

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Getting Back to the Basics of Law Enforcement:  
Protecting and Serving**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This article delves into the most current paradigm shift in law enforcement. This shift is supported by a prevalent mindset occurring in law enforcement that focuses on enforcing and responding as the primary goals. Officers are being pressured at an alarming rate to enforce more traffic violations and make more arrests, not to make the streets safer but to generate revenue for the jurisdiction in which they are employed. This new policy of enforcement has forced officers out of the neighborhood and onto the highways. The close relationships that were once created by the foot patrols and beat integrities are a thing of the past. This paradigm shift in law enforcement has pulled the peace officer so far away from the profession's core values that it could easily be argued that law enforcement is more like a corporation concerned about the bottom line rather than a vocation that was created to suppress crime. It is time that law enforcement gets back to the basics: protecting and serving.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement has gone through many changes since it was originally created in the Americas. Law enforcement is in a constant state of change, always adapting to the new techniques being employed to commit crime.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, “the night watchman reported fires, raised the hue and cry, maintained street lamps, arrested or detained suspicious persons, and walked the rounds” Uchida (in press) states. Law enforcement has shifted from a volunteer hue and cry system, to one of full-time personnel patrolling designated beats. Law enforcement continued this transition by shifting away from the heavy-handed tactics and focused more on the intellectual ability of the officers. Uchida (in press) stressed, “From about 1910 to 1960, police chiefs carried on another reform movement, advocating that police adopt the professional model.” As the 1960s progressed, law enforcement began to focus more on what has since been labeled “community policing.” As a profession, law enforcement has now moved into a period that is technology and enforcement driven. With this new paradigm, the profession has moved so far away from the guiding principles that helped to establish law enforcement as not just a job but a professional service that it has lost sight of its original purpose. The profession of law enforcement needs to redirect its attention away from technology and get back to the basics: protecting and serving.

Law enforcement was created for a very distinct purpose. That purpose was to serve the community in a specific capacity. That capacity was to protect citizens from criminal activity. The American watch system consisted of what is known as a “hue and cry.” This type of policing was solely responsive in nature and had little interaction

between the police and the citizens. "These watchmen were also unpaid and selected from the parish population. If a serious disturbance took place, the parish constable had the authority to raise the "hue and cry" (Uchida, in press). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, police switched from a volunteer service to one that eventually transformed into one that was fulltime. Thus, law enforcement became a 24-hour, seven day a week profession. As time progressed, law enforcement personnel shifted from an attitude that was driven by brawn to one that focused on brain. With this shift, officers began focusing more on the interpersonal side of law enforcement. There was a paradigm shift in the 1960's that embraced this concept and promoted it even more. Uchida (in press) stated this concept was "... 'community policing. As a result of the social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, a third wave of reform of police operations and strategies began to emerge: community-oriented policing." Community-oriented policing launched law enforcement into a whole new era. This new paradigm focused on helping the citizens and working collectively to resolve the problems within the community. It also focused on establishing police departments that were accountable to the communities in which they served.

As time progressed, departments shifted away from this mindset of serving the community. Departments moved towards an enforcement mindset. Officers are being required to issue more and more citations, not for the purpose of reducing traffic violators or increasing public safety, but rather to generate revenue for the city. Officers are also evaluated by the number of arrests they can make. Many of these arrests are generated from warrants that are created when individuals do not pay the citations that they are issued. Law enforcement has become a business, not a service.

This shift in mindset is so blatantly apparent but so easily overlooked. If one thinks back to police vehicles of yester years, a distinct slogan comes immediately to mind: To serve and protect. One must only look at the police cars of today to see that this slogan is rarely present. The reason the slogan is gone is simple. It is gone because the philosophy of protecting and serving is gone. There is no need for this slogan anymore if no one believes in it. A more appropriate slogan of modern day law enforcement as a profession would be: To enforce and respond.

## **POSITION**

One can argue many causes or factors that contributed to this latest paradigm shift in law enforcement. The author would argue that there are two main causes for the shift. The first is that the officer of today has a different mindset than that of the past. The second issue that greatly contributes to this paradigm shift is that governmental entities realized that law enforcement can be utilized as another resource to generate revenue. As a profession, it is absolutely imperative that law enforcement make these technological advancements, such as mobile data terminals, but not at the cost forsaking of the basic tenets of law enforcement.

The first cause of this paradigm is that officers employed today have a different mindset than those that were employed in past generations. This is apparent in the newer recruits that are graduating from the basic police academies. The desire to serve the community has been replaced with self-fulfilling ideology. Recruits have been overwhelmed with television and movies that portray law enforcement as an exciting, adventurous career. In the movies, there is never a dull moment. This perception of law enforcement has become the accepted norm for these new recruits. These recruits

come into the career always looking for the next big adventure. The day-to-day mundane aspects of law enforcement, such as patrolling neighborhoods, have been replaced with the prospect of the next arrest. Officers of the past worked “beats.” By working a particular beat, especially on foot, these officers had firsthand knowledge of the people that lived in that area. This not only helped to solidify a relationship between the officer and community, but it helped to build a crime fighting resource that was fostered by the collective partnership between the two entities. Officers of today drive around in police cars, most of the time with their windows rolled up. This has detracted from the relationships established by foot patrols and has all but shut the outside world out to the officer. One pane of glass has come to separate the officer from the community. Sharp (2007) expanded on this by stating that, “at the most basic level, the police can only operate effectively if they have, and can maintain, the support and confidence of the public. Police cannot prevent or detect crime without the active cooperation of ordinary members of the community.”

The second issue that greatly contributes to this paradigm shift is that governmental entities discovered that law enforcement can be utilized as another resource to generate revenue. Governments like any organization are always focusing on costs and budgets. With the development of certain instruments, such as the patrol car, the radar or laser, and the newly implemented ticket writer, law enforcement began its departure from protecting and serving the community. City and state governments began to realize that these instruments could not only be used to enforce the law and protect citizens on the roadways, they began to take notice of the money that was being generated with them. Garoupa and Jellal (2002) stated that the existence of asymmetry

of information between enforcers and the government causes the usual problem of regulating any bureaucracy: it can be that some resources are taken out of enforcement activities to be spent in other activities that generate more utility to enforcers (promoting their careers or selecting enforcement areas they want to target for other reasons than social well-being).

Once this recognition took place, governmental agencies began to see law enforcement as another way to create revenue and supplement existing budgets. After the enforcement process evolved into a revenue-generating process, law enforcement officers moved out of the neighborhoods. They moved onto the highways and main traffic corridors of their respective jurisdictions. They were no longer concerned about how safe they were making the roads by enforcing the law; rather they became obsessed with issuing enough citations to stay off of their supervisor's list of non-performers. The revenue mindset does not stop there. Many of these citations turn into warrants. These warrants are not for hardened criminals but for people who have failed to pay fines resulting from citations. Governmental agencies now have warrant officers whose sole purpose is to identify and pursue these people. The goal is not to get hardened criminals off of the street but to apprehend these persons so that the warrant fees can be added to the city's general funds. This too has become a lucrative money making business.

Scott and Goldstein (2005) addressed this concept by stating that some "agencies seek to recover the cost of providing a particular service from the individuals who benefit from the service." Several law enforcement agencies are starting to recover costs for providing investigations. Scott and Goldstein (2005) elaborated on this stating,



“such fees are not intended as penalties; therefore, recovery is typically limited to the actual cost to the police agency.” On the surface, this appears to be one more way that money can be generated by providing those basic services that police agencies are designed to perform. In addition, businesses and individuals are required to pay taxes for these services. Since these taxes are already collected to pay for these services, business owners and citizens should not be required to pay again.

“Red light cameras” are a new technology that is being introduced into law enforcement. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) (1998), “drivers who run red lights are responsible for 260,000 crashes each year of which approximately 750 are fatal.” Red light cameras were introduced into a community as a way to address these crashes. These cameras, although portrayed by local governments as being an effective crime fighting resource, are, in reality, nothing more than a money-making scheme. Some legislatures in California “have voiced strong opposition to the photo-enforcement technology, calling it an intrusion into people’s private lives. They are fighting to abolish it.” (“You Ought to be in Pictures...Red Light Photo Enforcement,” 1999). Law enforcement agencies are moving away from the priority of crime fighting and suppression and moving towards becoming a revenue generating entity.

With the introduction of the concepts of traffic enforcement, warrants, and red light cameras, law enforcement officers have been pulled away from their neighborhoods. They have been discouraged from spending too much time addressing the real issues affecting the community. Officers are not being rewarded for making their community safe. These officers are rewarded for generating arrests and citations.

This is not only a shame, it is unethical and a travesty occurring on a daily basis in law enforcement.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

To every argument there is always an opposing viewpoint. According to Plemons (2009), “an ever-increasing demand on available resources has caused many public safety agencies to explore techniques to increase efficiency.” When arguing that law enforcement needs to get back to the basics of policing, the counter arguments advocating for increased technology are strong. The opposing viewpoint is that law enforcement needs to continually evolve and progress into a more technologically advanced and superior profession. “It has been asserted that technology will play a key role in the future of every business and organization future, and law enforcement is no exception,” stated (Plemons, 2009).

The argument was previously made that governmental entities realized that law enforcement can be utilized as another resource to generate money for their specific needs. Toffler (1990) wrote that law enforcement agencies must use emerging technologies in a manner that furthers appropriate social and political goals in crime prevention. Failure to do so would prevent law enforcement personnel from being able to adequately suppress crime and keep the community safe.

Officers of today have not changed their mindsets compared to officers of the past. Today’s crime fighters have adapted to modern technology in an attempt to better be able to serve the public. Stephens (2005) stated “many credit the return to community-oriented policing for the downward trend in street crime that began in 1994. This approach has worked well where it has been implemented, especially when

combined with modern research techniques, such as psychological profiling, and technologies, such as high-tech surveillance, to help anticipate and prevent crime.” According to Stephens (2005), “the twenty-first century has put policing into a whole new milieu: one in which the causes of crime and disorder often lie outside the immediate community, demanding new and innovative approaches from police.” This mindset is prevalent among the law enforcement community. This mindset is the driving force that leads the law enforcement profession to focus on technology as opposed to basics.

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

Law enforcement has gone through numerous paradigm shifts since its creation in the United States many years ago. Many of these shifts have enabled law enforcement communities to adapt and transform into a profession as opposed to a career. With these historical transformations, a new mindset has been created. This new mindset has moved away from the core values for which law enforcement was created.

The current mindset in law enforcement is to strive to constantly to achieve the latest technological advancement and to shift away from the community-oriented mindset and transition towards more of a responsive mindset. This new paradigm shift, which focuses on enforcement, has forced officers out of the neighborhood and onto the highways. The community bonds that were once established by the traditional beat cop are becoming obsolete. The counter position argues that this technology is necessary to better serve the public. This argument is not valid. Stephens (2005) argued “lacking vision or a sense of public service poses the greatest threat to police.” The relationships

that were once created by community-oriented policing are actually being deteriorated by the emergence and overexploitation of technology.

It is time that law enforcement gets back to the basics: protecting and serving. The time has come that law enforcement, as a profession, must address this current shift and move back towards the profession's core values. Law enforcement must get back to the basics of law enforcement: protecting and serving.

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