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The convenient part of having a local police department, or any emergency service at all, is being able to call a phone number and get help for whatever dire situation you are in, no matter who or where you are. You do not need to know any officer or even be aware of their individual existence to make use of this service; their job is to help whoever needs help. Paradoxically enough, it is *because* of this convenient detached nature of emergency services that you should try to familiarize yourself and engage with their members, especially with the police.

In a relatively small city like Garfield, there is a handful of officers that is assigned to service the entire population. Guarding construction sites, monitoring streets at night on patrol, assisting with traffic accidents—it doesn't matter where; the fact remains that you are statistically likely to bump into a police officer at some point or another. When you do, “the police” becomes more than a faceless entity sitting behind a phone line. Instead, it becomes the officer you just waved or nodded at, or the officer you just asked for directions or other information. The concept of “the police” becomes humanized, and you now have an idea of what the man or woman responding to your emergency calls looks like.

Additionally, not every professional interaction with the police is a result of a 911 call, with high stakes and high emotions. The local police departments manage many mundane situations as well, from road closures to dealing with public nuisances. Establishing some sort of relationship with the police can make a traffic stop less stressful or make it easier to ask how long a certain street is going to be closed. This is good social common sense; obviously, you would want to know who the people policing your city are, and more specifically the kind of people they are.

Yet the paramount reason for engaging with your local police department has as more serious basis: crime prevention. Communities with good community-police relations tend to

have lower crime rates and more efficient police responses. No surprise there: trust is always beneficial to the smooth functioning of a society. However, the importance of good relations with the police goes even deeper than that. When the police engage with the community, they gain a deeper understanding of the members of that community. They gain an awareness of their wants, their needs, their fears, their values, and their dreams. They learn about the different cultures in a community, and how to avoid conflict stemming from differences in culture. A community-minded police force finds it easier to learn the ins and outs of town, as well as the unspoken rules and standards of a community that can't be found in a textbook or in a training stimulation.

A well-informed police force is also a better police force. When people trust and know the police, they are more likely to cooperate in investigations and provide vital tips and information needed to prevent and stop crime. The primary job of the police is to keep you safe, and engaging with your local police department will improve both the quality of their work and the quality of your life.

This sounds excellent on paper but is not as intuitive in practice. It isn't logical to just strike up conversation with every cop you see, so what exactly can you do? Thankfully, a little research provides a myriad of ways to successfully create bonds between you and your local police department.

The easiest way to start is to follow your local police department on social media – Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. Not only will you be more aware of traffic alerts and crime warnings, but you'll be also notified of local police-related events, from writing contests to parades. From there it is just a matter of attending those events and participating appropriately. Even during such socially distanced times as this you will easily find some or other virtual event to engage in. For example, some police departments send out surveys

concerning general safety and community events. Filling those out would both help the police department learn about the community and let you share your opinion on certain topics.

In-person events let you do this more directly. When the pandemic ends, you might consider taking this route in addition to interacting with your local police online. What is available varies by location, of course, but most police departments will have at least one of these options.

The most obvious way to engage with your local police department is to participate in a citizen's advisory board, or something similar. There, you and your fellow citizens can discuss issues pertaining to your community and how to manage them, with the police face-to-face. Not only will you be able to interact with police officers personally, but you will also be able to learn about issues in your neighborhood and how the police plans to respond to them. If your city doesn't have a citizen's advisory board, there are always community meetings. Usually held in the town hall, you will see law enforcement working with elected officials to discuss policies and, like on an advisory board, deal with issues pertaining to your city. Often during those sorts of meetings there are opportunities for regular citizens to speak and ask questions. If you have children, or are young enough to qualify, the junior police academy can help them (or you!) engage with the local law enforcement by teaching them the specifics of the job, the skills needed, and the importance of being a good citizen.

The police cannot exist without a public to protect, and the public cannot be safe without the police. Yet despite this, far too many people live their lives viewing the police as a faceless entity, to be feared and avoided. This is, as previously demonstrated, not only detrimental to the police but to the community as well. It doesn't have to be that way. After all, the best day to start making a change is today.