

ABOUT BEING A COP

One of my favorite authors, Stephen R. Covey, states, “The actions of any police officer in an instant can impact an individual for life and even a community for generations. Given this reality, every police officer must be centered on what is most important, at all times. Service, justice, and fundamental fairness must come far before selfish considerations. These are the foundational principles in which every police action must be grounded.”

A public servant must, under all circumstances, keep the interest of the public first and self-interest last. A police officer must be a noble character who runs toward trouble and horrible circumstances even while others are running away. Each police officer is a community servant who is held to a higher standard of conduct and commitment to service. I loved every day as a cop and would not ever want to do anything else. For thirty years, I woke up each morning (or evening, if my work took me to the night shift) and looked forward to going to work. Not one single day did I ever wake up and say, “I hate this job.” This is not to say that some shifts were more arduous than others or that on some days it was just plain physically exhausting to get out of bed, usually because just a couple of hours had passed since my head hit the pillow. But honestly, it never felt like a chore to go to work. My mom always told me, “Son, if you love your job, you will never work a day in your life, but if you hate your job, you will work every day.”

Captain Sullenberger was the US Airways pilot who safely landed his crippled jet loaded with 155 persons in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. In his book, *Highest Duty*, Captain Sullenberger describes being very fortunate to have found his life’s passion at the age of five. From that tender age, Sully knew he had the desire to fly airplanes. Like Captain Sullenberger (and I only compare myself to this true American hero because it relates to finding your passion), I found my life’s compulsion, satisfaction, and passion was to serve as a police officer. For me, the ability and the responsibility to serve others makes police work one of the noblest professions in America.

The students in my leadership classes are fellow law enforcement professionals, from the ranks of officer through chief. I commend them most for attending the classes and really thinking about their own development as leaders. I often ask these students, “If you had a choice and could choose someone to help you learn, would you rather have a brilliant, world-renowned speaker who is just there to make money, or someone with a deep passion and commitment, who really wants to see you learn?” Without question, students will choose the teacher who is passionate about the subject and the students’ success. To put it another way, if you found yourself on a plane headed for a crash landing in the Hudson River,

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who would you want to be flying the plane? The guy who is just filling in and says, “I hated this job anyway,” or the guy who says, “I have a passion for flying and would not want to be anywhere else”? For most, I think the answer is obvious.

Serving as a leader of police officers allowed me to gauge progress on a daily or sometimes even an hourly basis. I found it very fulfilling. In many ways, it reminded me of cutting grass: it is very easy to look behind you and see where you have been, where the grass and maybe even some weeds were are now freshly cut and looks neat and new. Your work as a leader can make sweet, fragrant order out of chaos. If you remain aware of your surroundings, you can see the results of your work, and it is satisfying in a very tangible way. Very few jobs offer this almost instantaneous feedback. We have the ability to make a genuine difference. We help wounded victims get to medical treatment, we ensure that battered women and children find solace, and we even help criminals to get access to justice every day and night that we work. As a leader, we should help each of our employees find that special strength within them to do the best job possible and serve their community with nobility.