

Coffee with a Cop in Gulf Shores, Alabama

Voiceover

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This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Kimberly Brummett

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This is Kimberly Brummett with the U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office. With us today is Community Resource Officer Josh Coleman with the Gulf Shores (Alabama) Police Department. Officer Coleman is here to discuss planning Coffee with a Cop events and the benefits of a Coffee with a Cop Program. Good morning, Officer Coleman.

Officer Josh Coleman

00:28

Good morning.

Brummett

00:29

What is the benefit of Coffee with a Cop?

Coleman

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Well, there are actually a couple of benefits to hosting Coffee with a Cop. One of the major benefits is really an opportunity to allow law enforcement the chance to address communication. When you really look at how we communicate with the public, we are always answering emergency calls, and never really have a chance to sit down and have a cup of coffee with somebody. So any type of interaction we have, we're always rushed or moving from call to call. So, this is an opportunity to really just sit down and focus on some of the questions that might not be a 911 question.

Really another benefit, I guess, would be—it removes barriers that exist: your police car, or at the station you've got the desk, and sort of the government setting, and really removes those, and we get into a relaxed setting. It allows us to build our relationship with those that we serve and, actually, it's either low cost or no cost at all.

Brummett

01:51

How do you plan a Coffee with a Cop event?

Coleman

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When you speak of planning an event, honestly, law enforcement is not necessarily event planners. So we try to come up with a way to guide that. The easiest way is actually going online to coffeewithacop.com. We actually have a planning event checklist, and you can also download free news release templates, and even download the national logo to print banners and flyers.

I actually, personally, like to have a banner somewhere inside the restaurant to help explain why all the officers are there. But when it comes down to the actual event planning, some of the highlights that I'd like to point out would be planning your event. You want to go about 6–8 weeks in advance, and actually either call the owner or manager of a local restaurant and set up an appointment so you can pitch your idea.

Once you've got your appointment set up, you have to go ahead and start thinking of the points you want to explain to that manager or owner about what you're wanting to do. And what you're wanting to do is actually ask to come into the restaurant for about two hours, and have an opportunity to interact with the community. And you're asking them if they'll provide the coffee—put a pot of coffee on the tables—and really as far as your event planning that's pretty much how you're starting. It actually breaks it down on the website.

Then two weeks before the event you want to get all your press releases out, and then about a week out, make sure you get your postings out on Facebook and your social media sites, and then once you've got all that done—those are the foundation to your business and your contacts in the community—but then when you're doing that you're actually starting to work on who you're recruiting from your department, and you'll have to ask yourself who will represent your agency and attend from the department. So go ahead and think of who you want to recruit to do that, and when you recruit your officers you want to make sure that you find officers that will willingly engage your community, so that you're not having officers just sitting around speaking to each other. Then as far as the day of the event, arrive approximately 20 minutes early and put your banners up, and make sure your coffee is out, and prepare to go ahead and start greeting the customers, and try to remember to enjoy yourself—all at the same time.

Brummett

04:50

Great. What types of relationships do you have with media now that you've implemented Coffee with a Cop, and what are your communication techniques for Coffee with a Cop besides social media?

Coleman

05:00

We've found that the media has actually been intrigued by Coffee with a Cop. Numerous departments across the country have had a lot of great results when they've invited their local media. I guess it's an easy referral to the things you've heard in the past where you see that media covers a lot of negative

things. I believe, really, that media enjoys covering something positive and not only positive, it's showing interaction between police and community. So I think they really enjoy doing that. We've got a great relationship with our local media here in Gulf Shores and I think those continue to build day-by-day.

As far as techniques to advertise, you mentioned social media but we also use our local newspaper, and we also send it out to community groups, churches, neighborhood watch groups, and try to get it out word of mouth in those avenues. Those really work, and then in the end if you're going to a fast food restaurant that is a popular morning location, in the end you always have that backup plan in case your word doesn't get out as much as you really wanted it to—that people will be there any way for breakfast. So that's always been a go-to backup plan, in case advertising has not worked like you would like it to.

Brummett

06:44

So what advice would you share that stems from lessons you've learned from implementing Coffee with a Cop?

Coleman

06:50

Our personal experience has really been sort of stepping out of our comfort zone when we interact with the community, and making a conscious effort to make those positive informal contacts. Police officers are used to certain types of interactions, so they were a little bit uncomfortable at first. I guess about after maybe about 15–30 minutes, somewhere around there, after getting the event going, they just started realizing that it was really about coffee and conversation and it wasn't about a routine contact.

So the advice would be to really make sure you brief your officers, explain to them that they're wanting to engage the public, because sometimes the public is nervous engaging us. To give them a fair opportunity to ask us questions, and to mention things that are going on in their community—in the early referral to us,—you know, something they wouldn't call 911 about—and just make it a comfortable interaction, which takes a little bit of work on both sides. That would be the biggest thing, because in the end that's what makes it the most successful—building relationships and really putting yourself out there.

Brummett

08:25

Great, great. Well thank you again for joining us today and thanks for your advice.

Coleman

08:30

Thank you.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

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