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QUESTIONS FOR JACK MAPLE

Trust Games

The former Deputy Commissioner who helped reinvent New York's police force tells how cops can respond more sensitively to the public — and when the best response is a left hook.

Q: *After a high-profile racial incident, like the death of Amadou Diallo or the assault of Abner Louima, what's the proper course of action by which the police can build trust with the public?*

You have to get the facts out to the public absolutely immediately. It's a mistake in really serious incidents that cops don't make any statements in the first 48 hours. In the Diallo incident, the cops should have come out and explained what happened. You have to have transparency within the department. How many members of the community have been out with the Street Crime Unit? How many have been out in regular radio cars? If you don't let anybody go out with the cops, the cops then appear to be an occupying army.

Has that perception ever influenced your decision to use force?

All the time. What a lot of people don't understand is that the cops are afraid. Let's say you're grabbing a guy that you think has a gun, and he starts resisting. Am I going to try to hit him with this nightstick that I got three hours' training on? The crowd is starting to yell. You're trying to get on the radio to get help. You're worried about the crowd. You're worried about the guy. You're worried about do you have the right guy.

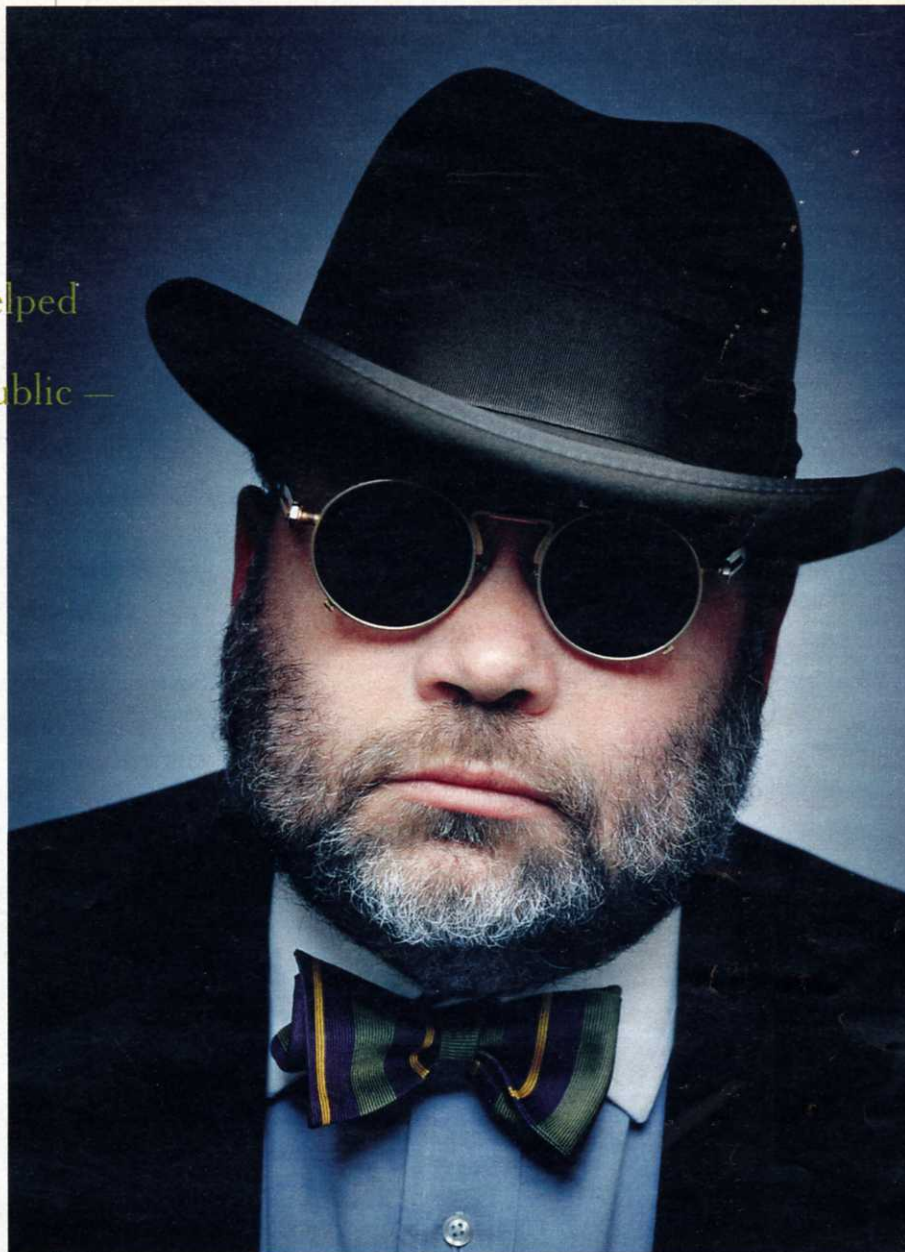
What have you done when you've found yourself being disrespected? How have you reacted when you've been seriously threatened? Have you ever lost control?

It's all about not losing control. How many fights have you been in in your life? Have you ever been punched in your face? Hard? I was more scared than anything else when I was a cop, confronting people. That's the thing people don't understand. I don't know if I ever felt myself losing control, but I may have gotten myself into situations that I shouldn't have, as a young cop. I think as you get older you're more confident, so you're not as aggressive.

What are the personal ramifications, for decent cops, of police brutality? How can you explain it to your kids, for example?

You say we have to do a better job, and you say unfortunately we don't recruit people from the Planet Perfect. I don't believe the police use force nearly as much as they used to years ago. If you were to sit in a Manhattan court now and look at the turban factor, meaning the people who've been hit on the head with nightsticks, compared with 50 years ago, it's dramatically lower. But since you can't guarantee that incidents like that will never happen again, you have to have a mechanism in place to investigate it.

But the threat of violence seems still to be one of the biggest tools at a cop's disposal.



Look, if somebody's going to punch me in the mouth, I'd punch him in the mouth, too. It's absurd when people say, "You have to use just that much more force to take the situation under control." How much force is that? You act like the cops have a menu in front of them, and the cops are going to say, "Because of this individual's height and weight and jaw size, I'm going to follow up with a right hand of exactly 122 pounds of thrust and I will be able to put the cuffs on him." Now let's say the suspect has low serotonin, high testosterone, just finished smoking a blunt and finished it off with a Colt 45. You tell me. Tell me the force used.

While you were on the force, did you ever have a cop like Justin Volpe, someone known to be violent? Did you try to talk to them?

I knew cops that were more handsy than other cops. No, you didn't try to talk to them. You just didn't want to work with them because they had a bad attitude.

But on several occasions you did stand up to a fellow cop. What does that feel like?

Here's the great thing about being a cop. You know when you go to Catholic school they tell you a clear conscience has the strength of 10 men? The great thing about being a cop is you have right on your side when you're doing something like that. Not the Mayor. Not the Police Commissioner. Not anybody else. But to expect that cops are going to turn each other in for something that's not of a serious nature, that is absurd. That's directly against our culture. — Kevin Gray