

**SMITH, RODGERS & STRICKLAND, PLLC**

**REECE AND RALPH MUSE ON NEWTON'S  
THREE LAWS OF MOTION & THEIR APPLICABILITY TO  
PROPER LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT  
FEBRUARY 14, 2005**

**BY**

**REECE TRIMMER  
RALPH B. STRICKLAND, JR.**

Not long ago we were just sitting around doing almost absolutely nothing (though our eyes were mostly open) when one of us suggested that perhaps we should take a break and muse awhile. Neither of us being able to think of a good reason to avoid a good muse, a-musing we went. After a few moments at it we had determined that one of Trimmer's favorite books was *A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT* by Norman Maclean, whereas Strickland was partial to *THE CAT IN THE HAT MEETS THE HOOKER IN THE TUBE TOP*; and more importantly, **that the laws of physics just might have something to tell us about personnel management.**

Physics is a *narrowly* fascinating topic, and we knew of no one who had ever attempted to use its principles to teach law enforcement officers. Undeterred, we decided to have a go at it.

Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) was a British physicist, scientist and mathematician interested in mathematical research. Newton is clearly the most influential scientist who ever lived. His accomplishments in mathematics, optics, and physics laid the foundations for modern science and revolutionized the world.

Newton made a huge impact on theoretical astronomy. He defined the laws of motion and universal gravitation, which he used to predict precisely the motions of stars, and the planets around the sun.

**Here are the Three Laws of Motion enumerated by Newton, and how we would suggest a first line supervisor apply them in the course of managing his or her squad.**

**1. EVERY OBJECT IN A STATE OF UNIFORM MOTION TENDS TO REMAIN IN THAT STATE OF MOTION UNLESS AN EXTERNAL FORCE IS APPLIED TO IT.**

Every law enforcement squad, whether patrol, investigation, civil, administration or special ops, is composed of a number of individuals of different backgrounds, talents and motivations. It is the responsibility of the squad supervisor to mold the squad into a functioning unit that meets the objectives established for it. To accomplish that goal, the supervisor must manage the squad.

As a manager, the first-line supervisor must be flexible in the approach to each individual. For instance, there are those who have learned a certain way to do the job, and they do it that way, even if it on occasion lands them in trouble. That's the way their mentor taught them, and By Gum! that's the way they are going to do it! They are "objects in a state of uniform motion that tend to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to them."

You, as the manager, are the "external force" that must act on them or they will never change their behavior or performance. Move the unwittingly mistaken officer off his errant course by telling him what he must do and how it must be done. Of course, people are not objects, but they may act as if they are. When that happens, you

must react, take charge and manage. Accepting a promotion isn't all "slaps and giggles." But Newton was right, and some officers will not change direction without management. If they are your responsibility, see that they get it.

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AN OBJECT'S MASS ( $M$ ), ITS ACCELERATION ( $A$ ), AND THE APPLIED FORCE ( $F$ ) IS $F=MA$ .**

Although this law appears more complex than the first (and that's because it is), let's make it very simple. Your subordinate is again the object, but his "mass" ( $m$ ) is his degree of resistance to change. How fast you need him to change and in what particular direction is the "acceleration" or  $a$ . You with your management skills are  $F$ .

$F=MA$  simply designates that you must apply your management skills to a subordinate according to his resistance to change and how quickly you need to move him in a certain new direction. The more resistance from him the more you need to be "forceful" in order to get the desired change. And the greater distance he is "off course" (not following law and/or procedure) then the greater is the need for you to act quickly and decisively.

Observe your subordinates. Determine if they need immediate counseling and direction. Choose the method appropriate to the need and personality of the subordinate. Apply the appropriate method. You are now in compliance with the second law of motion as it applies to management.

## **3. FOR EVERY ACTION THERE IS AN EQUAL BUT OPPOSITE REACTION.**

That is correct. For every management action you take toward a subordinate, he will give some kind of reaction in return. As he is not an "object," his reaction may not always be opposite in emotion or behavior from yours. Much will depend on your correct reading of his personality and which type of management technique you will apply to his situation. Just remember that he must take some action, and you, your agency, the head of your agency, and the people you serve, need it to be as positive as possible. The way you handle a particular situation may break or make a career. That is a terrible responsibility, but one each supervisor must bear,

There are many management books, courses and seminars available to you. Take advantage of them when you can. Listen to your own supervisor. Watch other successful supervisors. One book that may help you is *THE ONE MINUTE MANAGER* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson. It is available at your local bookstore or through <amazon.com> on the World Wide Web.

And we do not get a kickback from Blanchard and Johnson.

### **—RALPH HERE:**

As we finished this R&R Communiqué, I asked Reece if he had any final thoughts. He ruminated only a moment, and then said,

"Ralph, the manifestation of the universe as a complex idea unto itself as opposed to being in or outside the true Being of itself is inherently a conceptual nothingness or Nothingness in relation to any abstract form of existing or to exist or having existed in perpetuity and not subject to laws of physicality or motion or ideas relating to non-matter or the lack of objective Being or subjective otherness."

Well, I couldn't argue with that. Then, being unable to stay away from the subject of food, Reece opined:

"In Salemburg, we tried (and generally succeeded) not to think beyond what we would eat if the pork chops at the cafeteria were so over-cooked to be inedible. That was always true. Everything else varied. After the NC DOT put in the stop light, we figured we were too high class to admit worrying about pork chops." [Reece Trimmer, *Laws of Motion of Pork Chops, the Other White Meat*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 187].