

# ***PA FIRE POLICE***

## ***Understanding People . . .***

### ***“The Fundamentals of Humanics” Part 2***

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

As promised, this month we will continue to explore how and why people react the way they do. If you will recall, the information is taken from the Fundamentals of humanics section in the Advance Fire Police program.

#### **6. Human reaction can be predicted.**

Believe it or not, people’s reaction or conduct can be predicted before it occurs. One of our favorite ways to prove this in the classroom is by telling the class that when they return the following day for the second part of the class, they will instinctively return to the exact same seat they sat in the previous day. To their surprise they find that the statement is true, proving behavior can be predicted before it occurs. For the fire police officer this information should be helpful.

Your pager alerts you that you are needed for an emergency. You then put on your hat, your badge, your vest, and grab your flashlight and you’re now ready to go on duty. While on duty, however, someone gives you the single finger salute or someone else tells you your parents were never married. Your tour is not turning out too well and you may well become stressed out because of this abuse.

Now let’s start over and do all the same things, except now we also arm ourselves with the knowledge that motorists are going to react negatively. Now I am prepared for the abusive conduct and can handle it. The reason so many fire police officers get upset with the verbal abuse you receive is because you were not expecting it. After all you’re not getting paid and you certainly don’t need to take this abuse.

You are not going to change the public’s perception of fire police by returning abuse for abuse. In law enforcement we officers are encouraged to act in a professional manner and that at times you may very well be verbally abused. During my tenure as a police officer if I made a traffic stop and the motorist became irate and shouted out that they pay my salary, I merely asked them if they weren’t glad I was earning it. They got the point.

The point being made here is that when you’re not expecting negative conduct you react in a manner you may later regret. But, when you know, or at least expect it may occur, you’re ready for it and can keep your temper much easier.

#### **7. We have our own self-interest at heart.**

The average motorist – seeing you at your post – will most likely not be sympathetic nor concerned about your problems and/or your responsibilities.

They will – most likely – be concerned about their own situation and more likely be upset because you will not permit them to continue on their way – in the direction they want to go – regardless of the reason.

They will have their own self-interest at heart!

To prove this, tomorrow when you meet someone at work or wherever and they ask how you are, tell them and then watch what happens. Either they suddenly discover they’re running late or they jump in with “ONE UPSMANSHIP” meaning they will attempt to top your story. Why? Because the average person is not really interested in your problems, only their own.

Of course there is the person who may actually bring you a hot cup of coffee on a very cold day or a cool drink on a hot day but, most will have their own self-interest at heart and not care much about you or our problems.

#### **8. Argument cannot be won by agreeing or disagreeing.**

If this is not true, and we suggest it is, it seems silly to engage in something that will not have a positive ending. However, we have had folks claim that they had an argument with someone and they backed off and agreed with them.

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Well, let's look at this little ditty; "A person convinced against his will is of the same opinion still". You didn't change their mind, they simply agreed with you to get rid of you.

The point here is why engage in something that will be nothing more than an exercise in futility – wasted energy!

### **9. All people believe what they believe whether or not it is true.**

Hard to believe but true none the less. We have all encountered people in our lives that cling to beliefs even when they have been shown to be incorrect. You're going to encounter this type during your many tours of duty. You will waste a lot of energy trying to convince them they are not correct. Your best option, understand the concept and move on.

### **10. People become irritated when their habits are interfered with.**

Oh, so true. This is one of the major reasons why as a fire police officer you encounter anger, resistance, and a lot of grief from motorists. Your job many times involves changing people's habits so it is only natural that they will become irritated. The more you realize this, the easier you will be able to cope with it.

### **11. Informed people should be understandingly tolerant of those who are less informed.**

As already indicated, people are curious. How many times do firefighters and fire police officers complain about being kept out of the loop? We all want to know what is happening. There are occasions during training classes when a pager may activate, it is interesting to see every head turn in the direction of the alert and the class waits to hear what the call is all about. It's not their call, but they want to know none-the-less.

That's why, as we stated earlier, fire police officers need to be prepared for questions coming from motorist who are going to be interested in knowing what is happening. Instead of ignoring them the wiser move is to develop short answers and impart that information to them. If nothing else, it is a great public relations effort.

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### 12. People will always revert back to that which is natural and comfortable for them.

What this means is no matter what we have been trained to do, we will go back to the old ways of doing them because they are more comfortable. It is always interesting to watch fire police during the traffic control segment of the Basic course. They struggle to master the signals but it is so obvious that they will return to their own method when the class is over.

Why do we do this? Well let's review the material covered last month and this month to fully understand how all this works together for most people in general and fire police officers in particular.

The pager sounds an alert, the fire police officer gathers his radio and equipment and heads out the door to perform some type of duty required by the emergency.

Along with the required equipment, the fire police officer now begins a mental checklist; You're probably going to have to stop traffic,

maybe reroute traffic, that obviously is going to interfere with people's habits, they may become irritated when their habits are interfered with. They're going to be curious and want to ask questions about the incident. They're not going to be concerned with the problems you have to deal with, they have their own self-interest at heart, they may become argumentative, but that's a no-win situation, they're going to want to do things the same way they always do them so they will certainly resist the change you will require them to make.

After you digest all this information, remember that human behavior can be predicted, therefore, you're better prepared for what you are going to encounter. It may even bring a smile to your face when it happens and perhaps a little disappointment when it doesn't.

No one is perfect and none of these articles are designed to make you perfect. Rather the intent is to provide some guidance so that your tour can be enjoyable instead of the nightmare many fire police officers claim they experience.

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