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The Power of Evil

There is a line between good and evil and "that line is movable, good people [can] be seduced across that line." This quote is from a Ted Talk titled "The Psychology of Evil" presented by Dr. Philip Zimbardo. He discusses how evil can begin with "bad barrels" which are negative social situations and "bad barrel makers" who are the people in power who create bad situations that exacerbate bad apples. Bad apples are the few members of a group who go against what a group stands for. For example, the bad apple scenario takes place in the documentary, *The Seven Five*, directed by Tiller Russell. *The Seven Five* depicts former NYPD officer Michael Dowd and his partner's long list of crimes, including distributing cocaine while on the job from the 1980s to the early 1990s. This documentary exemplifies Dr. Zimbardo's theories and if he were to watch, *The Seven Five*, he would unquestionably comment on how Mike's power grew to evil, the 15-volt moments that occur in the movie, and the way the system was able to change the officer's morals from good to evil.

Throughout the documentary, the audience can watch the way Mike's evil grew within him as his feeling of power grew. Mike's first taste of what it is like to be a corrupt officer was when he pulled over a Puerto Rican man riding a bike and tricked him into giving Mike a few hundred dollars. However, this was only the beginning for Mike as throughout the following

years his crimes became more serious. From robberies of houses to the stealing of cocaine and drug money from coke houses, it seems as though Mike could never get enough power. This is an example of Dr. Zimbardo's theory that evil is the exercise of power to intentionally hurt others. As Mike became connected with multiple gang leaders that distribute cocaine, his power grew, and therefore so did his evilness. Mike didn't care that what he was doing was creating a horrible reputation for his precinct, which also relates to Dr. Zimbardo's mention of intentionally hurting others. The way evilness grew within Mike is a prime example of the ideas expressed in Dr. Zimbardo's Ted Talk.

Dr. Zimbardo's idea of the 15-volt moment also occurs multiple times in *The Seven Five*. The 15-volt moment is essentially when a person "crosses the line from good to evil." The first occurrence in the documentary of this happening is when Mike accepts the money from the Puerto Rican man he pulled over for no reason. Dr. Zimbardo would see this as Mike's 15-volt moment because although it was a much smaller offence compared to what Mike would do in the future, it was the stepping stone to Mike becoming evil. Another example of a 15-volt moment occurring in the film is when Mike gives Kenny a \$100 bill that Mike stole from a house that had called for police assistance. Initially, Kenny debates whether to accept the money, and it sits in his locker for days until he finally takes it. Dr. Zimbardo would consider Kenny's 15-volt moment to be when he finally decides to take the money and cross the line from good to evil. As the Ted Talk stated, "all evil starts with 15-volts", which couldn't be any more true in the case of *The Seven Five*, as the audience watches Mike and Kenny's crimes unfold.

The third topic Dr. Zimbardo would comment on when watching *The Seven Five* would be how the system was able to corrupt the officer's morals and turn them from good to bad cops.

Mike had created a system of corruption that he used to his advantage when getting Kenny to join him in being a corrupt cop. The Ted Talk can be connected to this happening through a quote from Dr. Zimbardo, stating, "the system creates the situation that corrupts the individual." The system was the corruption that Mike and others had created within precinct 75, the situation was the pressure that Mike puts on Kenny to join him as his partner, and the corruption of the individual is Kenny becoming a criminal and committing crimes just as Mike does. As the system grew, Mike began to corrupt more officers such as Chicky and Walter, who assisted Mike and Kenny in the robbery of a coke house. Dr. Zimbardo would comment on the power of Mike's system and his role in being a "bad barrel maker," leading to many more bad apples.

Dr. Zimbardo would be fascinated by the level of power and evilness that cops such as Mike possessed and craved. He would want to comment on the ways Mike exercised his power as evil and used it to intentionally and unintentionally hurt others. Zimbardo would also analyze the critical 15-volt moments that occur in the documentary and discuss how these moments changed the men from regular cops to corrupt ones. Lastly, Zimbardo would examine the ways precinct 75 had created a corrupt business using his "bad apple" theory. There is undoubtedly a line between good, and evil and unfortunately Mike and some of his fellow officers in *The Seven Five* crossed that line and didn't cross back over until it was too late.