

**The Bill Blackwood
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Police and Community Oriented Policing

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ABSTRACT

Declining trust and inadequate communication between law enforcement and the general public gives an unfavorable perception of police within their communities. This leads to a decrease in crime reporting and cooperation. Community policing proactively addresses public safety issues and repairs this lack of trust by promoting strategies that support the use of partnerships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. It opens the door to a more transparent relationship and assists in accomplishing crime reduction across the board. Police departments should promote community-oriented policing as a way to foster positive partnerships with their communities.

Community policing is built on relationships. To succeed, it is important for both the community and officers to view this as a tool to accomplish their mutual goal – a safer community to live and work in. The segments of community policing include a beat style patrol. Officers should walk, stop and talk to the members of the community. Community involvement programs such as a neighborhood watch are another part of community policing. Through these programs, the community gets a sense of ownership, and departments' and citizens' partner to identify high crime areas and solve problems collectively. Finally, accurate representation in hiring is necessary for community policing to be effective. The officers' demographics should mirror the communities' to increase effective communication and comfort level in interactions.

To be effective, officers must perceive this program as helpful and necessary, not as a soft on crime approach. Community policing should never take the emphasis off of officer safety and training. Finally, complete implementation of community policing is necessary. Partial implementation is ineffective.

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INTRODUCTION

The profession of being a police officer has evolved over the past 20 years from an enforcement based style of policing into a community oriented based style of policing. Although the idea of community policing was introduced more than 150 years ago, some departments have not fully grasped this concept and put it into practice on a daily basis. It is important to clearly define the true definition of community policing. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (2014), "Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and the fear of crime" (p. 1). When departments effectively incorporate community style policing, the public perception of their legitimacy increases. Police legitimacy is important to consider because of the importance of police trying to maximize their fairness. A growing body of research suggests that when citizens see the police as more legitimate, they are more likely to comply with police directives and the law ("What is community policing," n.d.). Considering the current climate in which law enforcement is operating, it is more important than ever for agencies across the country to engage the positive partnership espoused by community policing within their respective communities.

The age of technology has greatly impacted how police departments give and receive information, which has played a detrimental role in how the general public views and forms opinions on law enforcement as a whole. The information that is gained at such a rapid pace and the sometimes skewed views of this information has become

paramount as to how the community perceives police departments. However, this technology allows departments to have the opportunity to move toward greater transparency in their interactions with the public which can have positive impacts and contribute to the community style of policing.

Bertus Ferreira defines community policing as “a philosophy of full service personalized policing, where the same officer patrols and works in the same area on a permanent basis, from a decentralized place, working in a proactive partnership with citizens to identify and solve problems” (Ferreira, 1996, para. 8). Several different programs have been derived from the community oriented policing theory. Police departments should promote community oriented policing as a way to foster positive partnerships with their communities.

POSITION

Police and citizens often come into contact with each other for reasons other than criminal investigation. In addition to enforcing criminal law, police officers often participate in other forms of community service such as providing information or assistance. In many communities, police officers network to establish partnerships between residents and the law enforcement agency to reduce crime through problem solving strategies and police community partnerships. There are several different elements included in community policing. These include relying on community based crime prevention by introducing education, neighborhood crime watch, and a variety of other techniques in lieu of relying strictly on police patrols.

The benefits of this particular style of policing are that it increases officer accountability to the citizens they serve. This method of policing also focuses on the

unification of the police and the community they serve by producing a partnership that is based on trust, reducing crime, violence, and fear in the communities across America. One such aspect of community policing is assigning officers to a particular beat. This method allows them to get to know the geographical location in which they are working while fostering relationships with members of that community. This provides officers the latitude to rely on members of that community to help in identifying problem areas and also gives the officer and the resident a sense of ownership in their community.

Many agencies in larger congested cities have focused on this particular “beat style” policing process, a process in which agencies assign the officer to a particular beat on a foot patrol. Officers should utilize a “walk, stop, and talk” philosophy in their beat patrol. This theory allows the officers to be seen as personable to the citizens they serve instead of being seen as just a person who responds in a time of need. Under this beat philosophy, the “walk” allows the officer to be more visible by actually placing him on foot in the community. The “stop” part of this philosophy allows the officer to stop and talk to citizens and gives officers a chance to implement the third phase of this philosophy which is the “talk” part. The talking part of this philosophy is possibly the most important part of this theory because it allows the officers to actually have face-to-face contact and communication with the citizens. The citizens can get to know the officer on a more personal basis which allows a “trust” factor to be built. This style of policing also allows that officer to target hot spots for crime and develop patrol strategies in partnership with members of that specific geographical area to deal with the types of crime that are being experienced in that particular beat (Watson, Stone, & DeLuca, 1998).

Talking, and the establishment of trust, focuses on a proactive style of policing instead of a reactive style of policing, allowing the officer and community to help prevent the crime before it actually happens. This face-to-face style of policing helps build trust and relationships between police and respective members of the community. This method helps set goals through partnerships with those members of the communities, thereby improving the quality of life in that particular area.

Building relationships with members of a particular community or geographical location within a community is key to crime prevention. Relationships are built on trust and the general distrust of the police, especially in recent times, is an obstacle to overcome when it comes to effective policing. Allowing the citizens in a particular geographical location to know an officer by name and by sight will enable those individuals to develop a sense of trust with police personnel. This will offer citizens the opportunity to share information with particular officers and feel comfortable in sharing their ideas and concerns with officers, thus fostering a good partnership in the overall goal of preventing and solving crime in that area. It also allows the inclusion of problem solving as an integral part of officers' duties instead of focusing on the individual crime and call for service. The officers and community are more able to effectively communicate and identify the underlying problems, crime, and calls for service (Goldstein, 1990). This particular style of policing allows officers in a specific geographical location to gather local knowledge and information from community members in that area and then partner with those members to effectively combat crime.

Decreased complaints on officers is also a benefit of this particular style of policing. Community members in a specific geographical location have been able to

relate to a particular officer, and there is a relationship built with that officer through a partnership. The trust factor and relationship that is established between that officer and his location or beat patrol allows the community to get to know the officer better and, therefore, learn to effectively communicate with that officer, thus resulting in fewer complaints. That officer is seen as a person instead of a paramilitary style officer who is only there to arrest someone.

Neighborhood watch programs are also an effective program that has resulted in crime prevention in particular areas within communities. Neighborhood watch programs are a direct result of community based policing and became popular in the 1970's and 80's (Wihbey, 2012). These particular programs allowed police and community members to organize and participate in meetings to identify underlying criminal activity and high crime areas. It also allowed the citizens to participate in patrolling as part of an "observe and report" style of community policing. Research has shown that by the year 2008, communities that had implemented these neighborhood watch programs experienced a significant reduction in crime in their area. An article posted in 2008 by the National Crime Prevention Council, showed that 36 studies of neighborhood crime watch programs were evaluated. Of those 36 studies, 18 of them qualified for the more stringent analysis. Research showed that 19 of the 36 demonstrated positive effects with a 9 percent reduction of crime in a particular area. Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington (2008) stated, "Among the 18 studies included in the analysis, 78 percent experienced positive effects. The analysis showed that neighborhood watch was associated with a relative reduction in crime of about 16 percent" (Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington, 2008, p. 34).

In community oriented policing, police hiring practices should reflect the accurate representations of racial diversity across the board with regard to demographics. The demographic of departments should match the demographic makeup of the city in general. For example, a neighborhood or community with a high population of African Americans should put an emphasis on hiring African American officers and assigning them to that area.

Gender based hiring should also play an important role in the makeup of a department in relation to community oriented policing. A female sexual assault victim will most likely feel more comfortable talking with a female officer versus a male officer. If departments do not have adequate female representation within the department, it limits the department from being effective when it comes to dealing with specific types of crimes. The same argument can be made for a high populous of Hispanic, Caucasian, and many other different ethnicities.

Language barriers are also an inhibitor when it comes to officers being able to effectively communicate and engage the community. Cities with a high Hispanic population should be hiring bi-lingual officers to patrol those particular areas of the city and also in the dispatch functions within the department. This will allow the language barrier gap to be closed so that officers and citizens can effectively communicate with each other and adequately problem solve through collaboration.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

This particular style of policing can be detrimental to the morale of departments. Street level officers may view it as a “politically correct” way of policing. They also have been known to see it and be perceived as being soft on crime. The federal grant

programs associated with this particular style of policing gives departments the ability to hire more officers. However, some officers just simply see this as a waste of time and just another way of spending the federally obtained grant money. Officers also sometimes view this as turning them into social workers instead of crime fighters. On a larger scale, officers and departments have also facilitated the thought that this is a politician's political agenda and resume builder not only on a federal level but on a local level as well.

However, the purpose of these programs is not simply to turn officers into social workers but to transform communities into safer places to live, work, and reduce crime through partnerships with the community. This particular style of policing is not meant to replace traditional style policing but simply to enhance and compliment the traditional style. Furthermore, it is not meant to transform officers into social workers but to assist them in affecting change in the communities they serve by allowing them to build partnerships with those particular communities in which they live. Officers have been portrayed through community policing efforts in the media depictions pushing a child on a swing or holding hands with a small child eating an ice cream cone.

In reality, the goal of community policing is just that, to allow the public to see the officer as a tool in their bag helping them to better promote their communities and make that community a safer place to live and work. By seeing depictions of officers as real people who care about others and take the time to "walk, stop and talk", citizens are more likely to be willing to trust that officer. These efforts will lead to building personal relationships between the public and police departments. Community policing simply gives the department a facelift that results in being seen as human, caring, concerned,

and also proactive. This particular method is shown to work better, and the image portrayed is often more beneficial than being seen as reactive and being seen only as a man with a badge and a gun.

However, many officers still fail to grasp the concept of community oriented policing. They see departments allocating resources such as manpower to programs which they view as not beneficial. Officers sometimes perceive these programs as taking away from the traditional style of policing and leaving them short on manpower to adequately cover areas of concern. This can lead to fatigue of the officer which, in turn, becomes a safety issue. Being asked to work overtime in a particular shift or beat can sometimes put officers in danger by the long hours they are required to work due to inadequately staffed departments. Officers perceive this allocation of personnel to specific crime programs instead of being on beat patrol as handcuffing them in their duties and putting their lives at risk by requiring them to work extra shifts or longer hours.

The reality of departments being inadequately staffed is simply poor leadership instead of departments' lack of concern for the staff. Federal grants that are obtained to hire two new officers and those officers being assigned to a community based program should only be feasible if the department has enough coverage to adequately cover their prospective shifts and maintain the goal of reducing crime. Department heads should first make sure that officer safety is a priority and allow officers the time off they deserve.

Officer safety should never be an afterthought to community policing. Training in the basic police academy and continuing training on officer safety should always be a

priority within departments and a clear vision of this should be implemented from the top down. Administration should never lose focus on what is the most important when it comes to policing. The citizen's right to be protected, along with their property, and officer safety are first and foremost. These two particular things should never be put on hold to expedite someone's political agenda. Improper staffing patterns are generally the culprits to the increased overtime causing officer safety issues and it is not the community oriented policing method. The method of community policing should be implemented department wide and across the board with a clear vision and in conjunction with continuing training on officer safety. Although community oriented policing has been around for several years, some departments have failed to adopt this style of policing across the board. Research has shown that partial or "half way" adopting this practice is not beneficial to the community and departments as a whole (Borrello,1998).

RECOMMENDATION

Community oriented policing is a great tool to build and gain the trust in communities across the state. Departments should utilize this method of policing to adequately provide service to their communities and build partnerships with those in the communities to suppress and deter crime. According to Sgt. Steven L. Rogers (1998), of Nutley (N.J.) Police Department, departments that implement community policing throughout the police department stand a better chance of being successful with this program. Once members of each department buy into the method of community policing, not as the only way, but as a tool in conjunction with traditional style policing, relationships can be built with the community members where they serve. Doing so will

enable the officers and departments to formulate plans that will allow them to be successful in their efforts to combat crime. These partnerships built with the community are built on trust and can only help improve community relations with the department.

Neighborhood crime watch programs have been shown to reduce crime in targeted areas (Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington, 2008). Beat patrols are also a good way of building relationships with the community as well. Officers assigned to a particular area can have the opportunity to build partnerships with members of that geographical location as well as identify target areas of high crime. This opportunity for officers to build that trust with the community in which they serve allows an open avenue of communication with those community members which will give them a sense of ownership in their own communities. Building these relationships with those community members can also decrease complaints against police personnel and individual officers as well.

Officers sometimes experience apprehension when it comes to community policing due to the perception of them being seen soft on crime. This attitude sometimes unfortunately bleeds over into a more relaxed attitude of policing and thus puts the officers at risk for potential officer safety issues. Departments should continue to train officers in officer safety by scheduling the necessary time away from the job and provide them mandatory training in continued officer safety. Training for officer safety should never stop and should be a continued practice regardless of whether departments implement community oriented policing or not. Cross training officers in the academy in several different areas of policing has been the status quo for years and

implementing the community oriented policing method in the basic academy should be no different.

As today's world becomes more evolved with information being more rapidly and readily available, police departments across the country have been placed under a microscope. Departments have implemented community oriented policing since its inception but many departments have still yet to fully adopt this method across the board. Leaders from the chief down should send a message and make this a mandatory part of their department training while implementing strategies as well as training for officers so that this can be successfully accomplished. From hiring practices to beat patrols, to neighborhood crime programs, these methods when exercised in their entirety can effectively combat crime and build relationships with communities across the nation.

A new face of law enforcement is needed in light of the most recent times so that people can better understand what officers do and how they operate. It should not be considered a replacement for traditional style policing but should instead be seen as a form of communication and cooperation between police departments and communities throughout the country.

Police departments are a business. They are a business that provides community service. Some departments have lost focus on this. Lemonis (2013), a well-known entrepreneur, always focuses on three things: people, process, and product. By implementing community oriented policing, departments can focus on the people by hiring quality officers and placing them into positions where they can build those partnerships with the community. They can also focus on the process of implementing

the community oriented style policing across the board by providing training to their officers and stressing the importance of a sense of ownership in the community, not only through crime reduction but also relationships with those they serve. Lastly, consider the product, which results from the way departments serve their citizens by the combination of the first two: people and process. Once the right people are hired and retained and the process in which they police is executed, the product should be a successful partnership between community and police departments across the country. Police departments should promote community oriented policing as a way to foster positive partnerships with their communities.

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