

SMITH, RODGERS & STRICKLAND, PLLC

**FIVE RULES FOR AGENCY
ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS**

(Tape This to the Office Wall)

REECE TRIMMER

Senior Geezer and Cumberland County Sheriffs Office
Legal Advisor, Fayetteville, N.C.

SPECIAL TO CLIENTS OF SMITH, RODGERS & STRICKLAND, PLLC

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FIRST: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SECRET.

(Plan On Having To Explain It In Public.)

It makes more sense to believe in Santa Claus than to believe you can give someone special treatment and keep it a secret. Some people will know about it, and they will keep the secret so long as they like you. When you say “no” to them for the second time, they will stop liking you.

Everything you do is in the policy manual. Everything is a precedent. No one really wants to follow the policy manual. Everyone wants to forget about following precedent. Supervisors want to do whatever they think best for that given problem. Supervisors believe it can be kept quiet. But believing it will always remain a secret is fantasy.

At the time you make your decision, always assume you may have to explain your decision to your boss or in public. When you are thinking “cover-up,” also think what you will say if (when) it becomes uncovered.

SECOND: YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH A LOT, WITH GOOD LUCK.

(Plan On Having Bad Luck.)

Lots of people ignore the rules and get away with it. Some do as they please and nothing bad ever happens to them—they never get sued, demoted, and are never subjected to public embarrassment. Decent luck is enough for most people to handle most problems on a daily basis.

Do not be misled by luck. That nothing bad happened the last time does not mean that nothing bad will happen the next time. Past success creates the false promise of future success. Be prepared for bad luck.

Really bad luck is rare, but it can be catastrophic. One bad mistake ending up in a bad lawsuit can destroy a lifetime’s financial security. It is very unlikely, but it can happen.

THIRD: IMPORTANT RULES ARE THE ONES YOUR BEST FRIEND MUST FOLLOW.
(Your Best Friend Assumes The Rules Don't Apply To Him.)

Important rules are rules that protect the organization. Therefore, important rules apply equally to everyone. No one can jeopardize the organization. If a rule can be violated without damage to the organization, it is unnecessary.

Identify your important rules by asking if you would discipline - at some level - your best friend or your best subordinate for violating it. Too often rules are made for the purpose of punishing a bad officer. Make rules that you are willing to apply to the best officer. Give the subordinate the benefit of an honest doubt, but discipline when the need to protect the organization is clear. A Sergeant wants to protect "his men" first. A good Captain wants to protect the integrity of the organization first.

FOURTH: NEVER LIE TO A JUDGE, THE D.A., OR THE MEDIA.
(They Will Hurt You Bad If They Find Out.)

Telling a lie is a popular way to solve problems, as we learned in childhood. It works over the short run, usually. Adults quickly learn which lies tend to work and which do not. Certain people can help you a lot if they trust you—the good will of judges and prosecutors is critically important. With them, you cannot risk damaging your credibility.

The media is not in the same category and is more unforgiving. Once the media thinks you lied, they will never let up and you are helpless to fight back. If you cannot tell the truth, at least do not tell a lie. Explain that you cannot answer the question. Not answering may cause trouble, but it will be less trouble than telling a lie to a judge, the D.A., or the media. A wise chief once told me, "People will accept a mistake; they won't accept a lie."

FIFTH: MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY LAW: COURTESY, FAIRNESS, HONESTY.
(Make Courtesy Mandatory.)

Grocery store clerks are more courteous than many officers. The store requires a mandatory courteous greeting and parting message. Why isn't standard courteous language mandated for all officers who deal with the public? Rudeness and arrogance are seen by some as proof of bias. Courtesy requires no money, can be done by every officer, and helps prevent citizen complaints. Especially when officers are (or appear to be) in the wrong, courtesy will save the day while arrogance escalates the chance of a complaint. Good character and courtesy help win lawsuits.

Fairness means you resist jumping to conclusions even though you think you know the truth. If it is a serious personnel matter, wait until you hear from everyone who might have some information, even though it takes extra time. Do more than you think you need.

Honesty is tough. Some problems are best solved by a lie that spares feelings or answers a specific need. But those problems ought to be minor. Nothing is worse than working for a supervisor who solves most problems by telling a lie.

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