

Book Review

Book

Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement A Guide for Officers and Their Families

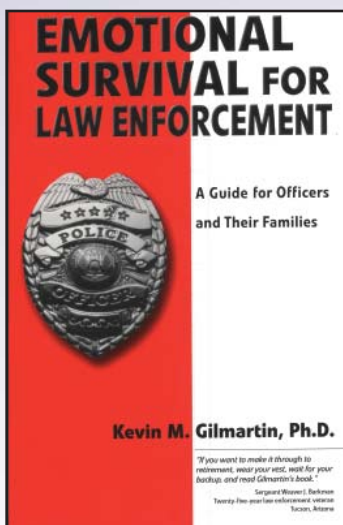
by Kevin M. Gilmartin, Ph.D.

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Reviewed by

Richard Hanzes

Department of Criminal Justice Training



Well written and easily read, Kevin Gilmartin's book, "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement," is an excellent work designed to encourage officers to take charge of their lives in order to physically and emotionally survive a career in law enforcement.

Although in many ways officers are winning the battle of street survival, they appear to be losing the battle of emotional survival. Law enforcement agencies and police academies throughout the United States do a great job of teaching officers to survive tactically by teaching and training in the mechanics of police service.

However, little if any emphasis is placed on teaching officers how to avoid the other dangers they will ultimately face.

The book was written to help law enforcement officers overcome the internal assaults they will experience both personally and organizationally. These assaults can transform idealistic and committed officers into angry, cynical individuals leading to significant problems in both their personal and professional lives. Many officers, in fact, do survive emotionally and remain fully functional healthy individuals after 20 or 30 years of police work. "It is not good enough to hire good people, organizations and individuals must do what they can to – keep good people good."

Gilmartin describes the journey through law enforcement and how the idealistic rookie can develop into the cynical veteran, and how emotional changes lead to physical changes. He uses personal experiences and stories to relate the topics in a way that officers can readily see some of the same characteristics in themselves. He explores the psychological changes in law enforcement personnel that can be caused by exposure to tragic, negative and violent events.

He goes on to describe the term hypervigilance as, "the necessary manner of viewing the world from a threat-based perspective, having the mindset to see events unfolding as potentially hazardous." Hypervigilance permits the on-duty officer to develop a subjective state of increased alertness/awareness of his/her surroundings required for maximum officer safety.

Concerns develop when the ride on the Hypervigilance Biological Rollercoaster begins. On-duty the officer is "alert, alive, energetic, quick-thinking, involved and humorous," while off-duty the officer is "tired, isolated, detached, apathetic and angry."

If law enforcement officers are to survive emotionally, they must look at both their on-duty and off-duty life styles and take charge of the events in their lives that they can control. Gilmartin identifies three things that officers control while on duty: their integrity, their professionalism, and how well they do the job assigned. In order to become an emotional survivor, proactive goal setting, exercise, and developing and nurturing other roles in life besides the hypervigilant police role should enable officers to manage their lifestyle more effectively.

Reading this book will help officers and their families to complete the difficult journey through a career in law enforcement with their relationships, families and positive professional attitude intact, and will aid in keeping good people good.