



## **Why This is the Time to RAISE Standards for Physical Fitness in Law Enforcement**

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When I entered law enforcement as a deputy in 1980, I had just completed three years as a scholarship athlete, playing Division One basketball for Western Carolina University. I was in the best shape of my life. But within a few years of police work, I had put on a significant amount of weight, and I would struggle with poor physical fitness for much of my 32-year career.

So, when I speak about the importance of physical fitness for the men and women of law enforcement, I do not speak as the model of fitness without empathy for physical fitness struggles. Rather, I speak as someone who can attest, based on my own personal experience, to the challenges associated with a poor diet, lack of physical exercise, and the poor physical fitness that follows.

I was blessed to have an amazing 32-year career in this profession that I love, and I am proud of my service as a deputy, officer, and chief of police. But in retrospect, I know, without a doubt, that I would have benefited immensely from prioritizing my physical health, both professionally and personally. As a retired chief who now travels the country as a training consultant, my much-improved state of physical fitness has been vital to my ability to maintain my busy pace at the

age of 67 years old. I wish I had been in this kind of physical shape during all my years on the job.

It is from this perspective that I am so troubled to see law enforcement agencies across the country lowering physical fitness standards or even eliminating them all together, knowing what we do about the impact of law enforcement work on the physical and mental well-being of officers. Law enforcement leaders should be doing just the opposite of the current trend—instead of lowering standards, they should be raising standards for physical fitness and incentivizing cops to stay in shape throughout their careers.

Let me be clear, this is not a time to target and punish honorable, competent and hard-working officers in the profession today who are not as physically fit as they should be—or would like to be. But it is precisely the time for leaders to stop ignoring what is painfully obvious: physical health allows our officers to be more effective on the clock and improves their quality of life off the clock.

I am very open to the idea that sit-ups, push-ups, and other traditional metrics of fitness may not measure the exact types of physical abilities required in a law enforcement career. I don't recall having to do pushups or sit-ups while working the street. But I do recall having to scale backyard fences and wrestle suspects into a pair of handcuffs. I do recall having to run up flights of stairs and help carry arrestees. Perhaps we need to replace the older models of physical fitness testing with newer, scenario-based measurements of fitness, or tests that better represent the reality of what is required on the job. What we cannot do is simply lower standards or eliminate tests altogether.

If someone had told me at the beginning of my law enforcement career in 1980 that I was required to maintain a specific physical fitness standard to keep my job as a cop, I would have undoubtedly prioritized fitness. I cannot accept the notion that we do not have men and women entering the profession today who share that same level of commitment. The vast majority of officers avoid certain behaviors, people, or places that might put their careers and pensions at risk. I am certain that if maintaining a reasonable fitness standard was also a requirement, they would do that too.

Throughout their careers, in every reasonable way, we should be incentivizing and assisting our officers to maintain physical fitness. Doing so will allow them to thrive as professionals, spouses, and parents. It will cut down on work-related injuries and disability claims. While there has been a much-needed increase in the willingness on the part of police leaders to make mental health resources available to officers in an effort to maintain emotional well-being, there is no question that mental health and physical health are often related. So why, then, would so many law enforcement leaders allow physical fitness standards to drop while, at the same time, recognizing that officers' mental health is an area in which improvement is desperately needed?

I cannot think of a better New Year's resolution for law enforcement leaders in 2025 than to start moving toward (1) enhancing the physical fitness requirements for new hires, and (2) instituting initiatives to encourage the great men and women of law enforcement who we have already hired to become and stay physically healthy throughout this noble but challenging career.

### **About the Author**

Harry P. Dolan is a 32-year police veteran who served as a Chief of Police since 1987. As one of the nation's most experienced police chiefs, he brings 25 years of public safety executive experience to Dolan Consulting Group. He retired in October 2012 as Chief of Police of the Raleigh (N.C.) Police Department, an agency comprised of nearly 900 employees in America's 42nd largest city.

Chief Dolan began his law enforcement career in 1980 as a deputy sheriff in Asheville, North Carolina and served there until early 1982, when he joined the Raleigh Police Department, where he served as a patrol officer. In 1987, he was appointed Chief of Police for the N.C. Department of Human Resources Police Department, located in Black Mountain. He served as Chief of Police in Lumberton, N.C. from 1992 until 1998, when he became Chief of Police of the Grand Rapids, Michigan Police Department. He served in that capacity for nearly ten years before

becoming Chief of the Raleigh Police Department in September 2007. As Chief, he raised the bar at every organization and left each in a better position to both achieve and sustain success.

Harry Dolan has lectured throughout the United States and has trained thousands of public safety professionals in the fields of Leadership & Management, Communications Skills, and Community Policing. Past participants have consistently described Chief Dolan's presentations as career changing, characterized by his sense of humor and unique ability to maintain participants' interest throughout his training sessions. Chief Dolan's demonstrated ability to connect with his clientele and deliver insightful instruction all with uncompromising principles will be of tremendous value in the private sector.

Chief Dolan's passion to achieve service-excellence is a driving force behind Dolan Consulting Group. He is a graduate of Western Carolina University and holds a Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership and Management from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

His training courses include [Verbal De-escalation Training: Surviving Verbal Conflict®](#), [Verbal De-escalation Train The Trainer Program: Surviving Verbal Conflict®](#), [Community Policing Training](#), [Taking the Lead: Courageous Leadership for Today's Public Safety](#), and [Street Sergeant®: Evidence-Based First-Line Supervision Training](#).