

PA FIRE POLICE ***Understanding People . . .*** ***“The Fundamentals of Humanics”***

By Tony Riccardi - PA State Fire Academy Approved Fire Police Instructor

In addition to dealing with angry and aggressive motorists, fire police officers have to contend with all types of people under a whole diversity of conditions including the arrogant, the ignorant, the belligerent, the emotional, the pompous, and you are expected to do so in a professional manner. Not an easy task, but you most likely know that already.

Unfortunately, you have no power to arrest or issue a traffic citation. People know that and it makes your job all that much more difficult.

When teaching firefighters, we emphasize that in order to effectively fight fires it is necessary to have a full understanding of fire behavior, it is critical to success on the fireground.

For the fire police officer it works the same way except for you it is dealing with people, not fire. Therefore, it would be extremely important to understand some critical factors about people. It is important for fire police officers to understand why people act the way they do! Keep in mind as you read through this article that the information being shared applies to you and me as well, after all, we are similar to the people discussed in this article.

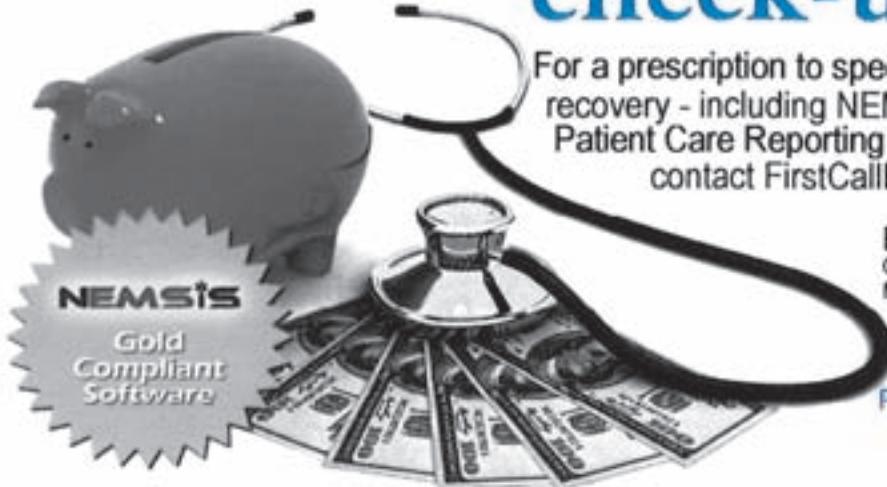
When assuming your role as a fire police officer at any emergency scene, you will almost immediately note some people are very courteous – obedient – and never give you a difficult time, others, however, act just the opposite. You can't help wondering why!

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To help understand why people react differently, it would be helpful to understand the basic concept of human nature. We call this – Fundamentals of Humanics and is covered in the Advanced Fire Police class.

We all possess the same human traits – but we act out in different ways – depending on the situation. To understand this concept let's explore these traits and see how they affect you.

One of the most important facts to understand about human nature, everyone does not respond the same way to the same circumstance or situation. You don't, they don't, and it's what makes us human. However, there are traits common to most people and that is what this article will explore.

1. People like to feel important.

While this may seem to be a negative, it is a positive as well. We put a fire company license plate on our vehicle to let people know we are an emergency responder, or

you may put decals on the side of your vehicle for the same purpose. This makes you feel important and there is absolutely nothing wrong with letting others know.

The negative side of this concept occurs when people believe they are more important than anyone else and attempt to defy your orders because of that belief. This is when fire police officers must stand firm and require all persons to obey your orders.

2. People are generally curious.

Probably one of the most consistent complaints from fire police officers concerns people who want to ask questions about what is going on. You will always be faced with this problem because all people are curious; we want to know what is happening. You cannot stop it but you can learn to deal with it in an effective manner. You know why you're there, it is either a fire or accident in most instances but "Joe Public" does not know why. When someone

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stops and makes an inquiry, answer by simply stating “there’s been an emergency”. Now comes the twenty questions you certainly don’t have time to answer. Once you’ve responded to their inquiry simply turn your back to the motorist. Believe it or not, it is not a rude gesture. You answered their question and the turning movement merely indicates you don’t have time to answer any further questions.

3. People resist criticism.

No one likes to be criticized, especially in public. When motorists make mistakes, resist the urge to openly criticize them, instead try to explain what they are to do. It may take a few seconds but the end result should be favorable. Imagine how you would feel if you did something incorrectly and the captain or the fire chief scolded you in front of motorists, pedestrians, and other fire police, you would resent it.

4. People resist change.

Probably the most constant thing in our life is change, yet we resist it. Think how many times you were required to make a change for one reason or another and how the urge to resist it almost, or in fact, did occur. Motorists will not gladly receive your orders to travel a different route than one they want to use. Of course, the emergency will require that they must comply. This is when good public relations become important. Remember, people react negatively to anything they don’t understand. This is why they become negative; they can’t understand why they are unable to do what they normally do. Your getting angry under these circumstances accomplishes absolutely nothing except to further antagonize the motorists. Remember, one of your most important assignments when called to duty is to help the traveling public to get safely around the scene. It is why you are there and it should be your goal to do an effective job.

5. People become slaves of habit.

How many times have you said or heard someone else say “I’ve done this job so

many times I can do it with one hand tied behind my back”. Obviously, we are declaring how confident we are in doing that activity. However, while we are confident, it is obviously based on the fact that we have developed a method of doing something and then constant repetition makes us feel this confidence. What you have done is merely become a slave to the habit of doing a particular activity in the same way time after time so that you are a “slave” to that one method. Motorists are exactly the same. They have a habit of doing or traveling a certain route and they come a slave to it as well. It takes understanding and patience on the part of the fire police officer to deal with motorists under these circumstances.

More on this subject next month.



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