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Community Policing

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ABSTRACT

With all the negative media law enforcement agencies have been exposed to across the nation the past couple of years, law enforcement must do a better job in building community relationships. Administrators must establish a departmental culture that focuses on extraordinary customer service. Agencies must be passionate and excel in this most critical area of police work, while striving to provide excellent police service each day. This means getting back to the basics when officers would walk a beat and engage community members one on one. Reengaging in the community should be one of the most important functions law enforcement agencies can do to foster community trust and transparency. There are several great programs already implemented in organizations throughout the state of Texas, such as; contacting with citizens through social media, Facebook, Twitter YouTube, Coffee with Cops, Citizens Police Academy, Park, Walk and Talk, Explorer Post Programs and Clergy, and Police Partnerships just to name a few. If an agency can effectively implement ways to foster new partnerships and nurture established ones, the agency will have a better chance of minimizing the negative effects to the department and city, should a major crisis occur within the community.

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INTRODUCTION

The term, "Community policing" is not new to the law enforcement profession; however, it has become more of a buzzword and it is time for law enforcement to go back to the basics. This means implementing outreach programs and getting everyone in the organization to embrace this philosophy. Requiring officers to walk a beat and get to know the citizens they are hired to protect and service on more personnel basis should be the priority of every law enforcement agency.

However, what may work in one city, town, or county may not work in others, so each agency must adopt a program that will best serve their community. Some *agencies* or individuals may not embrace this critical area of police work for many reasons. Some of those reasons may include; a lack of interest, funding, personnel commitment, buy-in from administration, or that it just takes too much time and energy. Law enforcement agencies should incorporate a community policing philosophy in the city to promote community involvement, generate positive support, and create a safer environment to reduce crime. This research will identify proven programs and the advantages associated with them, and it will attempt to identify the constraints or issues facing the implementation of successful programs that will need to be evaluated.

Community policing must start at the top of an organization and must have the support of a governing body. Getting everyone's full support and buy-in is crucial for a successful outcome, because members of the governing body may be asked about the programs implemented. Staff must be educated and updated on current and newly implemented community policing programs. It is imperative to create a culture and receive the support within the agency by explaining the purpose, goals, and

expectations associated with the newly adopted program. By explaining the project or program within the agency, program administrators will be able to answer any concerns and provide the opportunity to address them up front. Once everyone has accepted or at least bought into the program, then it is time to start reaching out to the citizens and stakeholders. Community activists, church leaders, school administrators, businesses, community leaders, and citizens are key organizations and individuals an agency will need to focus on building relationships with first. Meeting with these groups will assist in establishing a two-way line of communication that will help develop those relationships. In addition, by developing these essential relationships, the community will feel like a part of the law enforcement agency. Activities to consider that will help bring the community and law enforcement agency together are; being involved at city events, chamber of commerce events and other events that will bring the community in contact with the law enforcement agency. A popular program is, "Coffee with a COP". Law enforcement agencies must be able to demonstrate the benefits of any program and get the community's commitment to make it successful.

By introducing a community policing program, law enforcement agencies will be able to educate citizens about what a law enforcement agency does on a regular basis. The officers within the agency will be able to get to know the citizens better, while the citizens in the community begin to create individual bonds with the officers. This will create a better line of communication and healthier relationships. This increased communication will not only benefit the agency, but can create an environment in which citizens will want to become more involved. This will also produce an open line of communication that will promote citizens sharing information that normally would not be

obtained from someone in the past. Ultimately, this could establish an open line of communication that could result in a reduction of crime. This paper will not only address the above points but will validate why law enforcement agencies should incorporate a community policing philosophy in the community to promote citizen involvement, generate positive support for law enforcement, create a safer environment, and ultimately reduce crime.

POSITION

The idea of community policing is not something that is foreign or a new concept. It is believed that community policing can be traced back to Sir Robert Peal. He believed that the main task of a police department is to preserve peace and prevent crime. To do so, the officers must first secure the cooperation of their community (Ferreira, 1996). This established cooperation between citizens and law enforcement officers creates an ease of investigating crimes, minimizes crimes, and identifies problems within the community. It is believed that law enforcement agencies should incorporate community policing in the city to promote community involvement, generate positive support, create a safer environment while reducing crime. Community policing is a concept that has been used for years and dates to the 1800's when, Sir Robert Peel, was challenged with forming the first organized police department in England (Bloy, 2002). Additionally, Maguire and Wells (2009) stated that by establishing community partnerships is crucial for community policing efforts. The effort must have buy-in at all levels, from the top of police command to the lowest level of officers for the process to be successful, as well, understand "community partnerships" which are multifaceted and include neighborhood associations, faith-based entities, businesses,

social service groups, and schools.   For community policing to be effective both mutual respect and trust between the police and community stakeholders is imperative. Factors contributing to high levels of citizen mistrust are contributed to high crime, racial profiling and police misconduct. Therefore, it is paramount for police departments to re-engage in the community to foster mutual trust and authentic partnerships.

By placing officers back in neighborhoods, talking to citizens, and interacting with the kids in the streets, parks and front yards will help law enforcement officers build a trust between citizens and officers. Once trust is built within the community, it will make it easier for the community to report suspicious activity and crimes. In a study performed in 1994 by Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone, it was found that "police will become more connected with and integrated into their communities, which means that police will interact with citizens on a personal level, will be familiar with community sentiments and concerns, and will work with the community to address those concerns" (para. 6). An example of this would be a citizen who lives across the street from someone who has just bought a home and is new to the neighborhood. The new neighbor has yet to meet anyone, but they come home one evening shortly after moving in and discover their home has been burglarized. Police officers are summoned to the residence and start investigating the crime. Because officers have been actively involved in community policing and because the officers have established trust throughout the area, officers can immediately start talking to neighbors who live close by and discover that someone did notice a suspicious vehicle in the area. The police then write down a description of the vehicle and license plate number, and now have a lead in the case and can possibly make an arrest and solve the crime.

According to Meese III (1993), community policing reduces crime. Catching criminals is not always an easy task, when in fact it is usually just the opposite. Community policing puts uniformed officers and marked police vehicles in a specific area. By establishing a noticeable police presence on a regular basis, this will bring a level of safety to citizens. Citizens often begin to feel more comfortable knowing that a police officer is patrolling in the area, at all times. The constant police presence sends a message to potential criminals targeting an area. For example, if a criminal is targeting a specific area and they see that police are always in the neighborhood, then the criminal looking to commit a crime will move on. A US Department of Justice study indicated, "The officer in the community is able to obtain valuable information, both from citizen input and his or her own observations, about crime conditions, particular offenses, and criminal suspect" (Meese III, 1993, para. 2).

Lastly, community policing helps identify problems in the community. Officers involved in the community policing efforts can meet with leaders of the community, citizens in neighborhoods and business owners. Communicating with these individuals on a regular basis can help identify problems that they can address. By asking these individuals for input on ideas how to better serve them can lead to different ways to identify problems that can be looked at and resolved. This communication allows the officer to share their ideas and suggestions on potential problems in the areas of concern.

Community policing programs creates a positive relationship by getting citizens and law enforcement agencies working together. It promotes communication on a regular basis, which will help alleviate the fear of talking with law enforcement. By

breaking the communication barrier, it will lead to the citizens having a better understanding of what law enforcement does on a regular basis. In the 1980's, the Phoenix Police Department experimented with a business-centered community policing effort. They relied heavily on relationships with business owners, tenant's interest groups and community associations. According to one article, in forging these relationships with over 2500 law enforcement officers, Phoenix Police Department found that community based policing strategies work more efficiently and effectively than time sensitive call-and-response patrol work ("Does community policing," 2005).

Through the acts of community policing, civilians and law enforcement agencies can promote cooperation, deter crime, and identify problems within their communities. Community policing promotes communication on a regular basis, which will eliminate the fear of talking to law enforcement agencies. By breaking the barrier of communication, it will lead to the citizens having a better understanding of what law enforcement does on a regular basis.

COUNTER POSITION

As discussed above, community policing can have a positive impact on law enforcement and civilians alike; however, there are opponents to the theory of successful community policing. These opponents believe that community policing is too expensive, community involvement is difficult to establish on a continued basis, and officer buy-in is challenging to create.

Unfortunately, funding for community policing can be a challenge. Limited agency budgets will require adjusting and approval from City Council to move funds from an approved expenditure item. To have a successful community policing program,

agencies need to ensure they have sufficient resources which can become a problem with municipalities and or bureaucracies (Schaefer, 2001).

Though there are funding problems, law enforcement will need to consider solutions. There are many options available to offset costs to include grants, government programs and community activities. To support community policing, there are items needed to promote awareness such as Police Badges/Police Stickers and coloring books to give to children. Promotional funding for special events like, Picnic in the Park, Neighborhood Watch Programs, Citizen Awareness classes, Coffee with a Cop, vehicles, signs to be posted in the neighborhoods. While these look like expenditures, there is the opportunity that they can become a source of income to support the community policing program. In addition, there is a grant funded by The United States Department of Justice COPS Improvement Act of 2009. This was implemented under the President Barack Obama administration to assist law enforcement agencies in hiring additional officers and to assist in the development of community policing programs and makes funding for community policing programs more easily accessible (Congress.gov). Another source of income is future budgetary planning. One could say that if an agency started a program with grant money and was successful, then this could be used as evidence of a productive program. This is good information to use when planning for the next fiscal year and would justify the expenditure.

Another challenge is getting citizens involved. This, at first, will be a struggle because there are some communities where citizens do not want to be active or involved in matters outside of their personal life. Some citizens do not concern

themselves about officers patrolling their neighborhoods. It has been observed that, "They may not be responsive when a patrol officer asks questions and such. Then again, some do take a while to warm up to the presence of authority in the community" (Lombardo, 2016, para. 7). Additionally, once citizens are involved, it is difficult to keep them involved and active in the program. There is often excitement at the start of a program however this can fade. Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies across the country have found it extremely difficult to create long-term involvement across the community. This could put an end to community policing. Experiences have found that once citizens get involved in a community policing program and they are provided with the necessary training and activities, the involvement rate of citizens will remain at a high level sufficient to maintaining a productive program. According to Herbert (2006), programs such as, "Citizens Police Academy" or "Citizens on Patrol" provide citizens with a new outlook and idea on the element involved in policing and therefore improves citizen participation.

Lastly, the final critique against community policing is creating officer buy in. Some officers may not agree with the concept due to the fear of becoming too close to individual citizens or feel that it is an additional assignment without any financial benefit to the officer. The thought process is that if they were ever in a position of dealing with a citizen in a law capacity, then would their relationship be used to get someone out of a citation or other law violations. Some officer's do not want to put themselves in that position. To counter this argument, it would take law enforcement administrators selling the concept in to participating officers, listening to any concerns, and allowing input. This would possibly allow the officers to buy in to the program and feel like they are a

part of the change, rather than just being told what to do. Most, if not all, officers want to establish trust within their communities. Lombardo believes that building a relationship of trust between police officers patrolling the neighborhoods and the citizens that they meet creates a relationship making community problems much easier to address. "By selling this to officers as a chance to generate trust within the community, Community Policing should not be a hard sell to our officers" (Lombardo, 2016). Additionally, the 1995 Illinois Municipal Review wrote, "Once that culture of community policing is ingrained in the department and the officers individually, the tools of community-oriented policing such as foot patrols, bike patrols and additional education programs can fall into place" (Allen, 1995, para. 8). This will provide officers additional areas of focus such as the specialized units mentioned above.

RECOMMENDATION

In a study in 1992 by the United States National Institute of Justice, it was found in the city of Seattle, Washington post implementation of a Community Policing program that crime statistics significantly decreased and quality of life for citizens increased (US Department of Justice 1992). For this reason, it is believed that law enforcement agencies should incorporate a community policing philosophy in their city to promote community involvement, generate positive support, create a safer environment, and obviously reduce crime. Community policing is a concept that has been used for years. This concept dates to the 1800's when, Sir Robert Peel, revered as the Father of Law Enforcement, was challenged with forming the first organized police department in England (Bloy, 2002). By implementing this type of program, it is possible to increase trust between the citizen and the officer if done properly (Trojanowicz, & Pollard, 1996).

Officers who buy in to the program will benefit as well. They will be establishing a long-lasting relationship as well as a resource for citizens, not to mention, they are establishing a reputation not only for themselves but for the city government and police department they work for. It is not unusual for patrol officers struggle to accept community policing and adopt a "let's wait and see how long this will last, this time around" attitude. For the law enforcement profession to change from reactive responders to proactive problem solvers, administrators demonstrate the desired approach to ensure that needed skills are taught and developed (Gilmartin & Harris,1999).

Trust and transparency are two main areas to focus on in community policing. When an agency develops trust with their citizens, they will have pre-established relationships should a crisis occur within the community. Community policing facilitates positive interactions between law enforcement and children at local schools, parks, and neighborhoods. Community events such as parades on holidays like July 4th, Christmas, and other special community events are great opportunities to be directly involved with citizens. Going around visiting local clergy and attending social events is another avenue for involvement. Conducting regular walk-throughs of local business on a regular basis and asking them how to better serve their individual needs is vital. This is another way to establish a lasting relationship with the business side of the community. The focus is to demonstrate that law enforcement is interested in opinions. The input received will aid the agency with meeting the needs of the community.

The end results to this program is to get police officers integrated within neighborhoods, schools, and businesses. By accomplishing these tasks, law

enforcement agencies will build a long-lasting relationship of trust. Being visible and active in these areas will help in crime reduction and sends a message to potential criminals who may have been targeting specific areas or businesses. Being visible at schools, attending sporting events, and other activities gets officers involved with the community. Gaining the trust of children at a young age will hopefully teach them to trust police officers and discourage them from getting involved in criminal activity later in life.

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