

The Reason Why

by Titus Smith

With a feverish glint in his eyes, he yelled “Get away from me, I’m fine!” He was not acting fine. Our radio report had reported altered mental status, and a history of drug abuse.

“Sir, I need you to calm down.” I said this in as soothing a voice as I could manage. In the same tone, I told him, “Sir, It’s time to get on the stretcher, we’re gonna go somewhere you can get help.”

“Help?” he roared, “I don’t need help!” I knew it was time to act. The tension was rising at an alarming rate, and he was quickly becoming a threat to himself, my three partners, and myself. I had never restrained an unwilling participant before, and this man was not looking like he would give me an easy introduction to the process. He stood roughly five feet ten inches, but he was sturdily built. The biggest problem was that both of us had firm ideas about what should happen next, but both of us had different ideas about what that should be.

“Sir, your wife called 911, and told them you took lethal amounts of drugs. We need to take you to the hospital.” I placed my hand on his shoulder in a gesture that I knew would elicit one of two options. Either, he would be reassured by the contact and be encouraged to come with us, or, more likely, he would see it as a sign of aggression and charge me, meaning we could restrain and transport him. Whichever option he chose would expedite the process, and this unfortunate man would get the care he needed sooner than if we stood around arguing.

As expected, he chose option two, and tried to tackle me. I didn't let him get on top of me, and while my partners rushed to my aid. We had him restrained on the stretcher within 5 minutes, which happened to be the fastest restraint time in the EMS class at Allegan AESA for several years! Panting, Officer Morgan, the police officer pretending to be a high patient in danger of an OD, smiled at us and said "you guys did a good job at getting me on here, once I was on the ground you guys really held me really well!" We had been in an extremely realistic scenario, for a combative altered mental patient, preparing for when we would interact with them in the field.

I high fived my partners, and then unstrapped him. He continued, "You four did great at communicating between each other, but you forgot one thing." I paused. I went through my list of procedures for restraining combative patients. We had done everything! We even remembered to check that his restraints were not too tight, cutting off circulation! "After I attacked you and had you pinned to the ground, you should have simply asked me again to come with you to the hospital. Usually when people feel they have no choice, they will comply more readily."

It dawned on me that if our patient from the scenario had been in that situation in real life, he had likely been having a very hard day, and it may have made it a little easier if we had given him one more chance to comply. How easy it is to forget about people when we get too focused on the objective! Individuals are the reason EMT's, police officers, teachers, and most other public servants do the self-sacrificial jobs that they do. I had gotten so hung up on doing what I thought I needed to do for my patient, that I forgot to do what was truly best for my patient. I vowed to never let doing the job I was assigned become more important than helping the person I was assigned to help!

