

## Back 2 Basics: Proactive Mindset = Proactive Career Growth

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Having spent more than 20 years in and around law enforcement, I often find myself bombarded with career questions from students as well as aspiring and current law enforcement officers. Many questions boil down to this: “How do I make more money and/or get promoted?”

There are plenty of career opportunities available to police officers, even if some of them are not easily recognizable or they seem impossible to attain. Trust me, not only are they possible but they are often more attainable than you think.

You must seize the opportunities that come your way and position yourself to take advantage of the next ones around the corner. After all, officers are supposed to be vigilant individuals! My most common recommendations for career growth fall into three categories: Specialty Education, A&A Training, and Proactive Engagement.

### 1. EDUCATION

Today more than ever before, officers are entering the field with college degrees. The right type of credential can be key to getting that raise and/or promotion, but remember that there are options besides a college degree. While a degree is certainly important and valuable, many higher education institutions are now offering specialized credentials aimed at helping public safety professionals advance their career.

For example, Tri-County Technical College in Pendleton, SC offers an entirely online certificate. Their [Criminal Justice Leadership and Management certification program](#) is designed to position criminal justice employees (not just police officers) for entry-level supervisory positions in their respective areas of the industry. Already a supervisor but thinking about that command staff position? American Military University offers their [Executive Law Enforcement Leadership Certificate](#).

Both of these credentials incorporate aspects of law and human resources, management principles, theories of liability, and other areas specific to one’s ability to perform a specific job or aspect of that job. You should see if your agency will pay for these types of credentials and if your employer will recognize them in the review process for a pay increase and/or promotion.

### 2. A&A TRAINING

No, this is not Alcoholics Anonymous training! A&A training is otherwise known as ANY and ALL training. All officers must undergo certain amounts of training each year, but you shouldn’t be content with completing just the bare minimum. Yes, some agencies are slim on training opportunities and questionable on how they determine who gets training opportunities. If this describes your agency, you may need to reflect on what that is doing to your career aspirations as well as your overall ability to be safe, professional, and competent in the performance of your duties. In the immediacy, seek grants and scholarships for training or, if possible, consider paying for the training yourself and look at it as an investment in your career.

If you are fortunate enough to work for an agency that provides opportunities and encourages training, then take advantage! Why should an employer pay you more or give you more responsibility when you have done nothing to improve your abilities? Go to all the trainings you can, even if the subject is not something you are initially interested in. Aim to become the “go to” officer for a particular skill set. Training is education and education is tantamount to being competent, professional, and staying alive.

### 3. PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

There are two categories of proactive engagement: policing style and public interaction. Being proactive in your policing style essentially means that you take charge, are dependable, and get the job done. As long as you remain within your agency's policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), you should aim to perfect your "follow-up" game.

For example, you can still be proactive even if you are a rookie officer taking a report about a stolen lawn mower. Talk to neighbors, collect photos or serial numbers if possible, and check out the local pawn shops. Rather than simply taking the report, you may end up solving the case—and that will get you noticed.

As for proactive public interaction, consider how much you talk to your community members. What types of interactions do you typically have time for? Do you do things that leave a positive impression about your profession? All of these are questions to ask yourself and be honest about answering. Take time to let the kid waving at you at the gas station look inside your car, turn on the lights, and get a sticker! You have not only made that child's day, but you could have just changed someone's impression of you, your department, and your overall profession.

An officer who shows initiative, shoulders more responsibility, seeks new ways to grow as a professional, and is proactive on the job is unstoppable. This type of employee is not only worthy of a raise or promotion, but is often the employee everyone watches, admires, and wants to work with.

Taking these steps and proactively preparing yourself for any and all opportunities that may come your way could pay off in the long run with enhanced career growth. Good luck!



**About the Author:** Professor Christopher McFarlin is a seasoned law enforcement professional with more than 20 years of experience in the criminal justice system in various positions. He is a senior contributing author for *In Public Safety* and a Criminal Justice Professor at *American Military University*.

He has a double M.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice as well as his Juris Doctorate degree. He is a recognized law enforcement expert, specializing in LEO training. His articles are routinely featured on *PoliceOne* and other industry publications. Chris also serves as a reserve law enforcement officer in South Carolina. Feel free to contact him at (864) 646-1327 or [christopher.mcfarlin73@mycampus.apus.edu](mailto:christopher.mcfarlin73@mycampus.apus.edu).

Welcome to this installment of **Back 2 Basics (B2B)**! [This series](#) provides law enforcement officers with quality, practical, and trustworthy information. Whether in your first or 25th year of law enforcement, training is always necessary. B2B provides quick refreshers, written by industry experts, on a variety of fundamental issues in law enforcement. The views expressed in these articles are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect agency-specific law or policy. Agencies should consult their local rules of procedure and/or case law for specific guidance.

All comments, suggestions, or questions regarding B2B can be directed to the Editor of *In Public Safety* at [IPSauthor@apus.edu](mailto:IPSauthor@apus.edu).

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