

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| INTRODUCTION | vii |
| Chapter One MENTAL MODELS OF POVERTY, MIDDLE CLASS, AND WEALTH | 1 |
| Chapter Two HIDDEN RULES | 27 |
| Chapter Three THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE | 47 |
| Chapter Four RESOURCES | 83 |
| Chapter Five USING THIS INFORMATION THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER | 95 |
| REFERENCES | 117 |

INTRODUCTION

This book is written for first responders. First-response personnel have a difficult job as they are continuously called upon to work within many communities of different economic status. When people's economic status influences their access to our societal system, it affects the experience people have in society. That experience shapes how many things, including emergency services, are viewed and treated. First responders who have worked in all three economic communities (poverty, middle, and wealthy classes) can testify to being viewed and treated differently within each of these communities. The deeper the understanding first responders have of these differences, the safer they can keep themselves and the communities they serve.

Emergency service is particularly challenging because first responders are constantly called upon to work outside of the economic classes they are used to. When first responders, like anyone else, see things operate in a way that does not reflect their own experience, it is hard for them to make sense of the situation. When people see things that do not make sense and are not immediately understandable, our human nature is to react to it. Any first responder will tell you that is a dangerous place to be.

This book is not meant to justify or judge the behaviors one might witness, nor is it attempting to present a solution for the problem of a societal system that provides different degrees of access based on economic status. This book is a tool for police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), paramedics, and others whose job it is to be first on the scene. For easier reading, I will use the umbrella term *first responders* to refer to members of these organizations. Again, this book is a tool, and like any other tool on your belt—your axe, your gun, or your pike pole—pull it out when needed.

Throughout the book you will find mental models, usually in the form of illustrations, that introduce key points. You will see that the first chapters share understanding about the different economic communities and individual behaviors and attitudes within those communities. This is very useful information for first responders working directly with individuals or within different economic communities. As first responders advance in their careers, the job requires them to gain more of a communitywide perspective. The last chapter of this book focuses on how to use this information in a more systemic manner.

I would like to personally thank each of you for what you do! The things you see, the stresses you experience, are at times unspeakable, and yet you do it all over the next day, sometimes the next hour! Though you may not always be told this, know you are appreciated. I hope you find this book to be a useful tool.

–Jodi Pfarr

KEY POINTS:

- 1) This book is written for first responders. First responders are often required to serve economically diverse communities; therefore, the more first-response personnel understand what they are encountering, the less they will react to particular situations—and that means they can better stay in control. Staying in control allows a first responder the luxury of choosing the next action, a choice that ultimately keeps emergency service personnel and the community safe.
- 2) Communities are diverse in many ways: age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and economic status, for example, vary by community and within each community. All types of diversity affect communities and should be discussed. This book focuses on economic diversity between and within communities.
- 3) This book focuses on generational poverty, generational middle class, and generational wealth. Economic classes can be split into many different groups, but if we want to compare/contrast the classes in order to further understand them, using the three categories listed above simplifies our task.
- 4) This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions. People often choose not to talk about the different ways economic groups operate because they fear being accused of stereotyping. I am not asserting that if you live in one community or the other you are guaranteed to be or act a certain way—that would be absurd. Still, it is equally absurd to state that no differences exist between the different economic communities. We must have the courage to start to talk about the differences in a way that is respectful to

all. This book attempts to provide first-response personnel with a better understanding of patterns they witness and experience on the job. This understanding will help first responders keep themselves and the community safer. I trust that first responders will not use the information to profile or stereotype people, but will use it to better understand and relate to the events and people they encounter in their professional capacities. I also hope this book will help readers understand their experience of the societal system at large with regard to economic status.

- 5) Generational poverty, middle class, and wealth mean that individuals have been in that class for two generations or more. People in a generational class are more likely to exhibit the patterns associated with that class than are people whose families haven't been in it for two generations or more.
- 6) Situational poverty, middle class, and wealth mean that one spends only a period of one's life in that class. For example, if you grew up in middle class and maintained middle class status into adulthood, but then experienced poverty due to an illness or other mitigating factor, this would be considered situational poverty. You would not bring the same lenses and mindset to the experience of poverty as would someone who has never experienced anything else.
- 7) Poverty, middle class, and wealth are all relative. The 2011 Current Population Survey (conducted jointly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau) tells us that a household with an annual income of \$101,578 or more is in the top 20% of American households as ranked by income, which leads the other 80% of people to consider them rich;

however, if you asked households making that amount if they are rich, few would say that they are. They would think of friends who make more money as a basis for comparison. The point is that perception of economic class is relative.

- 8) Individuals bring with them the hidden rules of the class in which they were raised.
- 9) Emergency services, schools, social services, and businesses tend to operate from middle class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.
- 10) In order to move from one economic class to another, an individual must often give up relationships for achievement for a period of time.
- 11) For first responders to be perceived as good leaders, they must understand the hidden rules in operation and transfer information about laws and policies in a meaningful manner.
- 12) Again, this book is a tool for police, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and others whose job it is to be first on the scene. For easier reading, I will use the umbrella term *first responders* to refer to members of these organizations except in cases where I'm talking specifically about any one branch.

Chapter One

MENTAL MODELS OF POVERTY, MIDDLE CLASS, AND WEALTH

Mental models are pictures, drawings, or stories that communicate a lot of information in a small amount of time. Mental models are frequently used in first response and the military. They not only help deliver a lot of information in a short time, they can also assist in understanding the content. Both police and fire departments use mental models when they train first responders how to be as effective as possible. When a serious crime is committed, the police department will often get a sketch of the person who committed the crime and/or map out the scene. They don't stop at gathering a long, verbal description of the person or crime scene; no, a mental model is created. The mental model helps communicate a lot of information in a short time.

Every one of us already holds mental models of what poverty, middle class, and wealth look like. Some of our mental models of poverty come from our parents or grandparents who to this day save paper bags and rubber bands as a result of their experiences during the Great Depression. Some of us get our mental

MENTAL MODELS OF POVERTY, MIDDLE CLASS, AND WEALTH

models of poverty from media. Some of us did not have strong mental models of poverty until we came to work and saw a family in poverty with people working two and three jobs and still barely getting by. Or perhaps the first family in poverty we saw wasn't working at all. Some of us have very strong mental models of poverty because we grew up there. However or wherever we developed our mental models, this chapter attempts to set forth a mental model that incorporates all of the ideas.

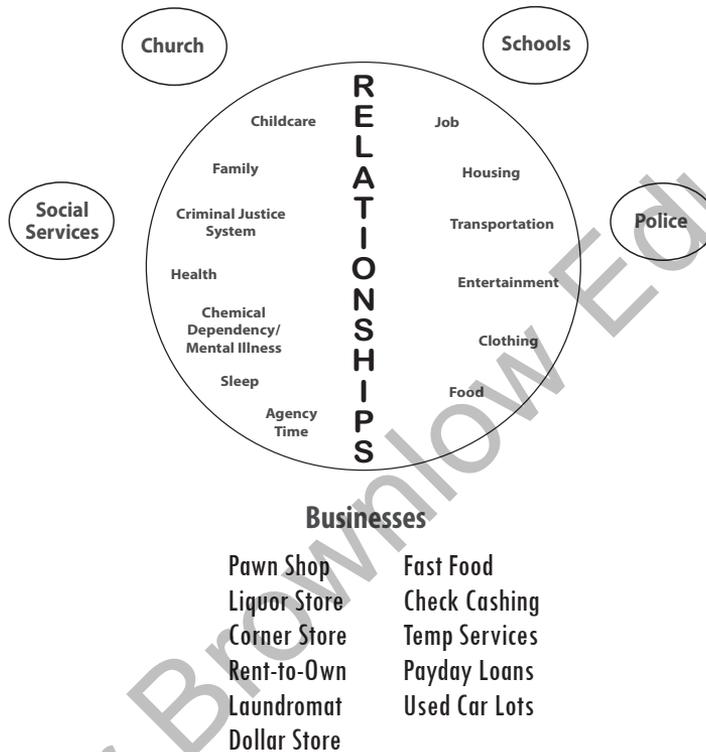
Think of an adult in generational poverty (not situational poverty), and follow that adult around for an entire day. What does that person spend time doing? Do the same for a middle class person and a wealthy person.

The circles that follow in this chapter represent average days in the lives of people in poverty, middle class, and wealth. It is worth noting that the mental model used to represent people in poverty was generated by people currently living in poverty, the middle class circle by people in middle class, and the wealthy circle by someone in wealth. Of course, everybody's circle looks a little different—one item may take up more time in one person's circle than in another's—but the basic components are generally the same.

A MENTAL MODEL OF POVERTY

Let's analyze the circles. We'll begin by looking at the poverty circle. What does transportation look like in poverty? Public transit; walking; bicycling; an older, broken-down car; or, if you have been very successful in an illicit trade, a decked-out ride. Transportation is generally unreliable at best, as is often the case with housing, as well.

Mental Model of Poverty



Source: *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities Workbook* (2006)

The first home address law enforcement receives for someone who lives in poverty is rarely the correct address. A first responder will have to go two or three moves further to catch up with someone. Such things as mental illness and chemical dependency are not always seen in poverty, but any first responder will tell you that they tend to be observed at higher rates overall in poverty than in the other two classes.

MENTAL MODELS OF POVERTY, MIDDLE CLASS, AND WEALTH

Incarceration rates are similar. Not every person from poverty experiences incarceration in the criminal justice system, but go to your local city or county jail or state prison and you'll find that the trend is people from poverty are represented at a higher rate than are those from middle class, and at a much higher rate than are people who come from wealth. Why this discrepancy exists is not the focus of this book, but it is a question worth raising and worthy of further analysis elsewhere.

As we look at the poverty circle, we begin to see that the circle is not always stable, and tasks take a longer time to accomplish. In poverty you take the pile of dirty laundry, gather up the kids, and go down to a Laundromat. At the Laundromat you wash the clothes, watch the kids, and unless you have a lot of money, you rarely get the clothes completely dry. Then you run for the bus but miss it, and it is the last bus of the day, so now you call back to the neighborhood to someone who has a car. Remember, it is the only ride in the neighborhood, so the driver has to drop off four other people before picking you up. Gas prices being what they are, you'd better have some gas money. The ride finally arrives; you load up everything and pull away, only to have the car stall out at the second stop sign because it is an unreliable car. Tasks take a longer time in poverty.

We begin to see that living in poverty is about survival, about getting today's needs met. When your life is about survival, it quickly becomes about today and now—not next year, not even tomorrow; it is all about today and surviving this moment. This point cannot be emphasized enough. In generational poverty it is all about the *right now*. There is often no grand future story, no picture of what you look like in the future. More time is spent focusing on surviving the moment, which leaves less time to fo-