

400 Things Cops Know: Street-Smart Lessons from a Veteran Patrolman

By Adam Plantinga

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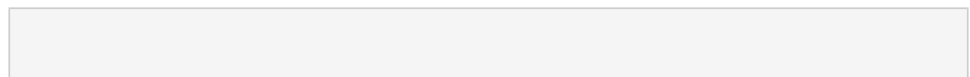
How does it feel to be in a high-speed car chase? What is it like to shoot someone? What do cops really think about the citizens they serve? Nearly everyone has wondered what it's like to be a police officer, but no civilian really understands what happens on the job.

“400 Things Cops Know” shows police work on the inside, from the viewpoint of the regular cop on the beat—a profession that can range from rewarding to bizarre to terrifying, all within the course of an eight-hour shift. Written by veteran police sergeant Adam Plantinga, “400 Things Cops Know” brings the reader into life the way cops experience it—a life of danger, frustration, occasional triumph, and plenty of grudgingly hard routine work.

In a laconic, no-nonsense, dryly humorous style, Plantinga tells what he's learned from 13 years as a patrolman, from the everyday to the exotic—how to know at a glance when a suspect is carrying a weapon or is going to attack, how to kick a door down, how to drive in a car chase without recklessly endangering the public, why you should always carry cigarettes, even if you don't smoke (offering a smoke is the best way to lure a suicide to safety), and what to do if you find a severed limb (don't put it on ice—you need to keep it dry.)

“400 Things Cops Know” deglamorizes police work, showing the gritty, stressful, sometimes disgusting reality of life on patrol, from the possibility of infection—criminals don't always practice good hygiene—to the physical, psychological, and emotional toll of police work. Plantinga shows what cops experience of death, the legal system, violence, prostitution, drug use, the social causes and consequences of crime, alcoholism, and more.

Sometimes heartbreaking and often hilarious, “400 Things Cops Know” is an eye-opening revelation of what life on the beat is really all about.



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Editorial Review

Review

[Plantinga's] observations about life as a street cop ... are practical and blunt when they aren't funny, heart-rending or chilling. My next manuscript with a police officer as a character will be checked against this book. I highly recommend it. --Warren Bull, Writers Who Kill

I've dog-eared every other page of this magnificent, insightful book. Plantinga's frank, dark comic tone provides insight into a world most people only read about or see portrayed, incorrectly, in movies and TV. "400 Things Cops Know" gets it right. --Stephen Jay Schwartz, L.A. Times bestselling author of "Boulevard and Beat"

An extremely engaging read. As a writer I found it very beneficial as a reference and there was a lot of information that I could glean from it in my current works. --Christina Escamilla

Truly excellent, and much more than a list -- this reads like a mix of hard-boiled autobiography and streetwise poetry. Certain to be one of my books of the year. --Lee Child, bestselling author of the Jack Reacher thrillers

"400 Things Cops Know" is by turns funny, harrowing, insightful, chilling, and unrelentingly honest. Most books, the writer Richard Russo once said, "aim for the head, the heart, the gut, or the funny-bone." The best books, he continued, go for all of them. This is one of those books. --C.J. Hribal, author of "The Company Car" and "American Beauty"

The new Bible for crime writers. --The Wall Street Journal

Essential for crime writers and anyone interested in the reality of police work. --George Pelecanos

Gritty, funny, and truthful, "400 Things Cops Know" will surprise you on nearly every page ... and give you a new respect for the cop on the street. --Edward Conlon, bestselling author of "Blue Blood" and "Red on Red"

Adam Plantinga's hard-earned, street-wise practical wisdom shines on every page of this book -- as does his unsentimental compassion and desire to make the world a better place. Reading it will help good cops become better, and the rest of us to better appreciate the hard work cops do. This book is wise, but it's also hilarious. --Paul J. Contino, Seaver Professor of Humanities, Pepperdine University

Funny and rueful ... many fascinating trade secrets here. --Katharine Whitemore, Boston Globe

Loaded with insights, criticisms, witticisms, and inside references ... threaded into stories of driving fast, taking down tough guys and righting wrongs, a low-key morality surfaces. Delivered without a heavy hand and mixed with unrelenting honesty about police shortcomings, admiration for the profession is complex, but hard to resist. --Lou Fancher, Contra Costa Times

The author pulls no punches or keeps any secrets. "400 Things Cops Know" delves into topics not normally on most people's minds, but at some point things they may have wondered about ... an intimate look at what

really happens in police work. --John M. Wills, New York Journal of Books

Eye-opening, funny, heartbreaking, and enlightening ... Plantinga walks a fine line between loyalty to the uniform and honesty with the public. --Glenn Dallas, San Francisco Book Review

"Every cop should read this book and so should anyone who wants an uncensored peek into the real world of street cops. It's wise and witty, fascinating and fun ... a lot of fun!" --Joseph Wambaugh

The canon of cop lit is broad and deep ... Adam Plantinga's book stands alone ... a nuanced, complex portrait of the life cops lead. -- Bill Mesce, Jr., New Letters

"A precise, concise, interesting, insightful and a necessary read for police officers, those contemplating police work, as well as those wanting to understand policing in society today. Written by a practitioner with experience and knowledge of policing who has put his observations, interactions and insights into the written word. Once you begin to read this book you continue to want to hear more. Well worth the readers time and money." --Michael G. Krzewinski, Ph.D., retired director of training, Milwaukee Police Department

If you are considering a career in policing, read this book. Read it before you start the academy, read it after the academy, read it all through FTO and probation. Read it as you go through your career. It's that accurate. This book might very well save your life. --Pete Thoshinsky, retired police lieutenant and author of "Blue in Black and White"

Riveting and often humorous ... an unusually frank insider's view. --The San Francisco Chronicle

As well as being an entertaining look at the daily lives of the men in blue, this book is an excellent resource for crime writers. Many of Plantinga's observations are laugh-out-loud funny and others will make readers sit back and wonder about the state of the world. Given the recent focus on the behavior of certain police officers in America, this book provides a savvy insider's look at the other side of the story. --Bev Vincent, Onyx Reviews

For writers of crime fiction, this book is a gold mine ... It's by turn fascinating, informative, funny, and heartbreaking, often more than one simultaneously. --Dana King, One Bite at a Time

About the Author

Adam Plantinga holds a B.A. in English with a second major in Criminology/Law Studies from Marquette University, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude in 1995. Plantinga's short story "Untitled" was included in the anthology 25 and Under/Fiction and Washington Post book critic George Garrett called it his candidate for the best story in the book. He has written thirteen nonfiction articles on various aspects of police work for the literary magazine The Cresset, published by the Valparaiso University Press. Plantinga was a City of Milwaukee Police Officer from 2001 to 2008, including time spent as a Field Training Officer. He is currently a sergeant with the San Francisco Police Department. He lives in the Bay Area with his wife and daughters.

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Chapter 1: 27 Things Cops Know About Shots Fired

1. Some handguns, especially the higher quality models, will fire underwater. The range will be greatly diminished but they'll still be deadly up close. You keep this in mind in case you ever find yourself in a swimming pool or creek engaging an armed suspect. Your gun may work just fine in the drink. But then again, the suspect's might too.

2. When you approach someone on the street to talk to them and they turn their right side away from you, it sets you on high alert. That's because it's human nature for suspects carrying concealed firearms to turn their gun side (which is more often than not their right side) away from the police. This is not normal behavior for law-abiding people, who tend to talk to you face to face. You also want to watch the style and manner of dress of the people you approach. Criminals carrying concealed weapons often wear baggy untucked shirts or have their coats partially unbuttoned in winter, so they can have ready access to their weapon. They also like to keep their gun hand tight against their body as they walk in order to secure it, and, because their gun shifts position as they move, they make a series of sometimes subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle pats, taps, and tugs to ensure the firearm is still in place. These are known as "gun retention movements" in police parlance, a phrase you want to include in the report when you make a firearm arrest.

3. If you're trying to help a seriously injured gunshot victim and hear his ragged breathing, it probably isn't breathing at all. It's what's known as agonal respirations, the hard rattle in the throat immediately preceding death. You still do what you can for them. You try to staunch the bleeding. You start CPR. But they're already well on their way to the next world. Your life-saving efforts aren't altogether futile, but only because it's better to be doing something, like chest compressions, than just sitting there watching them die.

4. It will go against your natural instincts to fire your weapon through a solid surface in order to hit your target, but if it comes down to it, you can effectively shoot outgoing rounds from a seated position through your own squad car windshield with a minimum of glass spray. However, if you are fired upon through the same windshield, the glass blowback will cut your eyes and face and the trajectory of the incoming rounds won't lose any of their accuracy.

5. Shootings, particularly those that are gang-related, set into motion a wearying circle of retaliatory violence. The reports of shots fired keep pouring in all over the district, everyone's out, everyone's settling scores and as a cop, all you can do is investigate each one to the best of your ability, scramble to keep up and pray for rain. You know that while some shooting victims are innocents caught in the crossfire, many are career criminals who get shot because of some drug or gang-related activity they indulged in. That's why you pat them down for weapons, even if they're on a stretcher moaning in pain. You might find the gun they returned fire with. Nobody's your friend out there and today's victim is often tomorrow's suspect.

6. A handgun is the great equalizer in a fight. If you're armed, you don't need determination or training to prevail. You don't need courage or physical strength or fortitude. All you need is a trigger finger and the ability to exert around eight pounds of pressure with it. That's why the best cops are the ones who don't get overly confident when taking on suspects of small stature, or guys who don't look like much. If they have a gun, they can end you no matter what your mile-and-a-half time is or how much you can bench-press.

7. Shotguns are heavy, especially if you have nothing to brace them on. It's enervating to hold them level at a target for an extended period of time. You want to lower the weapon mid-crisis and rest your leaden shoulders but then you'll feel like a wimp and a bad guy might riddle you with bullets. You just hope the situation resolves itself before your arms drop the hell off your torso.

26. Pre-Columbine, the police response to an active shooter (i.e. a gunman who is in the process of killing people) was to hold the perimeter and wait for the Tactical squad to enter with their long guns and ballistic shields. Active street cops resented these regulations, because they wanted to get in there and do their job. There was no time to wait for Tactical. Columbine showed they were right. The longer you wait, the worse it gets, because the active shooter probably has no expectation of going home alive and he is in a person-rich environment. So now police departments have completely revamped their approach. Now as a patrol cop, you and whomever you can round up go in right away with the mission of locating, isolating, and engaging

the shooter. This means listening for the sounds of gunshots. This means stepping over the dead and ignoring the wounded. Until the shooter is neutralized, nothing else matters.

27. Once in a while, even with the deep-rooted cynicism that comes with the job, you'll get a casualty so raw that it gives you a moment of pause. Like a seven-year-old girl who is struck by stray gunfire while playing outside her house and who dies at the scene in front of her family. One minute she is skipping rope. The next, she's gone. And you read the rest of the news headlines that day. The government is unveiling a new food pyramid, which recommends one more serving of vegetables and one fewer of grains, and the price of gas is up three cents and Paris Hilton has a new fragrance out. And it all seems so stupid and petty. And no, the whole world doesn't come to a grinding halt just because a little girl is murdered on some corner in some city in America. But maybe, just for a little while, it should.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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