is afforded the opportunity to demonstrate to himself and to force management that he can handle difficult enforcement problems in creditable fashion. It is important always to analyze the reactions of an apprehended traffic offender, and then tactfully to set the scene for friendly, professional, businesslike handling.

### THE FRAME OF MIND

Let us consider what is the usual attitude and the expected frame of mind of a traffic violator, at the time he is stopped for an offense. He may have delicate family matters or knotty business problems on his mind. He may not realize that he has violated a traffic regulation. He may be late for an appointment. He may be convinced that police arrests for traffic violations constitute something of an unfair game; that police officers have a quota of arrests to maintain; and that a high arrest quota will enhance the officer's chances for advancement. He may for some reason be genuinely scared at the prospect of receiving a fine, a jail sentence, or of losing his driving privilege. He may be embarrassed. He may never before have had personal contact with a police officer, particularly if he is a juvenile. On the other hand, he may have had unpleasant contacts with police officers on other occasions. He may be ill, physically or mentally. He may be worried or tired.

## TRAFFIC VIOLATOR IS A HUMAN BEING

It is not expected that all of these attitudes or conditions will be found in any one individual at the same time. A motorist simultaneously harboring all of the attitudes mentioned above would be, indeed, the exception. In fact many of these attitudes are the exception, since the average motorist is pleasant, alert, friendly, and cooperative. However, it is with the exceptional factors that we must be concerned, if we wish to understand those people who do react unfavorably to our efforts at traffic enforcement. It is not our job to find out specifically what attitude does exist in the mind of the offender, but by realizing that traffic violators are human beings, with various attitudes and problems on their minds, we are reminded of the need to exercise patience and understanding when taking enforcement action. To be apprehended in an error causes any violator keen concern and momentary displeasure.

## TRAFFIC OFFICER ALSO IS A HUMAN BEING

Traffic officers may be carrying some of the same problems and troubles as the violator. However, the nature of a policeman's employment requires from him a high degree of professional poise and restraint. Police officers are sometimes inclined to develop improper attitudes towards violators. The officer may think the violator is the type of person who is trying to "get away" with something. He may build up resentment because of a long, hard chase to apprehend the violator. He may be ill at ease because of the superior education or high position of the person apprehended. He may have developed a brusque mechanical procedure to follow in dealing with violators which is devoid of friendliness, sympathy, or understanding. He may have become cynical. But every policeman is required to "put his own house in order" before he enters on his day's enforcement duties.

## THE ROYAL ROAD TO PRESTIGE

*Because of the attitudes mentioned above, perhaps involving both the officer and the violator, the two are sometimes miles apart in their viewpoints, and occasionally it happens that there seems to be no middle ground for them to meet upon. Neither the officer nor the violator may be in a frame of mind conducive to the smooth transaction of officer-violator enforcement action. However, it is the professional obligation of the police officer to take the initiative and to handle the enforcement action with as little friction as possible. It is not to be expected that traffic arrests of motorists will ever become really popular with the motorists apprehended. However, all enforcement actions can be and must be handled in a less and less irritating, and more and more agreeable fashion. This is the royal road to prestige and fine reputation for any force whose work is largely in traffic enforcement and the handling of public events.*

## EVALUATE THE HUMAN FACTOR

Human relationships are complex. No two people are alike. Each person is, within himself, the product of a complex pattern of many influences. Human relationships have an infinite variety of inter-reactions. There is little doubt but that officer-violator contacts involve a

strong potential for friction and conflict. It is natural for humans to react adversely to restraint and control. The police officer's job sometimes requires him to deter or restrain; whereas the violator usually desperately desires freedom from restraint. It is at all times the professional responsibility of the arresting officer to evaluate the human behavior factors, and endeavor to eliminate or minimize all sources of conflict or friction.

The following precepts are furnished for the guidance of police traffic officers in dealing with traffic offenders:

1. Stand erect; do not lounge; keep hands off car.
2. Receive papers with left hand; be ready with the right. A motorist-violator occasionally is discovered to be a desperate, wanted criminal. It is for this reason that a police officer always stops his patrol car behind the violator (for good observation of the occupants); never does the officer stop in front of the violator.
3. Do not accept billfold or purse. Ask the violator to remove requested identification.
4. Tell the violator your intentions. Do not debate in your mind or aloud whether to give a warning, issue a citation, or effect a summary arrest. Do not play "cat and mouse" with the offender.
5. Act natural. Be friendly, but businesslike. Be courteous, be helpful, be understanding—to whatever point is indicated.
6. If an arrest is justified, make it. Give proper consideration to the possible use of courtesy citations and to traffic violation notices.
7. If you are personally upset, cool off. Check the tag on the rear of the car, or walk to the cruiser and back.
8. Avoid prolonged discussions. Answer any questions of the violator briefly, but courteously, to whatever degree is appropriate.
9. Never threaten a violator with charges, costs, punishment, or future action. Refrain from talking about collateral, unless it is necessary while giving instructions.
10. It is not necessary or proper to embarrass or unduly delay a motorist in connection with the handling of a traffic offense.
11. Try to have just enough police conversation to show the violator what he has done wrong, and to instruct him as how to meet the requirements of the traffic violation notice.
12. Do not give lectures to violators. When it is necessary to comment, emphasize police responsibility in traffic safety and accident prevention.
13. Remember that the motorist's offense is against a regulation and not against you.
14. Learn to disregard politely any irritating remarks made by the violator. They usually are due to the violator's upset condition, and would not be said under normal conditions. Allow a violator a cooling-off period, if necessary.
15. Occasionally, carefully review your own tactics and techniques in handling traffic violators. Change your procedures, and substitute better ones; experiment with various approved techniques; try to build yourself up professionally to a point where you are competent to handle any type of difficult situation in creditable fashion.

