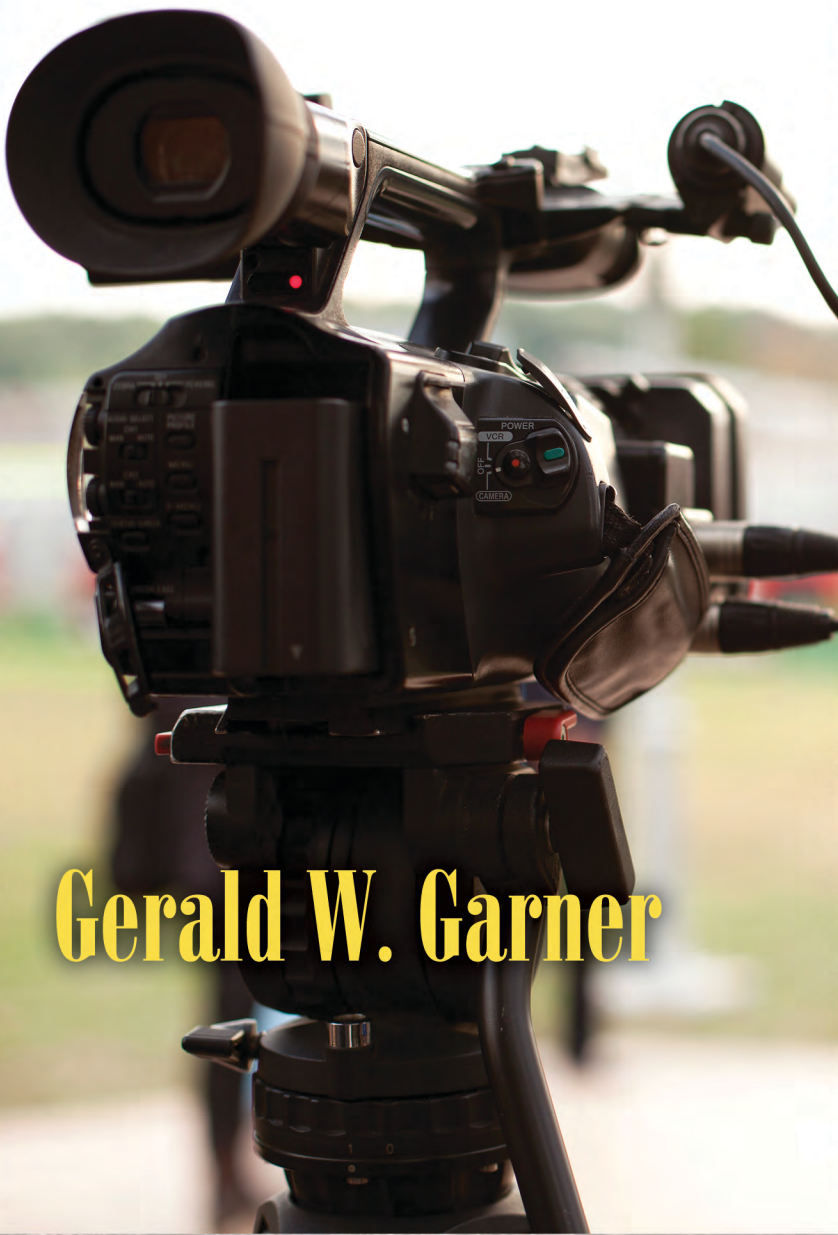
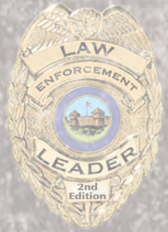


News Media Relations *for* **LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS** **2ND EDITION**



Gerald W. Garner



NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Second Edition

**NEWS MEDIA
RELATIONS FOR LAW
ENFORCEMENT LEADERS**

By

GERALD W. GARNER



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PREFACE

It is a fact that many veteran law enforcement officers who would not hesitate to enter a darkened building in search of a criminal are terribly afraid of facing a young man or woman armed with nothing more than a microphone or notepad. Fear and loathing of anything that smells even remotely of the news media is far too common among many law enforcement professionals. And that is a shame, as today's news organizations can aid law enforcement in a number of ways.

The law enforcement leader cannot afford the questionable luxury of avoiding the media. The wise and experienced leader has already determined that the news media can do a lot to help (or hurt) his organization. He is not interested in making things harder for himself, so he has elected instead to work with the press to benefit his organization while avoiding the media-related pitfalls that exist in plenty. He is aware that journalists and law enforcement leaders can help one another without surrendering the ability to keep a wary eye on each other.

The law enforcement leader who reads this book will learn a little about how today's journalist works. He will gain some knowledge of the peculiarities of the Internet, television, radio, and newspaper. More important, he will learn about what each of these media elements can do to help him distribute the facts and thoughts he wants put in front of a public that is always hungry for cop shop news. He likewise will learn how to give an interview or conduct a news conference that suits his needs as well as those of the media. He will learn how to write an effective news release, and he will become familiar with the personal rules for guiding an effective and ethical relationship with the members of the media. In short, the attentive reader will become a skilled user and consumer of the modern news media.

Neither this book nor any other can guarantee that the law enforcement leader's relations with the media will be eternally rosy. Bad news will happen and be reported from time to time. There almost certainly will be difficult moments with the press. The aim of this text is to keep those times to a minimum and speed the police leader's recovery from their effects.

Every law enforcement leader can enjoy a winning relationship with the news media. Every leader can help his organization and himself in the process. This is how it is done.

G.W.G.

INTRODUCTION

To one extent or another, dealing with the news media is a fact of life for every American law enforcement leader. Reporters and the news organizations they feed are not going away. Neither is the huge public audience for the stories, articles, broadcasts, and Internet pieces that they produce. It is to the advantage of the law enforcement professional to learn how to use the benefits offered by the media while minimizing the negatives originating with the press. That is the purpose of this book.

Authored by a veteran police leader with extensive media experience, the text steers clear of theory and the intangible and gets down to the practicalities of working with the news media. Armed with this handbook, today's police leader should find his or her frustrations and worries about the media reduced to manageable proportions. Ultimately, he or she may actually experience some pleasure and a real sense of accomplishment from a newfound ability to work with the press.

This book gets down to the practical quickly. Chapter 1 explores past troubled times but focuses on what cops and reporters have to offer each other. Chapter 2 defines news and breaks it down into its technical, component parts. Chapter 3 reveals the secrets for establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with reporters. It also discusses the absolute necessity for credibility on the part of the law enforcement leader.

Chapter 4 will assist the law enforcement leader in developing some sensible policies and procedures governing his agency's interactions with the news media. Chapter 5 emphasizes the importance of an effective Public Information Officer. The chapter also goes into the selection process and preparation for the key job of PIO.

The next four chapters explore several vital but very different elements of the media and how each may be used for maximum benefit for the law enforcement agency and its leaders. Chapter 6 looks at newspaper journalism. Chapter 7 covers the all-seeing eye called television and Chapter 8 sounds out radio for what it has to offer. Chapter 9 examines Internet news and investigates what the Net can provide the law enforcement leader laboring in twenty-first century America.

Law enforcement leaders can learn how to give a winning interview that suits their needs as much as the interviewer's in Chapter 10. Meanwhile, Chapter 11 will help them produce news releases that actually get used by the media. Chapter 12 teaches the art of leading a successful news conference, while Chapter 13 uncovers the tricks used by the occasional unscrupulous journalist. The chapter also provides sound advice for overcoming these tactics.

Chapter 14 helps the reader prepare for dealing with the special media challenges to be found at the scene of a major crime, disaster, or other high-profile incident. Chapter 15 instructs the reader on the responses required to recover from an episode of bad news. Chapter 16 shows the law enforcement practitioner how to bring to the public all of the good news that the agency generates. The importance of human interest stories and creativity is emphasized. Finally, Chapter 17 looks at a new phenomenon of the twenty-first century: so-called: "fake news."

The text is conveniently packaged for the reader in a hurry by concluding each chapter with a quick summary via a list of vital points to remember. It finishes with a glossary of terms often encountered in the ever-changing news business.

NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS should be read and reread in its entirety for the depth of understanding and media skills it can impart. It also can be brought out as a "how to" manual or troubleshooting guide anytime a particularly challenging media situation arises. The wise law enforcement leader will keep it close at hand and share it freely with his or her subordinates.

That said it is time to begin an examination of what the media has to offer law enforcement. The alert reader should discover that it amounts to a great deal indeed.

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NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS

Chapter 1

COPS AND THE MEDIA NEED EACH OTHER

Finally, after years of fussing and fighting, thoughtful leaders in both law enforcement and journalism have figured it out. They need each other. Intelligent, progressive police leaders recognize bickering with the news media for what it is: wasted time and effort. They see the tangible benefits to be gained from working more closely with the media. For their part, smart bosses of the news industry have figured out that they can work alongside law enforcement without surrendering their role as watchdog on government.

In an era in which both the public and the private sectors must secure more “bang for the buck,” cops and journalists alike can ill afford the wasted energy involved in pointless battles. Both sides will still fight the fights that ethics demand must be fought. Now, however, the goals must be worth the dispute. For example, the people’s right to know what is essential for the public safety is still inviolate; law enforcement’s need to protect an ongoing investigation must be respected.

It is both possible and logical that by working together or at least coexisting in relative peace the journalist and the law enforcement officer can sometimes make one another’s work easier. Each can help the other succeed at his job. In this way each can better serve the people who “pay the freight” for lawman and reporter alike: the citizens of the community.

There is absolutely nothing inherent in the journalist’s tasks or the peace officer’s duties that decrees the two disciplines must clash or otherwise work at cross purposes. The truth is that the law enforcers and the newshounds share some of the same concerns: a desire to help others, serve the public good, and protect the weak and disenfranchised. Conflict between the two fields of endeavor is simply counterproductive, not to mention unnecessary.

At the same time, it is not too hard to understand why traces of mutual distrust and bad feelings remain here and there. Much of it can be traced back to times past when real and perceived misbehavior on both sides resulted in ill feelings. These times might even be referred to as . . .

THE BAD OLD DAYS

“I made the chief of police mad at me,” said the ex-reporter. “And so he threw me down a flight of stairs.” The reporter was the late Ben Bradlee, later to become Washington Bureau Chief for Newsweek and the celebrated Executive Editor of the *Washington Post*. Bradlee was referring to a long-ago day when a rookie reporter’s story angered a New England police chief who retaliated with violence in response to the novice’s reporting. What had Bradlee reported to light the chief’s fire? “I told the truth,” Bradlee recalls. “The police were using a woman as a decoy to catch a rapist. The cops screwed up and she got raped.”

Even in the old days few police–reporter conflicts resulted in physical assault. Still, enough bad feelings existed to fuel decades of mistrust and ill will. Some of the feelings were, no doubt, based on actual misconduct by one side or the other. On other occasions, simple misunderstandings resulted in horror stories that were told and retold for years, the offenses perhaps growing with each telling. In such an atmosphere it is hardly surprising that cops and reporters often did not get along.

At times accurate, more often exaggerated, the complaints from each side depict legions of ignorant, brutal cops and hordes of lying, bleeding heart reporters, or so it would appear. Those gripes from the news gatherers included (and, to a lesser extent, still sometimes include) the following:

1. **Law enforcement is obsessed with secrecy.** Blame it on paranoia, a desire to cover their tails, cynicism, actual dishonesty, or whatever, it is almost impossible to pry information out of law enforcement types. Some cops foolishly insist on pointless secrecy even when releasing the facts would be beneficial to themselves.

2. **They flat out lie.** What else can you call it when they tell us that they have no leads and then we find out they already have the perp in custody? What is it when Smilin' Jack the Public Information Officer tells us they are going to transport the suspect at 9 AM, and they do it at midnight to avoid our cameras?
3. **They stick together and conceal their own misdeeds.** Cops are clannish to a fault. They think that no one can understand them but other cops. They will stop at nothing to protect the guilty within their own ranks. They see everyone else, particularly journalists, as the enemy.
4. **Cops are arrogant and exaggerate their own importance.** They are highly egotistical and are immediately defensive when questioned. They obviously believe that if it were not for them the world would be overrun by barbarians. They think that they are better than we are and it shows.
5. **They oversimplify issues.** Officers see everything as black or white with no shades of gray in between. They see everyone, particularly reporters, as either for or against them. They refuse to acknowledge that a journalist is just as obliged to report on a corrupt cop as to do a story on a drug dealer.

Of course, law enforcement leaders have at times been just as quick to condemn the actions of the news media. Cops, too, are not immune from including some untruths and exaggerations on their laundry list of media offenses:

1. **Reporters always believe the crook over the cop.** Left-wing news people have a built-in need to blame the police. If the local thug claims the cops roughed him up, what he has to say will get more media attention than will the accurate information provided by law enforcement. The police are always in the wrong.
2. **They destroy crime scenes and create a circus atmosphere.** It is hard to say whose DNA is on the scene now that these guys have showed up and run around. They get in the way and draw a crowd of rubbernecks who want to get their picture on TV. They have no appreciation for what we are trying to get done under difficult circumstances and just make a mess.
3. **They demand attention just when we are the busiest.** Reporters are arrogant and have an exaggerated sense of self-

importance. (Sound familiar?) They cannot wait until we have gotten our work done, instead demanding that we respond to them immediately. Their egotism knows no bounds, and the TV media types are the worst.

4. **They only report part of the story.** They only report what fits their own, preconceived agendas. They are willing to report that the bad guy was injured in the arrest. They fail to report that he attacked the cops and started the fight. You could drive a truck through the holes they leave in the story.
5. **They screw up what you said and quote you out of context.** Reporters cannot get it right if you write it down for them. By the way they edit your words, they can have you saying anything they want, even if it is not what you intended.

Certainly, some of the old ill feelings are based on exaggerations and simple misunderstandings at least as much as upon actual misconduct. Still, it is not hard to see why the old complaints exist. Some of the factors involved include biases, stereotyping, and personality clashes. Other problems have arisen when one side or the other has possessed incomplete or outright erroneous information. Still other difficulties can be traced to poor communication, including a failure to listen.

The inescapable fact remains that poor relations between law enforcement agencies and the people who report on their activities are just plain bad for business for all concerned. When conflict is the order of the day, the news people either do not get the true story or only get part of it. Law enforcement in turn fails to get the public's help with a case or credit for the good work done by its people. In the end, the public loses the most by not getting the best from either their public servants or their news media. In such a state of affairs everybody loses.

The good news is that the leaders in both fields more and more today are realizing that some of the past issues have arisen because cops and journalists are probably a lot more alike than either group is willing to admit. Realizing that kinship is the first step toward establishing a relationship in which cooperation and collaboration replace mistrust and hostility. Working well together means acknowledging . . .

WHAT COPS AND REPORTERS SHARE

The reality remains that cops and newshounds are probably more alike than they are different. The same qualities that chiefs and sheriffs want to see in their employees, editors and news directors often want to see in their people as well. Both professions, it would appear, frequently hire people with the same interests and internal drives.

Both professions tend to hire ambitious, strong-willed, opinionated young people. They then train them up in a culture in which the members see themselves as parts of powerful, traditional institutions with a huge role to play in protecting the country and defending the weak. These institutions are often highly structured. Both, for instance, assign some of their employees to cover beats. Both institutions are highly sensitive to criticism from the outside and feel they are not well-understood or loved by outsiders. As a result, the members of each often turn inward to their peers for support and may figuratively pile up the sandbags for protection anytime they feel they are under attack.

The leaders and members of the press and law enforcement sometimes can be secretive about their means of gathering information. They defend their turf and are not particularly welcoming to probing examination by outsiders. They see themselves as very important to the public good but prefer that they be allowed to determine by themselves what is good for that public.

Police and media employees “raised” in such an environment perhaps unavoidably display traits that are more similar than different from one another. Cops and reporters alike often have big egos and are unlikely to be dissuaded from a given course of action by opposition. Both claim a strong sense of justice and a desire to protect the innocent. Both feel overcriticized and underappreciated by the general public. Both are willing to fight back when they feel themselves under assault.

Cops and reporters each have important jobs to do in today’s America. Each knows it and is more than willing to say so to anyone who might be willing to listen. Each is a force to be reckoned with. Each has something the other wants and needs. Those important things will be examined next.

THE MEDIA HAVE THE ACCESS

Every police organization has good news about its operations and people that the smart police leader wants placed in front of the public. To get that information out there, the leader needs the assistance of the news media. The law enforcement agency has the information, but the news gathering organizations largely control the access to the means of spreading the word: the print and electronic media. There are a number of very tangible things a cooperative news media can do for the police leader:

The media can trumpet the good work that the agency's people are doing. Ready access to the media means that the public can be made aware of the good work done by law enforcement. A police press officer who has a good working relationship with the local media outlets can alert reporters to stories of good arrests made and positive law enforcement programs launched. Without the ready assistance of the media, much less of this good news will get out. A smart law enforcement leader will take advantage of every good news moment by sharing it with reporters. There will always be those "negative" moments. Using the media wisely when the news is "positive" will help offset the other side of the news.

The media can help educate and inform the public. Law enforcement has long known that a well-informed public can serve as an excellent partner in crime prevention. Cooperative reporters can help the police organization spread crime prevention advice and enlist the aid of thousands of eyes in looking for a wanted vehicle, crook, or crime pattern. One well-placed informational release can accomplish the same thing that might require hundreds or even thousands of man-hours by individual officers. The media can greatly magnify the effectiveness and efficiency of the police public information effort.

The media can focus the spotlight on deserving law enforcement personnel. Every law enforcement agency has legitimate heroes who have done great things. Cops almost routinely save people from burning houses and selflessly give of themselves to others in a hundred different programs and practices. Without the help of the media few beyond those in attendance at the department's annual awards program would ever hear about these heroes. The news organs can help bring favorable attention to those richly deserving it while making the entire law enforcement organization look good.