



by Stephanie Conn

## Taking off the mental armour

*Hi honey! I'm home! Now leave me alone. I need to veg out in front of the television.*

Does this sound familiar? If so, you're not alone.

Police often times need some "quiet time" to decompress and transition back to their personal life following a long shift. A commute from work can sometimes offer the time and space needed to unwind and transition, but a commute through stressful traffic is unlikely to offer the chance to disconnect from the police officer role.

Reminding yourself that you have left work and are going home where you are a "father, mother, wife, husband, pet-parent, sister, etc." and not a "police officer" can help you make the transition. I used to keep a picture of my husband on my visor and would call my nephew to remind me that I was a wife and aunt, not a police officer on my drive home.

In a study I conducted on police officers coping with secondary traumatic stress, one reported that he took time each day at the end of his shift to decompress. He spent some time alone to give himself the space to slow down from a day of go-go-go! He was then able to talk with his fiancée about his day without feeling the pressure of the hurried pace. Initially, it was

hard for her to understand why he wanted to be alone when they had been apart most of the day. Once she understood that he was just taking the time he needed for himself first and for them next, she didn't take his behaviour personally.

Personal time to decompress takes many forms. It might include passive activities such as watching television or playing video games or more active activities such as playing sports or going for a run. It isn't always easy to find this time due to obligations at home but it is possible with some creative family planning and open communications.

Taking off your mental armor requires that you:

1. Openly communicate this need to your loved ones so they do not misinterpret your behaviour as a lack of interest in them, and
2. Use a routine that works for you (active/passive, indoor/outdoor, alone/with others, etc.).

One pitfall can be assuming that others know, or should know, what you need. This is very problematic thinking, as you are the only one who really knows this and it is your responsibility to share it. In order to do this, you must be aware of what you need to let work stay at work. Instead of quiet time alone perhaps it

would be helpful for you to take a few minutes to vent your frustrations to a loved one. If that's the case, do it! Just let them know what you need from them and make sure they are willing and able to give it to you. Oh, and be prepared to return the favour down the road.

What if you don't feel you can talk to your friends or loved ones about your work?

Police see some pretty horrific stuff and sharing the details of these events can traumatize others, making them more concerned for your safety and well-being at work. I encourage you to tell them that you had a rough day and responded to some horrific calls, but that you do not want to discuss the call itself. I hope you talked to co-workers, supervisors and/or peer support about the event while you were at work, or at least plan to very soon. This is another instance where talking to a third-party such as a mental health professional is a good idea as you can unload the details of the day without fear of traumatizing a loved one.

Even if you don't have a family waiting at home for you, it is still important to leave your work at work. I would still urge you to do what works for you to transition to your personal life. If you are single it may be harder for you to maintain balance between your work and personal life because you may not be held accountable by a spouse or child to maintain other roles. You can monitor your own habits and sign up for non-police activities that help you stay well-rounded.

Regardless of your family situation, you can shed the mental armour that accompanies your police role and return to your home as your non-police self.

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### POLICE FOUNDATIONS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

In times of limited resources, conflicting demands and rapid cultural and technological change, public and private organizations need leaders with increased vision and skills to guide them in the achievement of their goals. To help you, a leader of today and the future, meet these growing demands, Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Humber), the University of Guelph-Humber and the University of Guelph have partnered to offer educational pathways that include tailored, streamlined programming at the diploma, undergraduate and graduate levels.

#### Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

Humber's role in this partnership is to provide a high quality, relevant leadership enhancement program (LEC) (i.e., Police Foundations Leadership diploma) geared to you as a civilian or uniformed member in a front-line operations, supervisory, mid-management or executive-management position. Humber is prepared to assist you, a justice professional, in attaining your goal of higher education by offering a high affinity diploma in Police Foundations Leadership which is delivered by high-calibre faculty. We offer a practical program with quality content to today's justice professional looking for advancement and fulfillment. You will have the opportunity to apply theory in real-life work situations.

#### Admissions Requirements

If you are a **uniformed member** of a police/justice agency, a member of the Canadian Armed Forces Military Police, or employed in private security, you must meet the following criteria to be eligible to receive credit for 23 out of the 30 courses required for the Police Foundations Leadership diploma:

- minimum of three years' experience
- have completed the Ontario Police College (OPC) training or equivalent, such as the Regular Force MP QL3 course or MPOC
- have worked to gain community experience

If you are a **civilian member** of a police/justice agency, you will be eligible to receive credit for 20 out of the 30 courses required for the Police Foundations Leadership diploma if you meet the following criteria:

- minimum of three years' experience
- have worked to gain community experience

The remaining seven courses for both uniformed and civilian members are scheduled in a flexible study format. That is, over three months in an accelerated hybrid delivery format combining intensive weekends in class (i.e., two or three Saturday/Sunday sessions) followed by two or three weeks of online education. Civilians will be required to complete three additional courses that are offered in May each year.

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