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TEXAS COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER STANDARDS AND EDUCATION

COMMENT ON OUR PROFESSION

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When Is It Too Late?

Or is it ever too late? I've heard all those words about "starting over," and another great saying, "the next day is the first day of the rest of your life."

These sayings give us the impression that it is never too late. But what if it is too late? Too late to say you're sorry, too late to make a difference in a personal relationship, and too late to correct your past mistakes.

We all know that mistakes often stay with us our entire life. Think of the lapse in judgment decades ago when, as a young person, one commits a foolish act of vandalism or goes for a joyride in a stolen car with a friend. This lapse, and the resulting criminal record, is with this person forever . . . and it is too late to get it removed. Think about the cross words you said to someone and never had the chance to take back before they passed on to another place. Think about the hurt that you have caused and will never be able to make amends for, or the child running between cars into the street directly in front of your vehicle, who through no fault of yours is now deceased. When is it too late?

Some things should never happen. Bad things are not supposed to happen to good people. But you know what? They do. Al McGuire, the famous Marquette basketball coach and commentator, once said, "Life isn't fair, or there wouldn't be wheelchairs and wheelchair ramps." Somebody got wealthy with the famous bumper sticker "__ it happens." Bad things do happen to good people.

If at times it is too late, what do we do right now? Can we always consider the long-term consequences of our short-term decisions? Can we always examine all alternatives with an eye to how we will feel many years from now? Can we become better at predicting the future consequences of our decisions of today? The answer to all of these is obviously "yes," but what about all of those things that we have absolutely no control over? What about them?

Why didn't you do something about the Gulf Oil Spill or about the pirating off the African coast? Why didn't you warn the people in Oklahoma City about the bomb, the people in the Twin Towers about the airplanes, or the children at Columbine High School in Colorado about the shooters?

Again, the answer is obvious. We can only affect those things we have control over, and we have the most control over ourselves. As we make ourselves more thoughtful of the consequences of our decisions, we grow in character. As we deliberate about our future and how our decisions impact the futures of others, we become important people in this world we call "community."

Today is a good day to reflect on when it is "too late." The regret we feel is the fuel necessary for our personal growth.