



# But first, **PLEASE** take a Selfie

By **MATTHEW DROGE**  
Riley County (KS) Police

A picture is worth a thousand words and its worth in regard to police legitimacy is priceless.

My name is Mat Droge and I am a public speaker, an advocate for social media's use in law enforcement, and I have been dubbed the original #TwitterCop for my online presence when speaking on behalf of my agency (@RileyCountyPD).

The history of the "selfie" is extremely short as with the history of most concepts in social media. This I imagine is the reason its importance isn't yet widely valued in law enforcement (which has a history of being behind the times and slow to change).

According to Huffington Post ([link](#)), the selfie originated and evolved from the "MySpace Pic," which was propagated by the influx in popularity of the, then, newly released [Facebook.com](#) in 2009. Social media exploded at this point and now, in 2016, we find services like Instagram, Snap Chat and a whole slew of online platforms that encourage the use of the front-facing camera, which has become standard on mobile devices since the release of the iPhone 4.

The concept is simple, all you have to do is take a picture of yourself or let others take a picture of you for that matter). For the purpose of this article I broadly use the term "selfie" to reference any sort of photo that is taken of you for the purpose of use on social media).

So why aren't police officers posing for more pictures? I have three theories.



**MATTHEW DROGE**  
aka #TwitterCop



## 1. They are afraid they'll be made fun of.

Yes, you read correctly. I firmly believe that many officers refuse to put themselves out-there because they are fearful that they'll be made fun of. I assure you, if someone is going to make fun of you they absolutely don't need you to pose for a picture.

I was once called the most photographed cop in the nation at a speaking engagement on community relations and to this day I have yet to find a Photoshopped image of me (please, don't take that as an invitation). A way to combat this fear is by being the first to make fun of yourself (when appropriate).

When I began using Twitter on the department's behalf, there was a competing parody account, which, at the time, was extremely popular and, let's be honest, at times it was hilarious. We had community members and news organizations following the wrong account and I decided that something needed to be done. Ultimately, through our tone on social media and through showing the public that we don't take ourselves too seriously that parody account has since gone dormant.

## 2. They fail to see its importance.

At times, I feel that some of my co-workers think what I do is a joke. They see what I want them to see (after all, no one wants to read tweets or see pictures of me doing my quarterly community engagement reports) and their perception is that my job isn't more than having a good time at community events and tweeting about donuts and cattle out on the highway. This is where I jokingly mention that some of my PIO friends have more serious things to discuss sometimes.

Most of these comments are made out of ignorance that social media and the selfie are both important to law



enforcement. They are a small way in which a department can make a big impression.

Several months ago, while I was out of the office, a group of college students came to the department as part of a social media scavenger hunt with the goal of getting a photo with a police officer. I was shocked at how long it ended up taking to find someone in uniform to walk out to our lobby and help them.

All I ask is that when refusing to take a photo with someone you place yourself in their shoes and consider the feeling of rejection you

may be causing (you are creating a negative experience with one of your community members). Also, please don't have a debate about which officer will be in the photo right in front of the person requesting (this is the "last picked in dodgeball" feeling and it doesn't reflect well on you or your agency).

I've taken tons of selfies that, honestly, at the time I wasn't really into, but it's about the overall department image when you are in uniform or in a position that represents your agency and it's not hard to suck it up and smile. A simple

picture spread through social media can have a huge positive impact on your department and it can help strengthen the relationship your department has with your community.

## 3. They think that public relations is someone else's job

This couldn't be further from the truth. An agency that really has a great relationship with their community didn't get there by the work of one



person, though one person can be the driving force and help push the department toward the end-goal. If the entire department doesn't jump on board the agency's message can't be consistent and consistency is a great way to bolster community support and most importantly, trust.

I was once researching ways in which we could create a better customer experience in our speaking engagement program and taken aback by comments a sergeant made to me when I asked why we were cancelling events and not telling anyone. "If we cancel a speaking engagement it's not my job to inform them, public relations is your job," in so many words was possibly the most eye-opening comment I've heard in my time as a PIO.

Community relations is an agency endeavor and if there isn't complete buy-in from the top down you have just become that agency that says one thing and does another. Public relations is everyone's job, because the PIO can't be expected to handle every interaction an agency has.

So how does a selfie relate to police legitimacy?

For an agency to be successful they need to have the support of their community. To get this they need to be viewed as legitimate authorities and not overbearing outsiders. It is important for the community to "like" the department as a way to maintain the support the department already



has or to begin mending a relationship that through years of separation has crumbled.

A selfie is a way to show a somewhat large group of people that a department is willing to interact with their community in a positive way. It shows that the agency is part of the community and that their officers are approachable. It doesn't cost anything and it takes literally seconds to do. Most importantly, it doesn't hurt to be nice and accommodate a request that takes such little effort on the officer's part.

I mentioned that I was once called the most photographed cop in the nation and whether that is true or not I feel

now is a good time to offer some tips to help officers take better selfies.

- Smile. Everyone can see you're a cop, you don't need to look like they do on TV. You're a human, act like one. Have fun, they are asking to take a picture with you because they like you.

- Do a mental checklist. To take a better picture, make sure the camera is held at a level above your nose and remember to slightly lean forward. Roll your shoulders back, stand up straight, and have fun with it. Don't like the way you look in a selfie that you've taken? Try using a filter to mask blemishes.

- Get your good side. Don't pretend that you have no idea what I'm talking about. I've found that this is also a good

way to make a bigger impression on the subjects in the photo. "Make sure to get my good side" is a great way to get a smile and make the photo a little more memorable.

- Maintain integrity. It's OK to say no when a selfie could be deemed inappropriate. For example, I do not take selfies with people who are holding alcohol or cigarettes. I also do not allow people to wear my handcuffs or unholster any of the tools on my belt. If requested to pose in a fashion that you or your department is not comfortable with, offer an alternative or explain why you are declining that particular request.

So go ahead, when the moment arises jump in, make a "duck face" and show your community that you're human. Your selfie could be worth a thousand words of support for your agency and it's a great way to make your day a little more fun.

Selfies are a simple way that officers can show their community that they are approachable, fun, part of the community and deserving of support. They should be embraced and for goodness sake, when someone goes out of their way to show that they value you enough to want your picture, say cheese. •

*Riley County (KS) Police Department Public Information Officer Matthew Droge, aka The #TwitterCop, has served as a sworn officer since October 2010 and as PIO since early 2013.*

## Las Vegas Police launch 'The LVMPD Chronicles'



By SGT. JEFF CLARK  
Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Dept.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department recently launched a new Web series, with officers telling their funny, crazy, touching and unique stories to the public. So far, it has been very well received and people are letting us know how much they like it.

In the playlist you'll find the intro and two

stories ... one of which is in English and Spanish.

We are extremely excited to launch this and carry it into the future. I wanted to share it with NIOA and the members.

To view it, [click here](#). •