



The Scotland Standard

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Morale It's All About You

Individuals must take responsibility for their own interpersonal communications to improve morale in the emergency communications center.

By Suzanne Ladd

Emergency communications is a difficult field to work in. The very nature of the job calls for a higher level of oral communication and active listening skills in order to extract vital information under the most extreme circumstances. Public safety telecommunicators work and answer hundreds of 9-1-1 calls and respond to thou-

sands of radio transmissions daily. They must comprehend what has and has not been said, make quick and decisive decisions, provide lifesaving instructions to callers or send help to units in the field. For the most part, they do this seamlessly without error and attitude. Telecommunicators are experts at communicating ... with everyone but each other.

If you attend any APCO conference or work related training, or just listen to your co-workers, you will undoubtedly hear dispatchers, supervisors, managers, and directors say the same thing: "Morale is an issue." They identify the culture as the problem or they make a broad statement about the industry and how it usually pulls predominately Type A

Send the **right equipment**,
With the **right responders**,
To the **right place**,
At the **right time**,
And provide the
right instructions until the
responders arrive.

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



MELODY JONES

← Length of Employment: 4.5 years →

Meet Melody! Melody is the A Shift Supervisor. She came to our department in 2015 from the medical field. Melody recently earned her Associate's degree in Emergency Management and is also a member of our Tactical Dispatch Team. We are truly thankful to have Melody as part of Scotland County 911!

Total percentage of 911 calls answered within 10 seconds:

97%

BIRTHDAYS & WORK ANNIVERSARIES

- 08/05—Michael McQueen
- 08/07—Tricia McKnight
- 08/16—Nikala Locklear (2 years)
- 08/26—Kim Leviner (1 year)

personalities — which of course to them is the problem. What's amazing is that they — the telecommunicator, supervisor, manager, etc. — are talking about themselves!

As a manager, I've worked hard to address morale issues and culture dynamics, and it's not an easy thing to overhaul, but this is what I've learned. The people who are talking about it are usually part of the problem. When someone comes into my office and tells me that morale is low or gossip is running rampant, I immediately pay attention. It's more than likely that their morale is low. If that is the case, then their negative perception feeds into their own behavior and interactions with others, which creates the gossip, hurt feelings and overall poor morale.

It's a vicious circle and hard to pinpoint. There are many reasons to feel low and defeated in this line of work. One call, one fat finger mistake, one missed transmission, one conversation with a co-worker or supervisor, or one verbally abusive caller can take down all the good affirmations and intentions for the day.

Agencies spend a lot of time training and developing communication skills as it pertains to customer service. They often fail to promote the importance of interpersonal communications among co-workers. Telecommunicators can often be the hardest on themselves and each other, especially after they share a dim confined space for 8-12 hours. There is often no give for their coworker, no pass for the misspoken comment or the unintended mistake that put comments in the wrong call.

Most communications centers experience new hires who cry during training. It's almost an expected and accepted part of the process. Why is that? The crying usually happens because of the way a trainee is being treated and spoken to or, even worse, spoken about, on shift. The gossip escalates when the trainee has a bad day or bad call. Unfortunately, good people get lost, because they can't get past the culture that prevails within communications.

So, what do we do about it? Is it really possible to change the culture and morale in a communications center? Yes, of course it is! It's not rocket science. The people in these very centers do extraordinary things every day. They literally talk people down from a ledge. They are exceptional individuals. They are the chosen voice for those in need.

All that is needed is a little guidance and self-control. This is really where change begins. Telecommunicators need to give the same level of care to each other that they give to every caller. The change in culture and morale really begins with you. In fact, it starts and finishes with you. It's all about you!

Here are some good thought practices to establish. They take concerted effort but if applied can change your thoughts and personal morale:

1 Someone's bad behavior doesn't dictate your own. In other words, bite your tongue! No, not literally, but the adage, "if you don't have something nice to say, then don't say anything at all" applies here. More so, don't rise to the bait. Many

(This article is continued on page 7.)

Agencies spend a lot of time training and developing communication skills as it pertains to customer service. They often fail to promote the importance of interpersonal communications among co-workers.

Always remember that its your VOICE in the darkness that gives HOPE to those who really need it.

SOP Review: Social Media

This month's SOP Review will be SOP 2.1 (A) - Chain of Command.

Employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not performing their job duties as County employees. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their personal use of social media as they are for any other public conduct.

Employees should not publish any personal information about themselves, another employee, the organization, a citizen, or a customer in any public medium that:

- Has the potential effect of involving the employee, their coworkers, or the County in any kind of dispute or conflict with other employees or third parties.
- Negatively impacts their ability to perform their jobs, or violates and board policy, administrative procedures, local, state, or federal law.
- Interferes with the work of any employee.
- Creates a harassing, demeaning, or hostile working environment for any employee, or anyone associated with or doing business with the County.
- Harms the goodwill and reputation of the County among its citizens or in the community at large.

Employees shall refrain from personal social media use during business hours. Such used should be reserved for breaks, lunch or other

designated time when the employee is not operating within paid work hours.

Employees may not use County computers or devices to access their personal social media accounts.

Employees are expected to refrain from comments in support of, or opposition to, political campaigns, candidates, or election processes that could damage the integrity of County operations.

Photographs or other depictions of County buildings, vehicles, uniforms, emblems, or the County seal shall not be used on employee on personal social media.

Employees may be legally responsible for content they post and held personally liable for defaming others and/or revealing confidential information.

If an employee's personal social media presence shows an apparent connection to Scotland County, he or she is to make clear that the views expressed on the media platform do not represent the views of the County.

County email accounts or passwords should never be used in conjunction with personal social media sites.

Employees should never use their personal social media accounts to interact with County or County-related business contacts.

Please refer to our SOP manual for a full review of this policy.

Highest Answer Time Percentage

98.67%

**D SHIFT
Jonathan, Amanda, Larinda, &
Michael**

Highest Total Calls Answered

811

Larinda Robb

658

Jeremiah McLeod

Tech Talk with Shane

In writing this, I do not intend to insult anyone's intelligence. Sometimes we forget to look at the simple answers first. I am also guilty of this same habit of not looking at the simple things first. Example: This morning I was ask to look at speakers on a dispatch console. I unplugged and re-plugged the cable from the computer, restarted the computer, and ran troubleshooter on why the sound was not working. To make a long story short, the problem was the speaker wire under the desk was separated from the extension speaker wire.

With that being said, there are some simple troubleshooting things that you can do in the 911 center that will speed up the process of getting your computer back operational.

1. Look at your cables – does everything look connected
2. Is the power light on - if it is not, try turning the power on
3. Does the problem happen on other positions - if it happens on other positions as well, it could be something that is a back room problem. Knowing this will speed up the process of troubleshooting.
4. When in doubt RESTART - one of the simplest ways to resolve issues with equipment is to restart. This is not always the solution, but it is the first thing that you can do. Many times this is the solution.
5. Be sure to report - if you are having trouble with equipment make sure to report it. Even if you are able to have the equipment become operational again, please still send an email. If it is something that you had to correct, chances are that it will happen again. This allows us to know something is having a problem and if we need to replace an item because of constant problems.
6. Notify sooner rather than later – with earlier notification of problems, it may be something that can be corrected before it causes a center-wide outage. Also, it may be a problem that we are aware of, and can offer a simple solution. Early notification of problems is essential to keeping the center operational and simplifying your job.

Don't forget that as an employee of Scotland County Emergency Communications, your APCO membership dues are paid for. This means that you are a member of an international, well-recognized, professional 9-1-1 organization at no cost to you. I encourage you to take advantage of this membership by volunteering to serve on committees, attend free online training, receive discounted training, etc.



**North
Carolina
APCO**
Leaders in Public Safety Communications

BACK TO THE BASICS

AUGUST 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13 Public Safety Committee Meeting	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25 Supervisor's Retreat	26 Supervisor's Retreat	27 Supervisor's Retreat	28 Supervisor's Retreat 911 Board Mtg	29
30	31					

TRAINING:

August 9-22, 2020

Continuing Education (Online)
 Richmond Community College
 Protocol 3: Animal Bites/Attacks
 Mass Casualty Incident Preparedness Awareness for TC's

MEETINGS:

August 13, 2020 10am
 Public Safety Meeting

August 28, 2020 10am
 NC 911 Board Meeting

UPCOMING EVENTS:

August 25-28, 2020 9a-5p
 Annual Supervisor's Retreat

PUBLIC SAFETY STATS

The Public Safety Stats section is new to this month's issue of The Scotland Standard. This idea was derived from our friends at Iredell County.

- **LAW ENFORCEMENT**— includes calls for the Laurinburg Police Department, Wagram Police Department, and Scotland County Sheriff's Office.
- **EMS**— includes calls for Scotland County EMS and Braveheart.
- **OTHER**— includes calls for DSS, DOT, Utilities, County Animal Control, etc.
- **ADMINISTRATIVE CALLS**— includes non-emergency calls such as after-hour calls rolled over from various public safety agencies, alarms, responder calls for roster updates, to request times, copies of calls, etc.
- **DSS**— our Telecommunicators monitor the DSS radio channel for DSS employees that are in the field.

Note: The dispatch radio transmissions do not include the state 800 VIPER radio channels that are monitored by our Telecommunicators, or any of the 800 VIPER Events channels that may have been used for special operations during the month.

Total CFS for the Month

4,123

Response by Agency Type

Law Enforcement*	3,204
EMS*	630
Fire	72
Other*	195

Phone Calls

9-1-1 Calls	3,161
Administrative Calls	4,419
Total	7,580

Answer to Dispatch Time

(seconds)

Law Enforcement	99
EMS	78
Fire	118
Other	98

Dispatch Radio Transmissions

Law Enforcement	32,152
EMS	11,897
Fire/Rescue	3,692
DSS*	453
Total	48,194

Averages by Telecommunicator

Incidents	295
Phone Calls	541
Radio Transmissions	3,442

times, the person on the other side has no idea that they are upsetting you, or, if they are aware, acting as bad as they are will only feed into the negative reaction they are trying to get out of you and make you feel bad because of it. Just don't do it!

2 When you're not getting the result you want, look at what you're doing, and then you make the change. Often, we expect others to change their behavior or actions, because they are not doing what is expected and it's their fault, right? We blame the other person because they are not doing, saying or reacting the way we think they should or expect them to. Try changing your approach, tone or body language. It may not be what you're saying but how you are saying it. At the very least, what you are doing is not working, so re-evaluate your approach and make the change.

3 Know your audience. In other words, make sure you are speaking in a manner that is appropriate for your audience. The way we speak to each other depends on the relationship and knowledge base. We all get the idea of "Mom/Dad voice." We have either been subject to it growing up or used it as a parent. We know instinctively not to use it on anyone other than a child because it's not appropriate. When we speak to our superiors, we monitor our behavior and our words, because we want to make a good impression. The same applies when we are training someone, we don't assume they come in knowing the terminology and technology, so we adjust our training and techniques to their level of knowledge. Take care, and think about who you are speaking to before you speak.

4 You can't control anything outside of your own thoughts. This is important. The one thing that we have control over is our own thoughts. Let's face it, telecommunicators are taught to control the call(er) and the incident. This is an important skill and very necessary in this line of work. But this is where it ends. The truth is, we have very little control over our working environment or any environment for that matter. It changes on a dime. The way we speak to ourselves is very important for mental health and personal morale. If you are saying to yourself, "I hate my job, I hate this place or I hate working with this person," then you are most likely projecting those thoughts through words, deeds and actions. You're also allowing someone or something to control your thoughts and giving them your power. You are the only one who can stop and change the conversation in your own mind. It takes practice and conscious effort, but it can be done. It's the corner stone to mediation, which isn't about clearing your mind, it's about controlling your mind.

To recap, emergency communications is a hard field to work in. The people who answer the call for help are exceptional individuals. They deserve a lot more recognition regarding this occupation and its value to society. At the same time, they deserve to work in an environment that promotes good interpersonal practices. It's important for agencies to adapt interpersonal communication training in their curriculum and address morale from a completely different approach. It doesn't happen overnight, but that change starts with you. If you control your thoughts and change the conversation you are having with yourself, it will change everything, including your working environment. Remember, it starts and finishes with you!

Suzanne Ladd is a Senior Program Manager for Seminole County Fire/EMS Emergency Communications. This article came out of the March/April 2020 Public Safety Communications magazine.