



As the Assistant Chief of Police in Kalamazoo, Michigan, it's an honor to wear this badge every day

Case Study: Equipping Michigan police to model justice

By Victor A. Green,
Certified Moral Courage® Mentor

I've been involved in law enforcement for almost 30 years. Over the past few, I've had the honor to serve as Assistant Chief for the Department of Public Safety in Kalamazoo, Michigan. You'll soon see why I decided to train and certify as a Moral Courage Mentor.

THE CHALLENGE

As sworn police officers, we should aim not only to develop meaningful relationships with citizens, but also to gain their cooperation — especially during disagreements.

That's because of something I've learned over the years: People determine fairness by more than the final decision that an officer makes in any interaction with them. The process an officer uses to make that decision matters, too. This is called "procedural justice," and a key pillar of it is providing opportunity for voice to be heard.

THE CASE

City commissioners called a town hall meeting to explore what unhoused folks in Kalamazoo need. Several groups with opposing viewpoints attended. A spokesperson for one of the groups became emphatic that officials, including police, were criminalizing the unhoused. But the activists with those claims found themselves silenced, as the town hall was prematurely shut down.



My fellow law enforcers and I have to rebuild trust with those we've taken an oath to serve. Photo: Tony Zhen/Unsplash

Immediately afterwards, the silenced group gathered to one side, away from the crowd. I wanted to personally let them know that I'd welcome their input. Walking toward them, I realized that one activist was live-streaming from their cell phone. Yet another reminder that, to be trustworthy, law enforcement has to be *seen* delivering procedural justice.



The motto "to protect and to serve" appears in the mandate of almost every U.S. police force. Photo: Nick Page / Unsplash

“Hi,” I said, “I’m Victor Green, Assistant Chief of Police. I apologize for what occurred tonight. I want to ensure you have the opportunity to speak at our next town hall.”

The most vocal activist replied, “You’re the Assistant Chief? They only put you in that position because you’re a Black man. You’re nothing more than a token.”

My ego could easily have been triggered to defend my qualifications right then and there. It would have taken nothing for me to say, “I’m nobody’s token! Let me tell you how I earned this position.”



Being a proud Black police officer is not an oxymoron, I promise you. Photo: Fred Moon / Unsplashed

But whatever I felt like blurting in the heat of the moment, I didn’t want it going viral on the live-stream. What I really wanted was to embody procedural justice.

So I quietly asked myself, “How do I ensure that I’m doing what I can to de-escalate this situation? How do I manage my own primal brain?”

I responded with a Moral Courage skill. “Hmmm,” I said. “Okay, tell me more.”

There was complete silence. The person didn’t know how to respond. I later found out why: they were used to a much more aggressive reaction and my nonviolent answer threw them for a loop.

“Let me introduce myself again,” I proposed. “I’m Assistant Chief Green. Here’s my business card. We can meet for coffee if you’d like to talk.”

THE PAYOFF

A couple of weeks passed. Then we met.

This person began by apologizing for calling me a token. A healthy start.

During our discussion, though, it



Often, this is what coffee looks like to the those who are unhoused. It’s my job to ensure they’re safe. Photo: Nick Fewings / Unsplashed

became clear that we didn't see eye-to-eye — on anything. All we agreed on was that there's daylight outside and we're having coffee.

Still, we developed respect for each other. The person felt heard and I did, too. Our relationship can only help in future encounters because there will be more moments when confrontations have to become conversations for anything to get done. Trust me on that one.

Since then, I've used "Tell me more" several times and each time, it has managed to neutralize the situation so that both parties can speak as well as listen. This single, solitary skill of Moral Courage works.

As a certified Moral Courage Mentor, I'm glad to teaching a cornerstone of procedural justice to fellow law enforcers.

If you'd like to teach Moral Courage skills in your company, school, or organization, then become a certified Moral Courage Mentor. Learn more at moralcourage.com/programming.



