

The Justice Academy Journal

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The Polite Ignore

I am often amazed at how things have changed for the better since I began my career in law enforcement nearly forty years ago. I see advances in technology that make a difference in assuring that the right person was arrested for the crime, some progress in criminal procedure and the courts which further the interests of justice, along with progress in standards that endeavor to assure the objective of making certain that our departments are comprised of professional officers that serve the best interests of the community.

We can all cite positive advances that we have witnessed over the years and I suspect that we can all point to progressive changes made in our chosen profession that benefit our occupation, but there is one thing that stands out to me as a new development, which is not at all positive, and yet it is readily embraced by a significant number of people who do so without thinking through the consequences it brings to their door. What I am referring to is “the polite ignore” approach used by so many in this profession nowadays in dealing with correspondence they receive from their colleagues and constituents.

JusticeAcademy.org

The Justice Academy serves as a national repository and portal for instructional programs and specialized training materials that are produced by law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the courts and makes these educational assets available to the general law enforcement community, at no charge.

JusticeAcademy.org also sponsors comprehensive research into a variety of issues relative to the law and justice professions, as well as authoring and advancing national strategic initiatives that deal with specific challenges. The intention of this service is to support professional development, personal advancement, and departmental competency of the law and justice community, as well as to serve as a mechanism for the proliferation of exemplary training resources nationwide.

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I am not at all certain how this phenomenon came into being, because it simply wasn't tolerated or viewed as an acceptable professional practice in years past, but it has become a rather common approach in the world we live in today in dealing with correspondence. I suspect that it has a lot to do with the evolution of the Internet, contemporary social media protocols that were mostly developed by children, combined with the deluge of correspondence that we all receive in our daily lives.

Many of us are just simply overwhelmed by the flood of correspondence that we receive each day through the mail and online, as a result of the multiple email accounts we create for ourselves.

Additionally, none of us want to be perceived in a negative light by those we serve and we certainly have no intention of alienating our colleagues within the profession, and yet by ignoring their correspondence, so that we don't have to openly admit that we are not interested in their overture, that is exactly the outcome we bring upon ourselves.

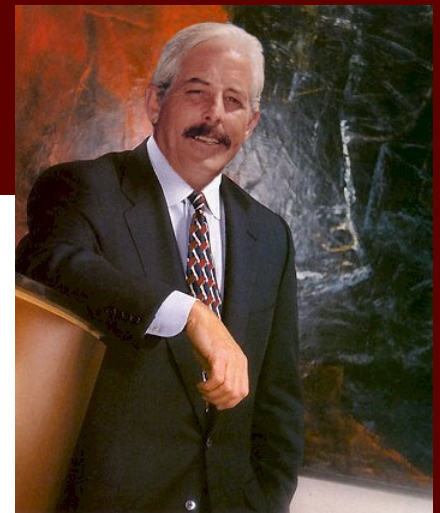
Whatever happened to candor, being forthright, and honesty in our dealings with one another? Expressions like "honesty is the best policy" have apparently become trite these days or gone by the wayside and been replaced with the polite ignore, so we don't have to say what we really think, or be perceived by others as not caring about those things they find meaningful. In place of an honest answer we simply

elect to pretend that we didn't receive their correspondence, or worse, that their message wasn't worthy of a reply.

The consequence of this polite ignore approach is just the opposite of what we intended however, and as a result, people perceive us in an extremely unfavorable light, as they should. It turns that employing such an approach as the polite ignore to dealing with correspondence can be symptomatic of a greater problem as reflected by our consistent disregard to deal with those issues that we encounter, which may not be at the top of our list of importance at that moment, but which do fall within our purview as leaders of the department and which invariably come back around to bite us or bring discredit upon us and the department we temporarily represent.

I can recall, in the old days, that Sheriff Pitchess would take great pains to make sure that each and every individual that sent him a piece of correspondence was answered in a return letter. It may not have come from him, but he made sure that someone in the department was paying attention. Many times, the answer to their request was a polite decline and sometimes it was even an overt response of no, but he never ignored them. That would have been unprofessional in his eyes.

About the Author:



Judge Hal Campbell, Ph.D.
Executive Director
JusticeAcademy.org
2010—2016

Hal Campbell currently serves as the Executive Director of JusticeAcademy.org. He also serves as a member of the teaching faculty for the University of Maryland concentrating in the areas of public policy strategy, criminal law, constitutional law, justice administration, empirical analyses, and higher education.

Judge Campbell recently concluded a term of service as a member of the judiciary in the State of Montana. His appointment to the bench was bestowed by the Montana Supreme Court, Commission on Courts of Limited Jurisdiction. Prior to this appointment to the bench, he served for over twenty-five years as a tenured professor and department chair with the California State University. His public policy and law enforcement experience includes a variety of senior management positions with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. From 1978 to 1989 he held positions in the department including Law Enforcement Planning Coordinator, Chief Analyst, and began his career as a Deputy Sheriff.

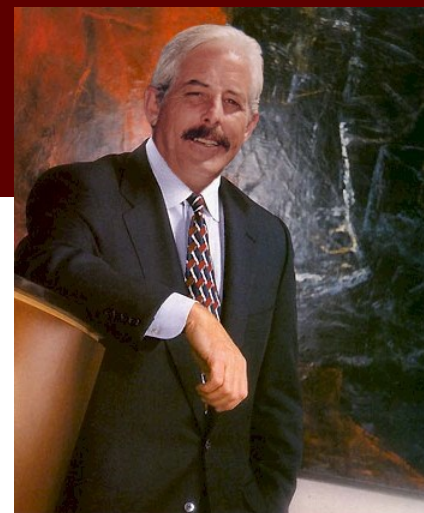
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Ignoring someone by failing to respond to their correspondence, or thinking that we have somehow become so self-important in our lofty position of power or that we are so busy that we no longer have the time to exercise common courtesy or professional business acumen, is worse than simply declining an invitation to participate or honestly saying that we have no interest in supporting the cause being presented in the correspondence that crossed our desk.

As a result, people rightly think of us in a very negative fashion as being a flake, too self-important, self-absorbed, or even incompetent, and they recognize correctly that we can't be counted for an honest answer and that we have no interest in serving the common cause, unless of course it furthers our own personal interests and aspirations.

My how times have changed!

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The Accrediting Commission for Law and Justice Education

Director: Rick Walker, Ph.D.

Email: leader@aclje.org

URL: www.aclje.org

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Judge Hal Campbell, Ph.D.

Email: director@justiceacademy.org

URL: www.justiceacademy.org

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Executive Director
Accrediting Commission for Law and
Justice Education

Judge Hal Campbell, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The Justice Academy