

Managing Law Enforcement Stress Through Emotional Intelligence

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By **Mark Bond**, professor of criminal justice at [American Military University](#)

Law enforcement emotional intelligence is defined as the ability of the officer to manage and use his/her emotions in a positive and constructive way, and to manage healthy relationships within the department and within other supporting agencies in the criminal justice system (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011).

Officers who have a functionally high emotional intelligence level have higher satisfaction rates and better career success within their departments (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011). Workers who have the ability to build healthy workplace relationships have reported lower stress levels at work and healthier off-duty activities that bring balance to their lives (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011).



The main reason behind the higher job satisfaction is the officer's ability to build relationships within the department. Higher levels of emotional intelligence means they often have a positive approach to conflict resolution with others (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011). Dr. Zafrul Allam (2011) noted emotional intelligence as having five distinct qualities:

1. **Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize one's own emotions as they are occurring to help guide your decision-making
2. **Self-Management:** The ability to control and manage your emotions in the moment and adopt to rapidly changing circumstances
3. **Self-Motivation:** The ability to harness ones emotions and use this energy to achieve goals
4. **Social-Awareness:** The ability to recognize emotions in others and being attuned to the signals of others and what they might want or need. The ability to have empathy and compassion
5. **Relationship-Management:** The ability to inspire, influence, connect, and contribute to healthy conflict resolution through the groups emotions

10 Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

Here are 10 benefits of emotional intelligence within the law enforcement work place (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011):

1. Better work and department attitudes and behaviors that lead to improved self-

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- confidence and better job performance (*less citizen complaints*)
2. Ability to focus on real issues and not department politics (*stays out of departmental gossip circles*)
 3. Better performance within a team environment (*active listening*)
 4. Ability to understand others' viewpoints (*empathy*)
 5. Positive influence on others and encourages teamwork (*general good attitude avoids being a negative influence when unhappy*)
 6. Leads by example (*on time, prepared for work*)
 7. Stays calm and effectively problem solves (*does not overact or allow bad decision to be made out of emotions*)
 8. Understands the bigger picture and is proactive with communications (*supports department's initiatives and is a positive role model*)
 9. Optimistic attitude that helps reduce stress levels (*sees the good in things*)
 10. Works towards removing communication barriers that affect morale

Five Tips to Reducing Law Enforcement Job Stress

Officers can reduce job stress by recognizing pitfalls and breaking bad habits that can form from working in a fast-changing, and dangerous environment (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011). Officers cannot always control the stressful situations they find themselves in, however, officers *can* decide how they will react to a stressful event (Allam, 2011; Dumbrava, 2011). Here are some ways to reduce your job stress:

1. **Resist perfectionism:** Recognize that we all make mistakes, we are continually learning and none of us are perfect. However, it is also important to take ownership when a mistake occurs
2. **Lead by example:** Come to work prepared and have a command presence
3. **Stop the *Stinking Thinking*:** Resist being negative and staying negative. It leads to poor job performance, complacency, and career burnout
4. **Control:** Do not stress about the things you cannot control, but instead focus on what you can control. Stay positive!
5. **Set goals:** Get in the driver seat of your law enforcement career. Do the things that are required to make yourself promotable, and be proactive in your own career decisions

About the Author: [Mark Bond](#) has worked in law enforcement and has been a firearms trainer for more than 29 years. His law enforcement experience includes the military, local, state, and federal levels as a police officer and criminal investigator. Mark obtained a BS and MS in Criminal Justice, and M.Ed in Educational Leadership with Summa Cum Laude Honors. As a lifelong learner, he is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in education with a concentration in distance education. Mark is currently an assistant professor of criminal justice at [American Military University](#) & [American Public University](#) and is one of the faculty directors in the School of Public Service & Health. You can contact him at [MBond\(at\)apus.edu](mailto:MBond(at)apus.edu).

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