

**The Bill Blackwood
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**Surveys: Law Enforcement Administrators
New Approach to Community Police Relations**

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ABSTRACT

Corporate America has invested a great deal of time and effort to assure first time customers become returning customers. One major component corporate America has employed and has put emphasis on is satisfaction surveys. Survey information or feedback gives business owners and administrators the ability to gauge customer satisfaction based on surveys. The information resulting from the surveys allow business owners or administrators to make sure their businesses are headed in the right direction. Although police departments and sheriff's offices are not selling a product, interactions with law enforcement officers should be measured and that data interpreted. Law enforcement agencies should model their customer service approach in the same manner as corporate America does. Utilizing surveys after citizen interactions, provides feedback to police administrators to identify potential police misconduct and assists in strengthen ties with the community as whole.

Several incidents during 2014 through 2015 where police actions were scrutinized by the media have made law enforcement offices more accountable for their actions. Tragically those actions ultimately resulted in the deaths of the citizens, which encountered police. The jurisdictions impacted were immediately scrutinized for the action of one officer. Surveys created to gauge the citizens' satisfaction based on the interaction with the officer would be unbiased feedback. Surveys are an excellent tool in which law enforcement administrators can gauge and establish a consensus from the community they are serving specifically based upon the interaction between the police officer and citizen.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate America maintains constant communication with customers with the desire of ensuring repeat business and to establish patron loyalty. The use of satisfactory surveys allows for immediate feedback and provides an opportunity to quickly address and correct mistakes. Law enforcement agencies should model their customer service approach in the same manner as corporate America. Satisfactory surveys from citizens about their encounters with the law enforcement would give immediate feedback to police administrators and assist in identifying key areas where potential police misconduct may exist. It is common in the private sector for the sales person to provide a patron a receipt upon completion of a transaction. The sales person/cashier then encourages the customer to take a survey on the web site printed on the receipt. Upon completion of the survey, the citizen often receives a “freebie” which promotes them to participate. In this case, once a citizen completes a report, the officer would provide a case card to the citizen with a case number and attached to the case card would be the website where the citizen would take a survey. When speaking in terms of what should be asked on this survey, a variety of questions arise, but by far, the most important would be if whether or not the officer was professional during the interaction, whether the citizen was satisfied by the manner in which the officer conducted himself, and whether they were content with the result. Also during this survey, another question would be asked and that is if the citizen wished to be contacted concerning the interaction.

The public has started to become more concerned with law enforcement conduct due to incidents from Ferguson, Missouri, North Charleston and Waller County, Texas.

The public's attitude has a cause for concern due to what was perceived as unfair encounters with those entrusted to protect the community. The law enforcement agency normally does not take into account the public's perception of police tactics and policies; however, public opinion should matter and should play a key role in the way departments interact with the community. Therefore, utilizing surveys and using the feedback to gauge the community's temper would be extremely beneficial.

Proper evaluation of citizen beliefs in Ferguson could have prevented the civil unrest heard throughout the country that occurred following each incident. On August 9, 2014, Officer Darren Wilson of the Ferguson Police Department, while responding to a possible robbery in progress, observed two Black males walking in the middle of the street (Clarke & Lett, 2014). Officer Wilson ordered the two males to move onto the sidewalk for their safety. One of the males, later identified to be Michael Brown, responded with an expletive and Officer Wilson and Brown engaged in a verbal and physical altercation. Brown attacked Officer Wilson while he was still in his patrol vehicle, and within minutes, Officer Wilson discharged his weapon, killing Michael Brown (Clarke & Lett, 2014). Law enforcement personnel see this incident one way, and the public sees this type of behavior in a different light. For the law enforcement officer, the most important thing is to make it home at the end of a shift, and since Mr. Brown was such a large person and was attacking Officer Wilson while still inside of his car, Officer Wilson thought the only way out was to discharge his weapon and stop the threat. On the other hand, as a community member or activist, one only sees a Black man being murdered by a White man. This is a conversation which can go either way, depending on the audience.

Approximately eight months later, on April 4, 2015 Officer Michael Slager of the North Charleston Police Department in South Carolina conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle and made contact with Walter Scott. Although Scott did not know the reason he was stopped, Scott was aware that he had a warrant for his arrest for failure to pay child support. Scott began to evade from the scene, and Officer Slager drew his weapon and fired eight times, killing Scott. It was later learned and confirmed after the autopsy that Scott was shot in the back while running away. The entire incident was caught on video by an individual witness who was passing by and uploaded the video to multiple social media platforms (Hager, 2015). Since the use of cellular devices with exceptional cameras has skyrocketed, the instance where a witness captures police misconduct is at an all-time high. "By 2020, one telecommunications company estimates, 6.1 billion people will have phones with picture-taking capabilities" (Draper, 2018, para. 17). This is in combination from red light cameras, surveillance cameras, personal digital devices, cellular telephone, and even satellites.

Three months later, on July 20, 2015, Sandra Annette Bland was pulled over by Trooper Brian Encinia of the Texas Department of Public Safety for a minor traffic violation. During the traffic stop, Bland engaged in a verbal altercation with Trooper Encinia and was subsequently arrested. Later, she was transported to the Waller County Sheriff's Office for processing and booking into the jail. Within hours of being booked into jail, Bland hung herself in her cell, committing suicide (Sanchez, 2015).

All three incidents described caused outrage in their respective communities and made national headlines throughout the country. Incidents like these form public opinions, especially when several incidents occur within several months to years from

each other. The subsequent effect is that the relationship between law enforcement and the community rapidly deteriorates. All three law enforcement officers involved in the cases described were terminated from their positions but were not convicted of any criminal offense or civil rights violations within the judicial system. The end result is distrust for law enforcement because there is a disconnect between law enforcement and the community.

Law enforcement administrators have recognized the distrust from these incidents involving law enforcement officers and have begun measures to rectify them. McBride (2016) reported, "Police officers in southern Virginia pranked an unsuspecting driver with a cold treat on a hot July day." (para. 1). In Halifax, Virginia police administrators opted to strengthen community ties and ordered first line officers to learn a new approach in which drivers who exhibited good behaviors are rewarded with ice cream instead of citations (Hartman, 2016). Even (Draper, 2018) (Draper, 2018) (Draper, 2018) after rewarding the drivers who chose to be good drivers, the public began complaining that the officers were conducting traffic stops without probable cause and therefore violating their Civil Rights. Once people began complaining regarding their civil rights violations, these programs seized. In Kansas City, Missouri, a CBS Correspondent reported a story named, "On the road CBS Secret Santa" (Hartman, 2016). In this story, police officers delivered cash instead of tickets during traffic stops.

There are many stories similar to these throughout the United States, but even though police administrators are attempting to build relationships, it has resulted in the exact opposite. It is clear the intentions of the administrators was to attempt to win back

the community's trust, the effect is similar to placing a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. This action will only be viewed by the few motorists who were stopped and not generally noticed by the public at large.

Utilizing a tool which allows the public to weigh in on the effectiveness of services delivered by the police would have a much broader reach. Surveying the community will give an accurate assessment of law enforcement line officers from those in their community who interacted with the police daily. These instruments would allow the police supervisor to ask specific questions that target the effectiveness of officers' actions. It is known the public wants to speak and be heard by the police, which is why there are protests and demonstrations. Because of this, the public does not have confidence in their police officers. According to Jones (2015), "The actions of police in certain U.S. cities ... have recently come under scrutiny after Black men were killed while being apprehended by White police officers. These events likely contributed to the decline in confidence in police" (para. 4). It is alarming that most interactions that involve a Black officer killing a White citizen does not make the news, but when a White officer kills a Black man, it is national headline news. There are murders frequently in Harris County, Texas, and it is seen too often that only a story will become a headline when a White officer shoots a Black man. "Today more than ever, we must work together to reform our justice and law enforcement policies so that we may improve law enforcement's relationship with the community and ensure we prevent the next Ferguson" (Gravois, Ramirez, & Smith, 2015, para. 5).

In response to this perception and concern with the issue, United States Representative Marc Veasey (D-Fort Worth) and former Attorney General Eric Holder

joined together to explore solutions. Together, they created a program aimed at fixing community trust issues and building collaborative partnerships. Thanks to their efforts, “Fort Worth is one of six pilot sites chosen for the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, a Justice Department program to help fight crime and build trust between communities” (Gravois, Ramirez, & Smith, 2015, p. 1). While this program is a noble effort and has tremendous potential to decrease crime and engage the community, it lacks a component of allowing the community to voice their opinion. Recognizing the issue of distrust only solves a small portion of the problem. In order to be fully effective, agencies must seek feedback and allow its citizens to voice their opinions. To this end, law enforcement agencies should use surveys to reconnect with their communities.

POSITION

Many innovations in the public sector originally started as innovations in the business sector. Corporations and small businesses often need to be on the cutting edge to maintain profits, stay in business and have consumers return to repurchase their specific product. Many of the ideas used by corporate America are adopted, tweaked, and used by the city, state, and then even the federal government.

Using a business approach to conduct police service surveys is the best way to accomplish measuring and developing a model and approach. Businesses have long recognized the importance of utilizing consumer feedback to model their approach to deliver quality and excellent customer service. Law enforcement agencies would be well served to look to the business community and utilize the same approach. Cain (2014) stated, “Law enforcement agencies are no different than cutting edge

businesses; they must keep up with the times and mirror any practices that have been proven successful” (p. 2). There is no difference from private to the public sector. Both are businesses and strive to provide a good service and the most important aspect of all is that business becomes profitable.

It is the duty of law enforcement to interact and become a part of the community they serve, not to ignore them. Surveys help departments establish an open line of communication and identify specific issues prior to problems such as civil unrest and questionable integrity issues. An instrument such as a survey will assist to accomplish that goal by serving as an early key indicator of potential issues within the department and allow opportunities to identify potential training deficiencies needing to be addressed. A survey can be a benchmark of the community, which rates police officers’ demeanor and interaction with the public. “Police are judged more by what physicians might call their ‘bedside manner.’ Factors such as how willing they are to listen to people’s stories and show concern for their plight are very important, as are their politeness, helpfulness, and fairness” (Skogan, 2005, p. 310)

Simplicity is the goal for the community to feel at ease with this instrument and want to complete it. The average citizen would want to complete the survey as it allows their voice to be heard. “A community survey is a sound business approach to identifying a problem, and taking the correct business like action to address the problem” (Cain, 2014, p. 3). The satisfaction surveys encourages community participation for issues they found with law enforcement officers they interacted with.

COUNTER POSITION

Many law enforcement administrators are receptive to this type of tool to

establish communication with the community. At the same time, there are law enforcement administrators who are resistant to the concept of surveys and do not believe they would be beneficial. Corporate America's business theories are modeled for capital gains; whereas law enforcement theories are only to protect and serve. Police chiefs and sheriffs could resist this innovation due to cost and compromised data from the surveys.

The cost to conduct a survey by large firms such as Gallup, Harris, and Roper can cost between \$5,000 and \$15,000 depending on the variables (Lee, 2002). This dollar amount would discourage many administrators from conducting a survey because, "Prices for focus groups can range from \$4,000 to \$6,000 per session if outsourced to a company that runs the focus groups. Since it's recommended that you hold at least two sessions, that price can be a little hefty" (Lee, 2002, para. 32) Chiefs and sheriffs are also leery of issues such as compromised data and inaccurate reporting. Unlike large corporate businesses with unlimited budgets that can afford firms that have expertise in collecting data, many police agencies do not and simply cannot afford it. Unfamiliarity with the process and inaccurate data can lead to data being easily skewed to get a favored result.

Some may argue that only large agencies are capable of disseminating surveys to the public, and the only solution for small agencies is to use survey instruments already put into place by larger agencies. This would allow for cost and time savings across the board. It would also assist in the effort and research. This solution, while good in theory, could actually have catastrophic results for smaller agencies. Smaller agencies would have skewed information which would not be useful for their city.

According to one source, “National studies do not generate useful information for local communities, and unfortunately, most of the community-specific surveys have been done in large cities” (Rosenbaum, Lawrence, Hartnett, McDevitt, & Posick, 2015, p. 5.)

A possible resolution to this issue is to gather qualitative information as opposed to quantitative information which is tailored to the agency’s immediate area. This implies using in-house surveys and computing this data through simplistic means based on the survey created. For example, if the survey is comprised of three questions and can only be answered in “yes” or “no” answers, then the data can be computed by a clerk and/or supervisor which the agency would have immediate feedback. Law enforcement administrators need feedback to have a type of indicator which depicts how connected or disconnected the particular agency is from the community.

RECOMMENDATION

In essence, establishing a connection to the community is paramount. It is imperative law enforcement administrators recognize the necessity to reconnect with the community. Surveys will serve as a plan to achieve this particular goal. These surveys should mimic those of corporate America because they have already been tested and they yielded the results needed to obtain a baseline to go in the right direction. It is obligatory police officers and administrators provide an honorable and exemplary service because the community expects an open line of communication with those who hold and protect them. These surveys will assist in bridging that gap between community relations and could prevent issues such as those seen in Ferguson, South Carolina and Waller, Texas. Just like any other issue, developing a survey will have its own set of problems such as cost, is the information provided

honest, and whether survey would work in a smaller city or town rather than the large one which they have been tested. It's to the benefit of every agency small or large to develop some type of accountability which also gives the citizen a sense of responsibility in rating the officer and the services render.

Success of the survey is to have the citizen easily access it immediately after in interaction has occurred. This will provide a real-time assessment of a particular officer's demeanor, behavior and ultimately his performance. The officer should be able to inform the citizen of the survey and explain its ease of completion. There should be a program in which documents and records for which officer and call a citizen has agreed to complete the survey. In the event, surveys are not being sent to the department, this should be a red flag to administrators that the particular officer or employee is not performing his/her job well.

Reestablishing relationships within the community, utilizing surveys that measure satisfaction, will only function if citizens feel compelled enough to participate, and that can only be possible if several police departments buy-in and participate. If there is resistance, either from citizens or law enforcement officials, to mimic corporate America business models, one can expect there will be further civil unrest. A published article documented proof that this model is in the forefront of law enforcement community relations. "The citizen survey, if carried out in a regularized and methodologically sound manner, offers an important tool for assessing a community's satisfaction with police, for identifying areas for improvement and for measuring change in satisfaction when new initiatives are implemented" (White, 2007, p. 221). Businesses rely on customer feedback for growth and satisfaction. Law enforcement administrators must incorporate

“feedback mechanisms” to deliver appropriate services to the community or corrective actions for line officers. Surveys will assist law enforcement agencies from ignoring their communities and could potentially identify the officers who are not performing as expected.

Law enforcement agencies and customer service strategies should be synonymous where the overall goal is to pursue the corporate America business model. These strategies would enhance community relations, community trust and overall satisfaction in the community. Police administrators would capitalize with the immediate feedback from surveys and with the information obtained would assist in the suppression of potential police misconduct.

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