

When thinking about the top characteristics of a police officer, words like brave and heroic may come to mind. Police officers, after all, are the source of safety for the general public. They are the professionals who respond to local threats and emergencies. They help to keep criminals off the streets, and work to protect citizens and their communities from harm. This job is not easy, and there are many capabilities – beyond strength and bravery – that officers must possess to be great at what they do.

Most police officers today are passionate about serving their communities and have the necessary training to carry out their jobs. They have honed skills in emergency response, decision-making, public communication, ethics, and empathy. However, there is no denying that issues still exist within the police force. Recent events have shed light on “bad cops” versus “good cops,” and the dire changes that need to take place within the criminal justice system. Perhaps that is why you are here – to become a police officer and to become an example for your community.

This begs the question, “What are the qualities of a good police officer?” Which skills and qualifications should an officer have, to be successful and respectable in their roles?

Today, it’s not enough to want to become a cop. You must develop the various qualities of a police officer to meet the demands of the job. Just what are these must-have police officer qualifications? Check out this guide as we break down what it takes to land a career as a police officer today.

Police Officer Qualities and Skills

Police officers work in a mentally, physically, and emotionally-demanding field. Some of the most important qualities that a police officer must possess include:

Physical fitness

Critical thinking

Sound judgement

Problem-solving skills

Communication skills

Interpersonal skills

Strong moral character

Sense of ethics

Compassion, empathy, and respect for others

Devotion to community

Strong initiative and perseverance

Ability to negotiate and rationalize

Even temper and composure in stressful situations

Patience and tolerance

Mental and physical agility

Teamwork

Knowledge of the law

What are the Most Valued Qualities of a Police Officer?

The above list holds the most important qualities of a police officer. If you strive to become an officer of the law, you must know how to work well with others, to uphold

respect for people and the law, and to have the mental, emotional, and physical capacity to serve your community.

While all the above traits are all important, there are certain characteristics in this list that are especially valued (and often evaluated) by modern police departments. These include:

- Communication skills:

Police officers must be able to communicate in a clear, concise, and confident manner. Whether they are speaking with a citizen, at a public event, or with other members of law enforcement, they must be able to deliver information clearly and accurately.

- Respect for individuals:

Police officers' main duty is to protect and serve others. This means they must also have great respect for, and an understanding of, people of all different backgrounds, cultures, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs.

- Sound judgement and problem-solving:

Police officers must always be able to work under pressure, to maintain composure, and to have sound judgement and decision-making skills during times of need. They must be able to reason, to weigh the consequences, and to consider alternatives, before deciding on the most logical course of action. Without sound judgment, rationalization, and composure, situations can escalate and cost lives.

- Devotion to the community:

Police officers must care about their communities, but also understand the issues and concerns that exist within it. This goes beyond basic law enforcement. Police officers must have insight into their community's challenges. They must also establish a trusting partnership with community members.

- A sense of law and ethics:

In policing, there must be an in-depth understanding of the law. The law can be taught. However, there must also be a strong sense of ethics, which is not as easily learned. Those who have a good morale and sense of ethics, that can also be balanced with the law, will find the greatest success as a police officer.

- Perseverance and initiative:

At the end of the day, police officers need to be resolute, steady, confident, and motivated to carry out their work. Even when faced with adversities or limited resources, police officers must persevere to accomplish their mission or purpose.

Qualifications to Become a Police Officer

Every state in the U.S. has its own set of requirements for police officers. This is to ensure the right people are on the job and devoted to their job. Remember – this is an important field where, often, it's literally a matter of life or death.

These requirements are set by the state's Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) Council. While the above is a list of minimum requirements for the state, individual law enforcement agencies can set their own, stricter requirements, as well. More agencies and departments, for example, are starting to seek higher levels of postsecondary education among their applicants.

Officers across the United States earn an average, annual salary of \$67,290. Police in Connecticut can expect even more, with an average salary of \$75,590 per year. On top of this, police officers can expect exceptional benefits like comprehensive medical coverage, extensive paid time off, state pension and other retirement aid, as well as tuition reimbursement for those who pursue a college degree.

In fact, more and more police officers are now seeking out a college education, as employers seek more qualified candidates for this job. This is increasing the competition and the standards for police officers today. If you wish to stand out and to become a great police officer, a college degree can get you there.

Not only will a college degree equip you with the police officer qualities and skills needed to succeed, but it will also increase your marketability after the police force. Even more, it can prepare you to have a greater voice in your role. A criminal justice degree program can provide you with knowledge of:

Contemporary, ethical perspectives

Current ethical and legal issues facing law enforcement

Criminology, criminal procedures, and criminal law

Communications courses that can carry through to public speaking, report writing, and more

While a college degree can sound challenging, it is achievable. For aspiring police officers, an associate degree in Criminal Justice is recommended. This type of degree will help you achieve your career goals on a timeline that works for you. Classes are offered days and nights, so that you can complete your law enforcement degree while continuing to work and fulfill other personal obligations.

In addition to a police officer career, the Criminal Justice degree at Goodwin can also help students prepare for other, related careers in areas such as:

Corrections

Customs and Border Protection

Drug Enforcement Agency

Federal Bureau of Prisons

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Private and Personal Security Agencies

Transportation Security Administration