

Police Agencies and Relaxed Grooming Codes: Why We Should Make the Change

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Author Note

Lieutenant Branch has been a law enforcement officer for 17 years. He began his career in 2001 as a detention center officer with the Poinsett County Sheriff's Department. That same year he took a similar position with the Craighead County Sheriff's Department. He served a dual role as an elected constable for two terms for the Little River Township while employed with the Sheriff's Department. Lieutenant Branch was a member of the Marked Tree Fire Department and served on the Poinsett County Search and Rescue Team. In his career in law enforcement he has performed the roles of a detention center housing officer, booking officer, control room officer, dispatcher, patrol officer, student patrol coordinator, investigator, and patrol sergeant. Currently, he is assigned the role of 2<sup>nd</sup> shift lieutenant with the Arkansas State University Police Department.

### Abstract

This paper will show that there is a need to change the grooming standards that many law enforcement departments use today that have been in place for over 100 years. There are two areas that this paper will focus on which are the allowing of law enforcement officers to grow facial hair and allowing acceptable tattoos to be displayed. The paper will speak to how it is believed that law enforcement adapted the strict policies and why it is time to make some changes. This paper will show that in today's world of allowing people more freedom to express themselves and judging them based off of their performance, law enforcement agencies could make the changes without upsetting the people that they police daily. The paper will also show that many law enforcement agencies have already made the change on the simple grounds of trying to recruit new officers.

## Police Agencies and Relaxed Grooming Codes:

### Why We Should Make the Change

The vast majority of law enforcement agencies have been practicing under a standard grooming policy that restrict facial hair to above the lip and no visible tattoos since the early 1900s. The last president to wear facial hair was William Howard Taft who held office from 1909 to 1913. Since that time, most law enforcement agencies have prohibited officers from growing beards and goatees. (Robert Weisskopf, 2018) wrote: “The US military had much to do with that. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, our military enforced a no beard standard in all but the Navy. The idea was a common facial grooming standard improved morale as well as helped maintain good hygiene.

Today, you’ll see more military with beards but only when they are serving in an area where it would be uncommon for a man not to have a beard.” Most all law enforcement agencies adopted this policy at that time which was considered the standard of professional. Fast forward to over 100 years later, most departments still have this same policy in place. I attribute this to a saying that I have heard over and over again in my 17 years in law enforcement, “Police hate change”. We are creatures of habit in the sense that we hate changing something that has worked for years without any problems. I for one see many benefits of change. Take for example the use of the revolver or as what most law enforcement officers call a “wheel gun”. Many of the officers that I looked up to at the start of my career either still carried a wheel gun or at least talked about the time when they used to carry one. I never once heard any of those officers talk about how they were excited the day that they were told to stop carrying their wheel gun and to start carrying a semi-automatic pistol. They never talked about the benefit of have 15 to 17 bullets versus of 6 to 9; instead, they only talked about how well they enjoyed carrying their

revolvers and how much they hated being forced, or at the least, strongly encouraged to make the switch.



### **Beards and other facial hair.**

An article written by (PoliceOne Staff, 2017) The Lubbock Texas Police department changed its policy to allow all officers to have “Well-groomed Beards”. The policy change was made on January 13, 2017. The article quotes Assistant Chief Neal Barron in saying “The response was almost immediate, right after the policy came out, you saw a lot of officers starting on a beard, and a lot of them have kept their beards, some have shaved,”. “And [the bearded officers] look good, they're neatly trimmed, I think they look sharp.” The article continues to say that “Barron told the publication he believes it will make officers more approachable and hopes it encourages people to apply to the department.”

Just down the road from Lubbock sits a small town called Dallas. The Dallas Police Department changed their grooming policy the same year. According to an article written by

(Alex Macon, 2017), which read that the Dallas Police Chief Renee Hall quietly instated an interim policy that read “All officers are advised General Order # 804.02 (a) 8 & 9 related to grooming standards, specifically facial hair/beards, for uniformed members shall be immediately relaxed. A groomed and maintained mustache, goatee or beard is authorized. Beards must be worn with a mustache. Facial hair must not be longer than a quarter (1/4) inch in length. No portion of the beard may be exceptionally longer than the rest.” The article also states “Hall has also approved the use of outer vest carriers, which in the Dallas summer provide a cooler alternative to the closer-to-the-chest wear. Another request Hall said she has heard from officers, which has not yet been turned into policy, is that they be allowed to wear baseball caps.”

My department went to the outer vest carriers last year, and I can say that it improved mine and others morale. The article ends with something that I find to be extremely important, “It’s not better pay or a guarantee of rewarding work, but it’s something.” I am always looking how to improve morale even on a shift level. The cost to allow officers to grow well-groomed goatees and beards is ZERO dollars to the department but the rewards could be a higher retention rate, better morale and better recruiting.

Lots of departments have started to allow officers to sport beards and goatees in the month of November as part of No-Shave November. Most department encourage that the officers donate a small amount of money which is then send to a local or a national non-profit organization. According to the website (No-Shave November, 2018) which is the official site for the no-shave november movement, it states the goal of No-Shave November is to grow awareness by embracing our hair, which many cancer patients lose, and letting it grow wild and free. Donate the money you typically spend on shaving and grooming to educate about cancer prevention, save lives, and aid those fighting the battle. The site states that they work with the

following organizations in support to help battle cancer. The Prevent Cancer Foundation which is one of the nation's leading voluntary health organizations, and the only U.S. nonprofit organization focused solely on cancer prevention and early detection. Next is Fight Colorectal Cancer (Fight CRC), where their mission statement is, "we find it unacceptable that the #2 cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. comes from a preventable disease. We want to see victory over colon and rectal cancers!" The third organization is one of the most well know organizations in the fight to save children with cancer, St Jude. The mission of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is to advance cures, and means of prevention, for pediatric catastrophic diseases through research and treatment. Consistent with the vision of our founder Danny Thomas, no child is denied treatment based on race, religion, or a family's ability to pay. I say all that about the No-Shave November site so that I can proudly point out that as of October 28, 2018, there are seven law enforcement agencies on the top 10 leaderboard for this site for total money raised <https://no-shave.org/leaderboard>. The Denver Sheriff Department is currently at number 1 with a total of \$3,065.00 donated so far. My point is that law enforcement departments across the country could run this program year-round. Allow officers to donate to a fund inside the department, then at the end of the month the department sends it to the non-profit organization. If the leadership in the department sees fit, publish it in a press release so the community sees that the department is doing something good. Once it becomes common knowledge, the community will be constantly reminded of it when they encounter their officers. Hell, even post stickers on the patrol units.



I believe that more law enforcement

departments should look at it as a public relations boost by showing that the officers are giving back to the community by donating to help fight a disease that has affected everyone in one form or another.

Moving a little closer to home, changes are in place in our state's capitol. A news report by (Winnie Wright, 2018) it explains that the Little Rock Police Department is looking to change their policy on facial hair as part of their recruitment and retaining problems with-in the agency. According to the article the department starting offering hiring bonus to new officers, which in my opinion is a fast way to kill morale with the officers that have been there with three or more years, but I will save that for my next paper, and they modified its disqualifications standards to help retain more qualified recruits. The article states "they announced another possible change, this one regarding personal appearance." "We are constantly competing with other departments for new recruits," said LRPD Officer, Steve Moore. After a long and highly publicized process, Little Rock police are now fully staffed; However, keeping it that way is difficult. Officer Moore says the PD has several retirements coming up, prompting them to consider some changes when it comes to personal appearance. "When I started, there was no way you would consider anybody having facial hair in uniform as a police officer, but it's a different time," he said. "I've seen other agencies that have facial hair and they still look professional. That will just be the key, is having somebody monitor the officers that do that to make sure that facial hair is within policy. We will have to come up with a policy that defines how long your hair will be, how long the facial hair will be, things of that nature, and you'll have to make sure that's enforced. "If you want a goatee, you want a beard and that other department has that, that may be the thing that sends you over the edge to go there as opposed to coming to Little Rock. It's something we've got to consider. As times change, people change, and does what people think is professional and

what's not," Officer Moore said finally. LRPD is going to test the looser facial hair requirements during no-shave November, for cancer awareness." I along with other officers are trying to get our department to allow us to participate in No-Shave November in hopes that it can become a new standard at our department. I strongly agree with (Jonathan R. Adcox, 2018) when he wrote "As beards are becoming more and more popular, alongside with men becoming more cultured to the meticulous detail involved with manicured grooming standards, the corporate workforce is become less antagonistic to the idea of facial hair. Additionally, as gender-roles have become increasingly dissolved, it has become increasingly more important for masculine men to self-identify as men. Furthermore, the corporate workforce is becoming increasingly tolerant of beards due to societies ever-growing fear of prejudicial gender bias. Ultimately, whether you agree with beards in the workforce or not, beards are here to stay." I just hope that the ideas of the corporate workforce bleeds over into law enforcement.

### **Tattoos.**

The topic of tattoos can be tricky. That is because it boils down to a matter of personal option as it relates to what is offensive. I personally do not have any tattoos, but the thought has crossed my mind more than once over the last several years. This might maybe because they are not as taboo as they seemed to be when I was a child. The members of United States Military have a long reputation of being one of the largest groups of people in the United States that have a tattoo.

According to an article posted on the website for the (Veterans of Foreign Wars, 2016) "In 2009, the Army reported that some 90% of combat soldiers had at least one tattoo a much higher percentage than the one in five people in the general population with a tattoo. Themes typically included pride in service, patriotism, unit identification and memorials." Growing up in



the early 90s, I associated tattoos with sailors. Popeye The Sailor Man, which was a cartoon in my day of a spinach eating sailor with a boat anchor tattoos on each of his forearms. Today tattoos are as common as jewelry such as wedding bands or earrings.

In 2014, the Army decided it was time to tighten up its grooming policies which included tattoos. An article by (David Vergun, 2014) he reports that the new policy would read as “Tattoos cannot be located anywhere on the neck or head above the lines of a T-shirt. They also cannot be located anywhere below the wrist bone. Visible band tattoos cannot be longer than



two inches wide. There can be no more than one visible band tattoo. Sleeve tattoos on arms or legs are not allowed. Each visible tattoo below the elbow or knee must be smaller than the size of the wearer's extended hand. There

cannot be more than four total tattoos below the elbows or knees. Soldiers who currently violate these revisions can be grandfathered in as long as commanders validate their current tattoos.

Also, each year, commanders must check each Soldier for new tattoos that might be prohibited.

The checks will be done when Soldiers are in their physical fitness uniform and do not include tattoos that might be hidden by the shorts or T-shirts. Prohibited tattoos include those just

mentioned, as well as ones that could be deemed extremist, indecent, sexist or racist.” Needless

to say, that this did not set well with our nation's armed service members. And why should it?

Why do we still judge a person by their appearance? It seems to me that there is more value in a person's actions, demeanor, and overall personality than if they have a tattoo.

It did not take long, about one year later, the Army realized the mistake and made another change to the policy. In a report written on the website (Army Times, 2015), Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey listened to those under his command about how much this policy

change was causing hate and dissonant. Daily shared his concerns with Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno. After reviewing the change on April 1, 2015, Odierno said "Society is changing its view of tattoos, and we have to change along with that," and "It makes sense. Soldiers have grown up in an era when tattoos are much more acceptable and we have to change along with that." It varies from source to source, 19 % to 33%, as to how many former military members have become law enforcement officers but, with those officers comes a good chance that they will have tattoos. As stated above, it is estimated that close to 90% of them have tattoos. Does this make them a bad officer in the eyes of the people they police? Should those officers be punished into wearing long-sleeved shirts in 100-degree weather when the humidity is at 70 or 80%? The answer is a big NO. The photo below is of a tattoo that Zach Ferguson has on one of his arms.

In an article by (Ken MacLeod, 2015), it describes Mr. Ferguson as a 36-year-old who served eight years in the military which included tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Ferguson has the tattoo pictured above on his right forearm and another on his left forearm that reads



“Freedom.” According to the article Mr. Ferguson wanted to become a police officer in Manchester, New Hampshire in 2015; However, the article states “Just 18 months ago, the Manchester Police Department went to a stricter tattoo policy. It says new

officers can't have any visible tattoos when they wear short-sleeves or shorts period. Frustrated that her husband's pride in his military service now disqualifies him from wearing a blue

uniform, Annie Kelly wrote a letter to the Union Leader newspaper a few months back which was then transformed into an op-ed piece.” “I just thought it was kind of unfair,” says Kelly. “My husband spent many years as an active combat soldier in combat zones,” she wrote in the paper. “Who would be a better candidate for the police academy? Tattoos in the military are not only common, but almost a rite of passage. Our soldiers are proud of their service and want to show what they have done and where they have been. And why shouldn’t they be? Without them, none of us would be able to lead the lives that we do.”

The article says that the newspaper article caught the eye of incoming Police Chief Nick Willard. I believe that once again appearance over skill set wrote a policy that did not better the department in any way. “Military service is the number one qualifier I look for in a potential police officer,” says Chief Willard. “Even more so than a college degree.” So Chief Willard reversed course, allowing applicants with visible tattoos to enter the police pipeline subject to review of their body art to make sure it isn’t racist, gang-related, or, otherwise, offensive. “I believe it’s a good change,” says Ferguson. “Not everyone who has tattoos is a bad person. But that’s what the policy made me feel like kind of.” On a side note three years later on August 28, 2018 the Senate unanimously confirmed Chief Willard as U.S. Marshal for the state of New Hampshire. Sounds like this guy might have a good handle on what he is doing to me.

Posted on the Fox News website, a report by the (Associated Press, 2017) stated that “many departments say it's tougher to attract candidates to a physically demanding job that offers low pay and is under increasingly intense public scrutiny. That has led many to make a nod to shifting fashion trends, particularly among millennials, and ease longstanding bans on beards and visible tattoos.” "Modern practice is colliding with dress codes," said Will Aitchison, an attorney who represents police unions during labor-related disputes. "And what police departments really

should be focused on is how the officer performs his or her job, as opposed to how they look." In Kansas, state police did a public survey on whether officers should be allowed to have tattoos to help determine whether to change their policy after they couldn't fill about 100 trooper jobs. Half of the nearly 20,000 respondents had tattoos themselves. Sixty-nine percent said the department shouldn't have a policy prohibiting visible tattoos. "We were surprised by the response," said Lt. Adam Winters. "It just doesn't seem to bother people." "Still, the department's prohibition on visible tattoos has stayed in place, in part because of the potential challenge of regulating the content of tattoos that might be offensive."

There are lots of great people in this world that have done great things in spite of have tattoos. Thomas Edison the genius of invention has one a quincunx: a geometric design consisting of five spaced dots, located on his forearm. Yet he helped create the modern world as we know it. Winston Churchill who was most well-known for being the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during 1940-1945 and 1951-1955. He was once an officer of the British army, a writer, artist, historian, and a Nobel Prize winner for literature. He proudly displayed a tattoo of an anchor on his forearm. Theodore Roosevelt the twenty-sixth President of the United States, wore a tattoo of the Roosevelt's family crest across his upper torso in all black ink. The design was mostly floral in its pattern, was large and blazoned across his chest as a coat of arms. There are many others in history that have done great things and yet their tattoos did not seem to hinder them.

Believe it or not, there are a lot of people with tattoos that are changing our world right now. (John Stanton, 2017) wrote in an article "There's Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), who's had numerous sessions with tattoo artists. Hunter, like Jackson, has most of two half-sleeves complete. A Marine, he says he started getting tattooed at the beginning of each deployment, a

practice he's carried on with his brother. "Every deployment I'd gotten a tat, so when he deployed, I got my last one," Hunter said, noting that his wife who has had her own work done has encouraged him to get more, including one on his forearm." He adds "Rep. Mary Bono Mack (R-Calif.) the only known female member of the caucus went to a tattoo shop shortly after the 9/11 attacks to get "a tattoo of a cross, which is a reflection of her strong faith," spokesman Ken Johnson said. Rep. Dan Boren (D-Okla.) has a Kappa Sigma tattoo in honor of his fraternity." There are likely many others that keep their tattoos hidden, most likely because there is someone in their ear saying that displaying tattoos is unprofessional.

In a report posted on Forbes website, according to (Rachel Hennessey, 2013) "As consulting firm CEO John Challenger explained, most employers today would agree that a person's appearance is nowhere near as important as his or her professional skills. "Even in this tight job market, most companies aren't going to view tattoos too harshly. Companies have a vested interest in hiring the most qualified candidate." According to Bank of America BAC Spokeswoman Ferris Morrison, the company has no restrictions when it comes to inked corporate employees. "We have no formal policy about tattoos because we value our differences and recognize that diversity and inclusion are good for our business and make our company stronger," she said. This attitude is not uncommon in contemporary corporate environments. Having large, colorful and highly visible lilac tattoos inked across her upper chest didn't stop Courtney Pecola from landing a job as vice president of Philadelphia's ZB Sports, a sporting goods retailer, in 2004. "If I'd passed on her because of her tattoos, I'd be out one phenomenal employee," Pecola's hirer commented."

**Conclusion.**

In today's world it is hard to find younger people, or even older people that want to become law enforcement officers. The pay is low, the hours are sometimes long and crazy at times, the expectations are extremely high yet you are judged for any mistake that you make. We will exclude lots of people that are more than qualified, and likely to make great officers, if we continue to discourage them by saying "shave it off and cover it up."

The website (Lybio.net, 2016) translated Paul Harvey's recording that says it best as to what makes a police officer, "A Policeman is a composite of what all men are, mingling of a saint and sinner, dust and deity. Gulled statistics wave the fan over the stinkers, underscore instances of dishonesty and brutality because they are "new". What they really mean is that they are exceptional, unusual, not commonplace. Buried under the frost is the fact: Less than one-half of one percent of policemen misfit the uniform. That's a better average than you'd find among clergy! What is a policeman made of? He, of all men, is once the most needed and the most unwanted. He's a strangely nameless creature who is "sir" to his face and "fuzz" to his back. He must be such a diplomat that he can settle differences between individuals so that each will think

he won. But...If the policeman is neat, he's conceited; if he's careless, he's a bum. If he's pleasant, he's flirting; if not, he's a grouch. He must make an instant decision which would require months for a lawyer to make. But...If he hurries, he's careless; if he's deliberate, he's lazy. He must be first to an accident and infallible with his diagnosis. He must be able to start breathing, stop bleeding, tie splints and, above all, be sure the victim goes home without a limp. Or expect to be sued. The police officer must know every gun, draw on the run, and hit where it doesn't hurt. He must be able to whip two men twice his size and half his age without damaging his uniform and without being "brutal". If you hit him, he's a coward. If he hits you, he's a bully. A policeman must know everything-and not tell. He must know where all the sin is and not partake. A policeman must, from a single strand of hair, be able to describe the crime, the weapon and the criminal- and tell you where the criminal is hiding. But...If he catches the criminal, he's lucky; if he doesn't, he's a dunce. If he gets promoted, he has political pull; if he doesn't, he's a dullard. The policeman must chase a bum lead to a dead-end, stake out ten nights to tag one witness who saw it happen-but refused to remember. The policeman must be a minister, a social worker, a diplomat, a tough guy and a gentleman. And, of course, he'd have to be genius.... For he will have to feed a family on a policeman's salary.”

So, I ask, how do we recruit people knowing that this old narration still stands true of what most still think, and some a lot worse, of a law enforcement officer? I do not have all the answers but I believe that one step would be to minor not the military as we did 100 years ago, but the rest of the world. Other careers are open to facial hair and tattoos because it is not about looks it is about the person. I fear that nothing will change until those in charge of writing policies, really began to listen to the officers on the ground.

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