

MAKING COMMUNITY POLICING WORK

By: Robert R. Friedmann

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Common to all social outbursts is an underlying tension precipitated by a perception of social and economic deprivation and a sense of injustice. Unpopular judicial decisions or law enforcement behavior act as a triggering event. Such outbursts are not unique to democratic societies, as is evidenced by the Tiananmen Square incident in China and the recent riots in Thailand. What is common to all societies is the enactment of formal and informal mechanisms of social control; what is different is the method used and its degree of acceptability. When the jury in the Rodney King trial found the police officers not guilty, that verdict became the triggering event for the crowd's collective behavior and the ensuing rampage, which far surpassed the damage to life and property caused by the riots of the 1960s.

In the last few years, attention has been given to a new form of policing strategy that has come to be known as community policing. The "professional" trend in policing that was typical of the 1950s resulted in a greater sense of isolation of police officers from the communities they served. In the early 1980s, in reaction to this isolation, it seemed as though police chiefs and commissioners in several countries (most notably Canada, England, Israel and the United States) jointly decided to adopt this new community policing strategy.

Although the trend toward community policing is growing in the U.S. and throughout the world, it is still actively practiced by a relatively small number of forces, and it suffers from the lack of a clear definition, consistent programmatic implementation and measurable criteria for success. There are some encouraging signs of serious community policing efforts in cities such as Baltimore, Houston, Kansas City, Madison, New York, Newark, Portland, Santa Ana and Savannah in the U.S.; Edmonton, Halifax and Toronto in Canada; Exeter and Manchester in England; and in Israel.

A community sets up its official law enforcement arm to deal with criminals, with order breakers and law violators, yet most law enforcement activities focus on service delivery that is largely non-criminal in nature. In the West various basic premises of personal and individual liberties provide set procedures to be followed by police officers (which in most cases are followed). I suggest the following as the guiding definition for community policing: Community policing is a policy and a strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police services and improved police legitimacy through a pro-active reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime-causing conditions.

It assumes a need for greater accountability of police, a greater public share in decision-making and greater concern for civil rights and liberties. It advocates proactive policing in areas other than direct crime administration and removes some responsibility for fighting symptoms of

social ills from the police and places it squarely on the agenda of a large variety of other social-service agencies. Self-imposed control assumes that most people will abide by the law, in the same sense that most people do not withdraw their savings from a bank at the same time; if these assumptions are violated, then societies and banks collapse.

Because some cooperation obviously does exist between police and citizens and between police and some social-service agencies, what is new about this approach is the characterization, direction and scope of such relationships. In short, this calls for a redefinition of the division of labor of social service delivery. If combating and minimizing the motives for crime is to be considered as important as making a dent in criminal behavior, then police cannot be expected to carry that burden all by themselves.

Yes, they should continue patrolling, investigating, recording, reporting and even preventing crime. But what they should not be expected to do is to struggle alone to realize the "law and order" agenda. This can be achieved through the creation of a "super agency" or "board of directors" composed of agency representatives and civic leaders that should work to facilitate, coordinate, enhance and support those actions that are needed to improve the quality of life in a neighborhood.

Often high-crime areas also suffer from a plethora of social ills such as blight, a high teenage pregnancy rate, poverty, low health levels, low education achievement, a high dropout rate and high unemployment. The police can serve as a diagnostic device, but it should be up to the "superagency" to take the necessary steps to facilitate a concerted effort that would act as a genuine "seeding" device to curb the motives and incentives to commit crime. Several police forces have already started to look at such a possibility. The city of Savannah, Ga., has established such a superagency, called the "Collaborative." The City of Portland Police Bureau is currently under a five-year transition plan, at the end of which time (1995) the total force will be under the Bureau of Community Policing and as such will be interacting with various social service agencies.

The greatest advantage, as well as the greatest disadvantage, of this model is that it is clearly not a solution for problems that require immediate attention. Nonetheless, it may well be the inevitable next step in the policing revolution. It goes far beyond the traditional cosmetic "police-community relations" methods and is much more substantive in its approach, although it is not necessarily more costly. It requires built-in safety devices to guarantee that it will be carefully planned and fully implemented. Yet such an all-out effort is possible, and we should not shed the responsibility for more effective crime control.

Community policing can be realistically achieved and measured for success or failure. For example, the police will be the first to map the problems of the city, criminal and social alike, and may assist in targeting police and other service efforts in these areas. The superagency is then to enter the picture by taking action that the police cannot and should not take alone. The superagency removes the need for dependence on good relationships between police and, for example, municipal public works and utilities departments. Yet it also transforms the scope of responsibilities and the nature of social service provision by affording the possibility of a coordinated effort on behalf of and with the cooperation of citizens. It also holds the biggest

promise for any meaningful empowerment of citizens by permitting them to take a greater part in managing their residential and business areas in collaboration with police and other agencies.

We need to fight crime at the roots of the problems that create it, and we need to guarantee that all citizens have access to minimal acceptable standards of quality of life. It is essential that such an approach should be formalized and that it should not be dependent on specific police or city leaders but should become an acknowledged strategy and civil service standard. We have practiced the other possibilities far too long and cannot afford to ignore the promise that community policing offers. In community policing lies the hope not only for better policing but also for a better society.

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