

## In response to the mayor's open letter

Minneapolis police speak back to Betsy Hodges about community relations.

By JOHN DELMONICO

Dear Mayor Hodges:  
Your statements in your recent open letter to "the communities of Minneapolis" and in your community forums are repeated and personal slaps in the face to every member of the Minneapolis Police Department. While you attempt to hide behind the tired remark that "most officers are good; the problem is just a few bad apples," when you speak of the "culture of the department" that is "on a downward spiral and must be changed," you paint all officers with the same brush, since all of us are members of "that culture." One does not need to be too clever to understand that the culture to which you refer is one in which racism and brutality is condoned and ignored. While that may well be your perception, it is a perception that is as malicious as it is false.

Contrary to the premise underlying your misperceptions, bad behavior by Minneapolis police officers does not go unpunished. If anything, discipline is too often more severe than is necessary to serve the stated purpose of being corrective rather than punitive. One cannot reasonably conclude that the system is broken merely because some complainants are not satisfied with the outcome.

There are many legitimate reasons why not all complaints result in discipline. Sometimes the action of the officer was necessary and appropriate but misunderstood by the complainant. Sometimes there is insufficient evidence to prove wrongdoing. Sometimes the circumstances warrant coaching or training or modification of policy, rather than discipline. And, yes, sometimes complainants lie.

The true test of a good disciplinary system should be whether complaints are fairly and thoroughly investigated. When sufficient evidence supports the charges, discipline should be imposed promptly after the investigation is concluded, and it should be at a level that is commensurate with the offense. If you were willing to look at facts rather than rely on your misguided perceptions, you would be telling the communities that we already have such a system.

**No amount of effort by officers or expenditure of taxpayers' money for cameras or other gadgetry will improve the relationship between officers and communities when elected officials perpetuate mythology.**

You claim you want the relationship between officers and "the communities" (obviously showing that you do not consider Minneapolis to all be one community) to improve. A relationship is a two-way street. For a good one to remain good and for a bad one to improve, it requires desire, commitment, effort and trust by both parties — not just by one. Your stated formula for improving the relationship between the cops and the communities places 100 percent of the burden on police officers. This implies that police officers are 100 percent to blame for any relationships that may be less than perfect.

Every member of every community should rightly expect that each Minneapolis officer will treat him or her with a high level of professionalism. Believe it or not, Minneapolis police officers actually expect that of each other. We often preach that in every citizen contact we should treat all folks — whether victim, witness or suspect — the way we would want our loved ones to be treated.

However, it is fair to say that while we would expect a police officer to treat our loved ones with respect, we would expect our loved ones to treat a police officer with respect, as well. That expectation of mutual trust and respect is precisely what is missing from your "relationship improvement" plan. No mention is made as to whether the community can or should expect those who punch us, spit on us, curse at us, shoot at us or falsely complain about us to improve their behavior.

Your words and actions do not support your purported goal of improving the relationship between police and communities. Accepting and spreading misperceptions about your Police Department fuels the flames — it does not extinguish them. No amount of effort by officers or expenditure of taxpayers' money for cameras or other gadgetry will improve the relationship between officers and communities when elected officials repeatedly undermine those efforts by perpetuating mythology in those communities for their own political aggrandizement.

John Delmonico is president of the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis.