

## Use the *emotions* force

**P**erhaps the worst news to tell someone is that of an unexpected death, and I learned it's also the worst time to make quick assumptions about how close someone was to the deceased.

When someone at my high school died, in pursuit of information, I broke the news to a friend who also knew the deceased. Unfortunately, I really underestimated how close the two were.

Based on my one experience, I am terrified of the next time I'll have to do something like that. Even if I had known how close my friend had been to the deceased, it still takes a pretty high emotional intelligence quotient to find the right words when delivering the news. Or maybe a lot of training. But who needs those skills that much?

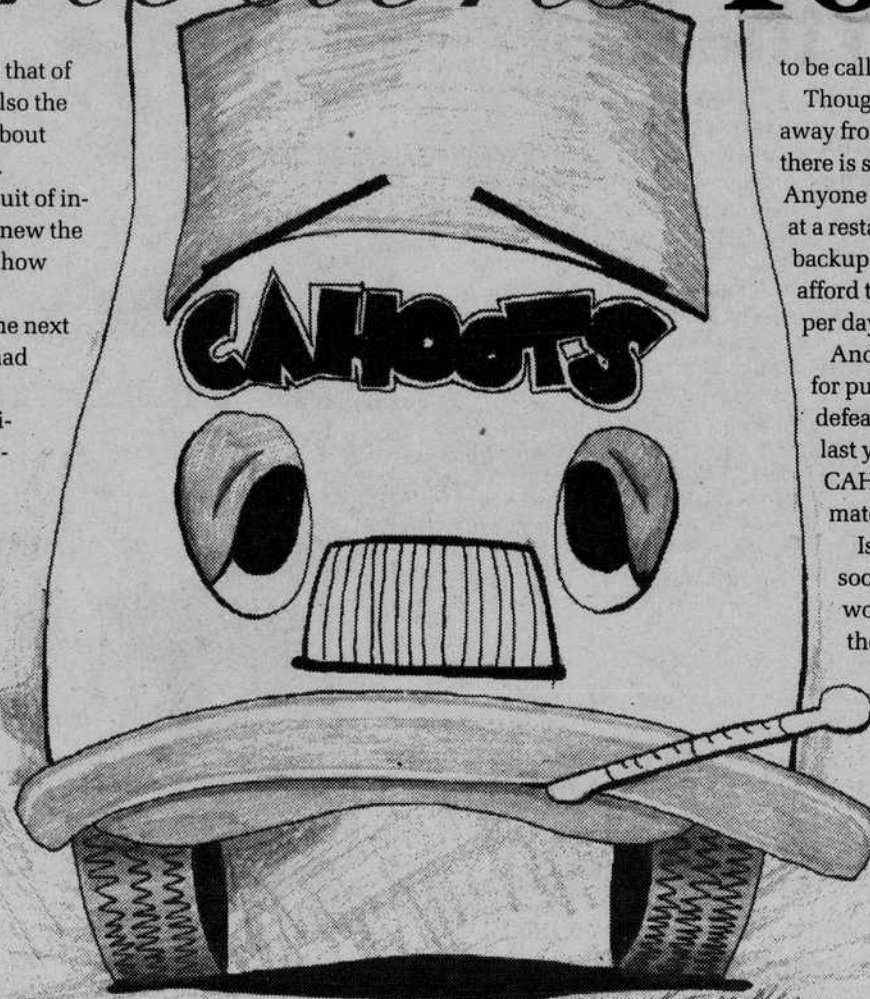
Police officers? They seem to get a lot of society's unpleasant tasks. Can we expect them to do other jobs with the same proficiency as their primary one of keeping society peaceful? Maybe not. The Eugene Police Department has recognized that some jobs are better left to experts. So in 1989, they relinquished certain tasks by sponsoring a program called CAHOOTS.

As acronyms go, it's unusual to find one that long that actually makes sense. "Crisis Assistance — Helping Out On The Streets," however, pretty much sums up what they do. And as the initials imply, it is an example of a community organization, White Bird, collaborating with the Eugene police.

"Community policing" uses ways of dealing with problems that end up in the police department's lap, but in ways that aren't traditional to law enforcement," CAHOOTS coordinator David Zeiss said. Those problems include dealing with public drunkenness, checking the welfare of shut-ins and delivering really bad news.

You may have seen the CAHOOTS van driving around Eugene. It's big, white and obvious. Other than that, though, it is easy to have never heard of CAHOOTS.

"We don't advertise very much," Zeiss said. "Most of the time that we operate, we're already engaged." So there isn't any need for more "business." But it is an important



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and unique service available in Eugene. So, from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m., CAHOOTS answers calls that the police feel a counselor is better suited to handle (generally, these are a result of folks who call either 911 or, more appropriately, 682-5111).

I have to admire the program for taking on some really depressing tasks, especially the death notifications. "When a death occurs and it's necessary to notify family members ... they're not enjoyable to do. But we think we do a good job of caring for people who receive the news of those circumstances," Zeiss said. Again, it's a job traditionally associated with police, but isn't it better to send someone who is both trained in counseling and not going

to be called away to a public safety emergency?

Though the CAHOOTS van is less likely to be called away from a location for a riot, murder or traffic accident, there is still the ever-present pressure of another dispatch. Anyone who has been a single parent or the only manager at a restaurant knows the problems of not having any backup. There is just one CAHOOTS van, and it can only afford to operate half-time, despite an average of 12 calls per day.

And here we see the problem with declining support for public services funded through taxes. When voters defeated the Lane County public-safety ballot measure last year, money that could have supported a second CAHOOTS unit running an overlapping shift never materialized.

Is CAHOOTS the feel-good but dying dream of a society that steadily declines in support of public works? I hope not. Funding people to do what they're good at, what their trained for and what they want to do will inevitably be much more effective than simply delegating the task to people who might not fit any of those criteria.

Although the CAHOOTS employees currently have plenty to do, I think it's important that more people in Eugene know about this. For everyone, it is a program that might be personally useful in a future crisis, and it might help voters reconsider the next time public-safety tax measures come up.

For students, most of whom will leave Eugene eventually, it is a great model for other cities,

many of which have no such program. "It was certainly unique when we designed it. We didn't have any models," Zeiss said. Now that Eugene and White Bird have done the hard work, "selling" the program to other localities won't be as difficult, and students are the ideal population to spread the idea.

The next time you need to break some bad news, consider how much folks who have to learn from a stranger will benefit from being told by a professional.

Jonathan Gruber is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached via e-mail jgruber@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

### WORLD WIDE WHAT

#### Do you think the Student Senate's passing of a pledge for diversity and stance against bigotry is in conflict with First Amendment rights?

on the web  
[www.dailyemerald.com](http://www.dailyemerald.com)



“I think people should be respectful of others regardless of color.”

Leah Wyatt  
 freshman  
 pre-journalism



“As long as the pledge is confined to the Student Senate expressing its opinion, the pledge does not conflict with First Amendment rights.”

Laura Close  
 sophomore  
 political science



“It's sad that we have to [have a] petition to be aware of racism. It should be a given. The UO should be more aware.”

Chris Hsu  
 senior  
 fine arts



“It's still covering up issues that are ugly. It doesn't help our close-minded ideas.”

Steven Lopez  
 senior  
 visual design