

TALK AROUND TOWN

When looking bad looks bad

The appearance of impropriety is just as damaging as actual impropriety.

That was one of the first things we were taught in journalism school — a lesson about conflicts of interest, allowing yourself to get too close to sources or allowing personal beliefs drive your reporting.

In other words, if it looks like you did something unethical or improper, it's just as bad as if you actually did it because it erodes your readers' trust in your work.



PETER J. WASSON

That same lesson can be applied to many other professions — police, for example.

In today's edition, you likely read about the Ashland County Jail administrator's resignation, which followed our coverage of his late-night crash a couple of weeks ago.

The problem wasn't the crash itself. Had the administrator, Kyle Cadotte, stayed at the scene of the 3 a.m. crash and taken his lumps, no matter what they might have been, he would almost certainly still have his job. Generally speaking, courts have ruled that in Wisconsin, even police officers can't be fired for getting a drunken-driving citation — and to be clear, even a citation wasn't guaranteed because police reports said alcohol was a suspected factor in Cadotte's crash, but stopped short of accusing him of drunken driving.

The problem was Cadotte's behavior after the crash — leaving the scene, refusing an officer's request that he return and sending his father to check on his truck, according to police reports — and

then his department's behavior after that.

Those factors led many readers to conclude, accurately or not, that Cadotte had been drinking and to question whether he was dodging consequences or getting favorable treatment from a fellow officer.

In the police reports, there is no evidence of the latter. The Bayfield County deputy at the scene did the same thing that any deputy would do at any crash scene.

But remember where this conversation began: If it looks like you did something wrong, it's just as bad as if you did because it erodes people's trust in you and the institution you represent.

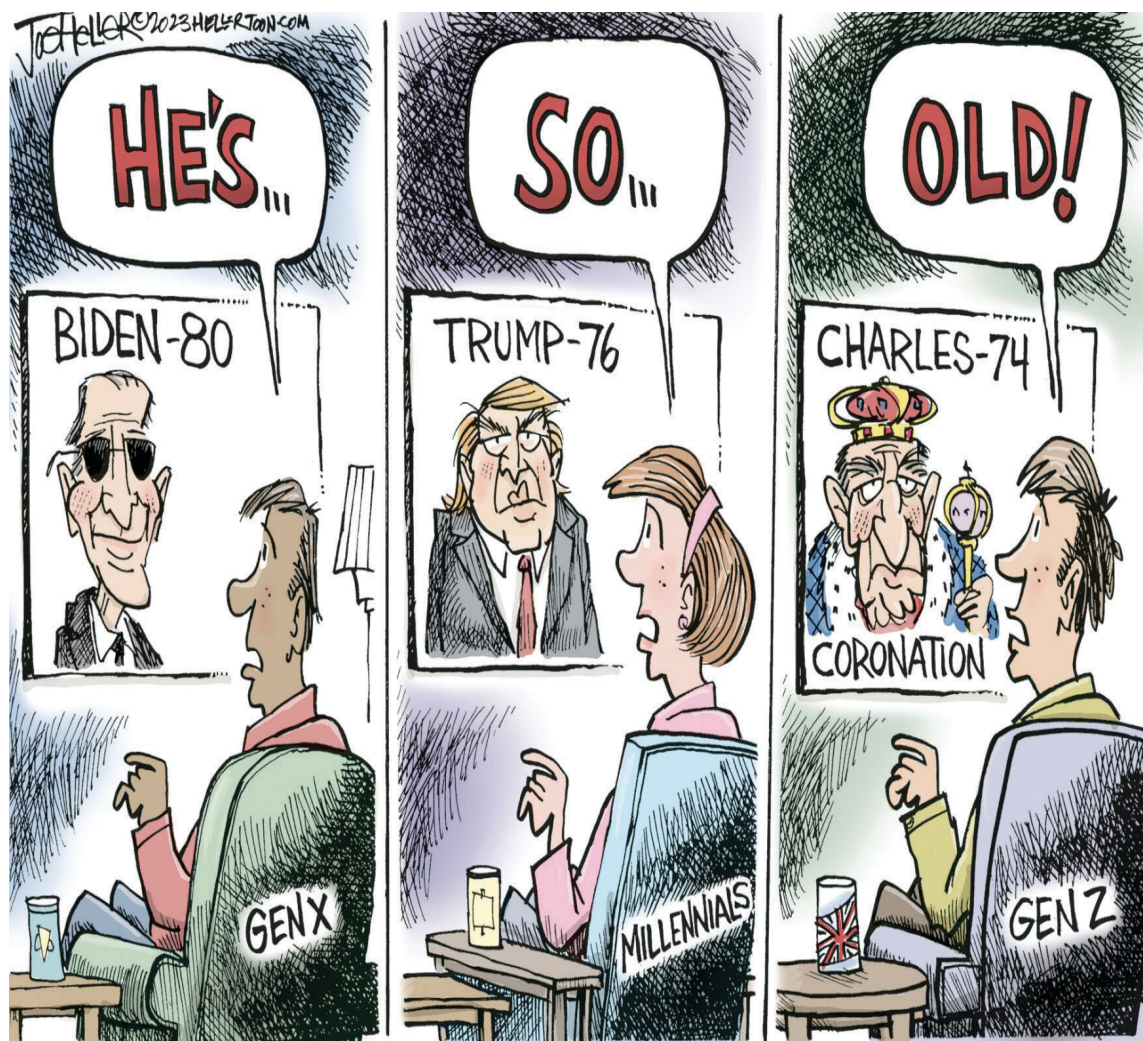
The institution in this case is the Ashland County Sheriff's Department — which allowed Cadotte to remain on the job for a week after his crash and only suspended him after the Daily Press published a story about the wreck.

Many readers concluded on social media that had the story not been published, the entire matter would have been kept quiet — demonstrating that erosion of trust in the institution of the Sheriff's Department.

There's no way of knowing how this all would have played out had Cadotte stayed at the scene and accepted the consequences of his crash. His poor judgement not only ended his career but also tarnished a department that already was under scrutiny.

Because the appearance of impropriety is as damaging as actual impropriety.

Peter J. Wasson is managing editor of the Ashland Daily Press.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Cadotte tarnishes entire department

EDITOR: This letter is in response to the article that appeared in the April 25 newspaper regarding Ashland County Jail Administrator Kyle Cadotte's crash.

I cannot understand how some people are not held accountable for their actions for no other reason than their name, where they work or, of course, who they know.

Is there anyone who can explain to me exactly why he was not given a sobriety test? Better yet, why was he allowed to leave the scene? And since when can any of us just leave the scene?

I was in a similar situation in December of 2021, and this is why Cadotte's situation bothers me so deeply. I was treated fairly, but certainly was not allowed to call the shots.

This incident was handled poorly as any intelligent person can plainly see. This situation will bring shame, distrust and embarrassment that the sheriff's department doesn't need any more of.

There are many good men and woman at the sheriff's department, but when things like this happen, it shadows the entire institution.

A person might also

question Sheriff Zupke's recent decisions. Seems most of what's been happening lately is simple chaos.

In closing I would like to say, "Mr. Cadotte, respect your badge and the uniform you wear and take responsibility for the very situation you created. Take your punishment like the rest of us have to.

Annette Seemuth,
Ashland

What do you think?

Email Letters to the Editor to pwasson@ashlanddailypress.net



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122 W. Third Street,
Ashland, WI 54806
(715) 682-2313; fax (715) 718-6423

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NEWS STAFF

Peter J. Wasson, Managing Editor
pwasson@ashlanddailypress.net
715-718-6241
Tom Stankard, reporter
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net
Office: 715-718-6480
Cell: 248-930-8687

ADVERTISING STAFF

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