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## From the Editor

with Greg Friese, Editor-in-Chief



# How to respond to a denial of service at a restaurant or coffee shop

EMS, police and fire personnel need to prepare for being asked to leave a restaurant, coffee shop or grocery store

Aug 6, 2019

Two uniformed paramedics were turned away at a Florida McDonald's restaurant by an employee, since terminated, who refused to serve "anyone with a badge."

The widely circulated news story was based on a Facebook post from one of the paramedics and aired on a local news channel without additional comment from the paramedic or his employer. Caspers Company, the franchise owner, issued a written apology, concluding with "What occurred does not reflect the values of our brand, our franchise, or the love and admiration we have demonstrated consistently for our friends in law enforcement and first responders."

Reports of police officers being denied service at a Starbucks, firefighters being chided for shopping for groceries, or paramedics being heckled for resting at a posting location are all too frequent. Many of these incidents are attributable to a low performing employee looking to exit their job in a fireball of infamy rather than the enforcement of a corporate policy. These confrontations might also be the manifestation of the ongoing vilification of public service by politicians and the poor understanding most civilians have about what EMS, fire and law enforcement personnel do for their community.



A Florida paramedic was denied service in a McDonald's after being told by an employee, "We don't serve officers in here." What would your response have been? (Photo/Pixabay)

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Have you discussed or role played with your personnel how to respond to a denial of service in a restaurant, coffee shop or grocery store? Here are the key points I'd discuss in a roll call briefing or company training.

### 1. LEAVE AN UNSAFE SCENE

A rogue employee denying service to a uniformed EMT, firefighter or cop is looking for a confrontation. The scene may not turn **violent**, but be sure the ideal video for the perpetrator is for us to be caught on camera arguing, yelling and striking threatening poses. The perpetrator doesn't care about losing their job. Their goal is to help you lose your job or further reduce the stature of the uniform and agency it represents in the community. Don't become a supporting actor in their attempt at fame.

### 2. DOCUMENT AND REPORT THE INCIDENT

After leaving the scene document the who, what, where and when of the incident. Report this information to your immediate supervisor. It's not clear to me why the McDonald's incident was a public Facebook post or the July 4 Starbucks incident was reported in a series of Tweets. I

suspect most agencies would prefer the chance to discuss the incident chief-to-owner in private before it becomes an evening news item.

We live and work in the age of provocations, hot takes and ultimatums. A negative review or critical Tweet might be the endpoint, but it shouldn't be the opening salvo in communication with the business owner.

If the department chief and business owner are able to meet privately, it's likely all parties will be able to identify the action items to make things right – terminate the employee in question, apologize privately and publicly to the personnel involved, affirm the organization's policies to serve public safety personnel and the ongoing steps to train and inform all employees of the business. [Use social media to celebrate](#) the cooperation, appreciate the personnel who welcome in public safety, to appreciate the service provide by public safety and to educate the public.

#### 4. LEVERAGE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH

The [2019 EMS Trend Report](#) asked respondents to react to this statement, "The general public understands what EMS professionals do." A stunning 88% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. The public's top takeaway or lingering question should not be, "Why are six officers at Starbucks?" or "Why are paramedics eating on the job?"

Instead, we can [educate and inform the public about EMS, police and fire](#) if we live the Golden Rule at the Golden Arches and wherever we go. We're not going to fix the McDonald's employee who turned away paramedics or the Starbucks customer who asked that uniformed police leave. But the resulting public conversation is a great opportunity to share with the public the challenges of working 24/7 and the benefits of uniformed personnel visiting the stores and restaurants in their service area.

### About the author

Greg Friese, MS, NRP, is Editor-in-Chief of EMS1.com. Greg has a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree from the University of Idaho. He is an educator, author, national registry paramedic since 2005, and a long-distance runner. Greg is a three-time Jesse H. Neal award winner, the most prestigious award in specialized journalism, and 2018 Eddie Award winner for best Column/Blog. Ask questions or submit article ideas to Greg by emailing him at [greg.friese@ems1.com](mailto:greg.friese@ems1.com) and connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).

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