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The Police Leader Playbook

## The power of professional sincerity in policing

When emotional investment isn't possible, projecting trust and respect through sincere communication can be the key to safer, more effective outcomes

March 24, 2025 08:42 PM • Police1 Special Contributors



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By Jeffrey G. Scholz

Effective communication can mean the difference between success and failure. Depending on your line of work, failure could translate into a lost sale, an angry customer and a bad review, or — in policing — even life or death.

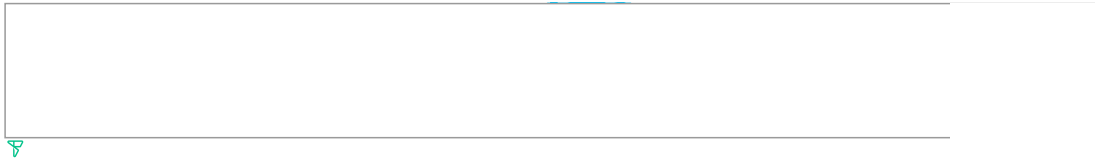
Professional sincerity is a concept that combines authenticity with effective and strategic communication, especially in the high-stakes or challenging environments encountered by law enforcement and professionals in people-oriented roles. It's an essential trait that promotes trust, fosters ethical behavior and enhances both personal and organizational success. While sincerity often implies a

deep personal connection or emotional investment, professional sincerity is more nuanced. Its role in high-stakes situations cannot be overstated; it can be the deciding factor between successful resolution and potential disaster.

Through my small business, **886 Consulting LLC**, I teach this concept to police officers and civilians nationwide. Professional sincerity emphasizes the importance of demonstrating genuine care and engagement, regardless of personal feelings toward the individual or situation.

## Understanding professional sincerity

Professional sincerity is grounded in genuine communication, alignment between words and actions, and a commitment to ethical standards. Traditionally, sincerity is associated with honesty and emotional congruence where the feelings you express reflect your internal emotional state. However, in a professional context, especially in roles that involve managing conflict or crisis, sincerity also takes on a functional dimension.



As a professional in any people-centered field, you're often required to communicate in ways that build trust and reduce tension, even when you may not personally empathize with or agree with the other person. This practical approach to expressing sincerity isn't just a theoretical concept; it's a powerful, applicable tool that empowers you to navigate challenging situations effectively in your day-to-day work.

Let's be clear: professional sincerity doesn't mean you have to like or even care about the person you're dealing with. It means you must communicate in a way that feels sincere to them. If you don't come across as genuinely caring, your ability to influence their behavior is diminished. Maintaining professional sincerity is essential to defusing tensions and achieving positive outcomes – whether you're handling a customer service complaint, a high-stress confrontation or even a hostage negotiation.

## The role of professional sincerity in leadership and ethics

This principle holds true in leadership, where sincerity plays a critical role in building trust and credibility. Leaders who are perceived as sincere can inspire loyalty and foster a culture of openness and transparency. It's well established that authenticity and sincerity in leadership strengthen teams, reduce internal conflict, and create an environment where employees feel safe to share ideas, voice concerns, and admit mistakes.

However, as I often point out, sincerity in the workplace doesn't always require emotional investment. For leaders – or professionals managing delicate situations, such as law enforcement officers engaged in conflict resolution – the ability to present oneself as sincere, regardless of personal feelings, is essential. The goal is to manage the situation effectively, reduce hostility, and foster productive dialogue. In these moments, genuine sincerity may give way to professional sincerity—a practiced, intentional approach to communication that prioritizes outcomes without sacrificing authenticity.

## Professional sincerity as a strategic tool

Professional sincerity is both an ethical and tactical tool, especially in high-stress situations. In my Crisis Communication classes, it becomes a powerful asset, where the ability to quickly establish rapport can de-escalate tensions and create opportunities for peaceful resolutions. My approach teaches professionals – including police officers, fire and EMS personnel, social workers, medical staff, educators, HR professionals and others – to embrace professional sincerity as a vital component of their interpersonal interactions, even when they may not personally connect with or care for the individuals involved.



This nuanced view of sincerity acknowledges that professionals often don't have the luxury of emotional alignment. Instead, they must focus on projecting honesty and trustworthiness — because in many cases, the outcome hinges on how sincere they are perceived to be. Whether negotiating a peaceful resolution to a crisis or navigating a difficult customer service interaction, the ability to project sincerity — in other words, professional sincerity — can mean the difference between escalation and resolution.

## Balancing authenticity and professionalism

One of the core challenges of professional sincerity is balancing authenticity with the skilled ability to manage perceptions. While emotional authenticity is valuable in many interpersonal interactions, professional sincerity allows for a degree of strategic detachment. In any situation — especially during a crisis — the only thing you can fully control is yourself. That means managing your emotional responses to prioritize the greater goal: resolving the situation, serving the client, or de-escalating a crisis.

For example, a customer service professional may face an angry or disrespectful customer. While they may not feel emotionally aligned with the customer's frustration, they still need to respond with sincerity to calm the situation and find a resolution. Similarly, law enforcement officers may encounter distraught individuals — even those who have committed serious crimes — but must still demonstrate sincerity to achieve a safe and effective outcome. This is where emotional intelligence, as explored by scholars like Daniel Goleman, intersects with professional sincerity, enabling professionals to navigate emotionally charged situations with empathy, control, and purpose.

## The ethical imperative of sincerity

In addition to its tactical value, professional sincerity carries profound ethical implications. It fosters trust and ensures that interactions are grounded in honesty — even when emotional investment is absent. By maintaining consistency between your words and actions, you uphold ethical standards that are critical for long-term success. This is especially vital in law enforcement, where insincerity can have serious consequences. Officers know all too well that once your credibility comes into question — not just in the courtroom, but on the street — your job becomes significantly more difficult.

My approach to professional sincerity emphasizes that sincerity should never cross into manipulation. The goal is to influence behavior positively, not to deceive or exploit. While courts may have upheld the legality of certain deceptive tactics, I strongly advise against them. Professional sincerity is not about trickery — it's about addressing people's basic needs and concerns without requiring emotional attachment. By communicating truthfully and treating all individuals with dignity, we protect both our personal integrity and the reputation of our organizations.

Professional sincerity is a multifaceted concept that merges ethical conduct, strategic communication, and emotional intelligence. While personal relationships often require genuine emotional investment, professional sincerity demands a different kind of commitment. Applying it in high-pressure situations—regardless of emotional alignment — is essential for resolving conflicts, building trust, and achieving productive, safer outcomes.



In the professional world, particularly in law enforcement, effective communication must inspire trust and reflect integrity. Striking the balance between authenticity and professionalism is key to navigating complex interpersonal dynamics under pressure. Through

professional sincerity, individuals and organizations can foster environments where honesty, trust, and ethical behavior thrive – leading to more positive and safer interactions.

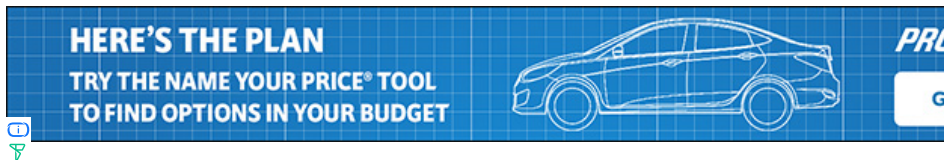
## Integrating professional sincerity in law enforcement training

With credit to the author, law enforcement agencies are encouraged to find ways to integrate professional sincerity into their training programs to reap the benefits mentioned above. Some suggestions for this include:

### 1. Role-playing and simulation exercises

*Reality-based training scenarios:* Create scenarios that officers are likely to face, such as domestic disputes, mental health crises, and traffic stops with uncooperative individuals. Emphasize how to convey sincerity without necessarily feeling personal alignment with the individual. Use actors or role-players to simulate challenging personalities, such as argumentative or distraught individuals. This helps officers practice the balance between sincerity and emotional detachment, focusing on genuine communication.

*Feedback on officer tone and demeanor:* Incorporate real-time feedback on tone, body language and word choice to ensure officers communicate in a way that is seen as sincere. Trainers can point out when an officer’s communication is insincere or dismissive, encouraging them to adjust their approach.



### 2. Workshops on emotional intelligence and self-control

*Emotional intelligence modules:* As we mentioned, officers must practice self-control over their emotions, as in any situation, the only thing that may be controlled is yourself. Include training on these principles. Through empathy and self-awareness, officers can learn how to manage their own emotional responses to project sincerity even when they may not personally empathize with the other person.

*Managing implicit bias:* Teach officers to recognize and set aside implicit biases that could hinder sincere communication. This helps ensure that interactions are handled professionally and ethically.

*Self-reflection exercises:* After role-playing sessions, encourage officers to reflect on their own emotions and reactions, considering how those feelings impacted their ability to convey sincerity.

### 3. Structured communication techniques



*“Reflective listening” exercises:* Train officers in reflective listening, a key component of active listening in the “behavioral stairway,” and a technique where they paraphrase or summarize the other person’s words to show understanding and respect. This is a powerful tool for projecting sincerity and defusing tension.

*Empathic statements:* Teach officers to use empathic statements strategically, even when they don’t feel an emotional connection. For example, phrases like “I understand this is frustrating for you” show an understanding of the other person’s feelings without requiring personal alignment. This is also known as “emotional labeling,” another part of active listening skills, and can be highly effective. It’s essential to focus on recognizing the person’s emotions, not claiming to understand their entire experience.

#### 4. Ethics and professionalism training

*Ethics workshops on sincerity and manipulation:* Conduct discussions and case studies on the difference between sincere communication and manipulation. Highlight that professional sincerity is not about deceiving or manipulating people but rather about honest, respectful communication and fulfilling the basic needs of a person in crisis.

*Long-term impact of sincerity on trust:* Use real-world case studies to show the impact of professional sincerity on community trust and how insincere behavior can damage public perception of law enforcement.



#### 5. Debrief and reflective practices post-interaction

*After-Action Reviews (AARs):* After real-world incidents or training exercises, conduct structured debriefs where officers can discuss what went well and what could be improved regarding sincere communication. Encourage self-assessment on professional sincerity and perceptions.

*Peer review sessions:* Allow officers to observe and provide feedback on each other's communication styles. Constructive feedback can help them understand how their words and actions are perceived by others, fostering awareness.

#### 6. Incorporating sincerity into agency policies and culture

*Agency-wide commitment to sincerity:* With credit to the author, make professional sincerity a core principle within the agency's values and code of conduct. Leaders and supervisors should model sincerity in their interactions, creating a culture where it's valued and expected.



*Ongoing professional development:* Continue to integrate professional sincerity into courses on all aspects of basic and in-service training, ensuring that it remains an integral part of each officer's development and the agency's mission.

These methods help officers internalize professional sincerity, giving them tools and structured ways to project it consistently, even under stress. Implementing these techniques into training can support the agency's broader goals of building community trust by utilizing the four pillars of procedural justice to enhance legitimacy by ensuring officers are equipped to handle encounters ethically and effectively.

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#### About the author

Jeffrey G. Scholz is a retired New York State Trooper with over 24 years of service with the New York State Police and over 28 years of experience in law enforcement. He is an IADLEST (International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training) National Certified Instructor.

Upon retirement in May 2022, Jeff was the Senior Investigator for BCI (Bureau of Criminal Investigation) Training at the State Police Academy in Albany, NY, responsible for the development, facilitation, and delivery of in-service and basic training programs to over

1,100 NYSP Investigators in the BCI, as well as programs for over 3,000 uniformed Troopers, recruits, civilians and outside law enforcement agencies across New York State and beyond.

Certified as a New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Master Instructor for Police Topics, Jeff received the coveted 2019 New York State Police George M. Searle Award, which recognizes excellence in police training. Jeff also served as the division coordinator for the NYSP Crisis Negotiation Program and has been a crisis negotiator since 2006. His extensive career also included roles in uniform patrol, field training officer, undercover narcotics work, computer crime investigations, and major crime investigations. He was also a responder to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City. Jeff continues instructing police officers and civilians nationwide through his consulting business, 886 Consulting LLC, various organizations, and the New York State Office of Mental Health. He is also a cold case consultant for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. Since 2022, Jeff has instructed thousands of police officers and civilians in 17 states and counting.

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