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Thinking about Policing and the Current Pressure Points: Some Ideas!

By

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In my twenty-four years in policing, as a sworn officer and chief, followed by an additional twenty-five plus years in higher education, I have some personal observations that I want to share. I refer to the existing polarized state of police and community hyperbole. The new mantra of “breaking news” does not wait until the facts are known before judgment is cast. Yes, some of it is bias and subject to special interests, but to the majority of us, policing has a distinct and essential place in society to keep the peace and to knock down crime and criminality. An important aspect sometimes lost is the absolute need to engage in police and community partnerships centered on collaborative quality of life efforts. The police are not separate from the community, and neither is the community distinct from the police. Stop acting as if that is true!

This post will undoubtedly bring retort as everything seems to do so these days. However, I feel six important steps should be taken to improve police and community conditions, with those who want a harmonious society and not turmoil for selfish reasons. The following aspects, when strengthened, can make a difference, at least to my beliefs and experience.

Factors to Improvement in Policing. (Not in order of importance)

1. Police and citizens require more face-to-face time in the problem-solving mode, to see where each can assist the other to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods and across the jurisdiction. To this past success story, I give thanks to Herman Goldstein who wrote the book and to former Chief Dennis Nowicki and employees at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, who successfully applied these principles in Charlotte, NC.

2. Supervisors must be highly trained to ensure they have the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to achieve job position dictates. We cannot hold them accountable when we place all manner of non-supervisory duties on their plate. When diverted from being in the field, and when they feel crushed between street officers and administration

Factors go to those influences and issues that require special consideration and to be addressed with a desire to make positive change occur.

and other demands, effectiveness suffers. To hold them accountable and responsible means they have to be able to carry out their duties without all the other baggage.

Unfortunately, some are hurriedly promoted and not provided appropriate training before they assume those duties. That is totally unfair to everyone.

Supervision is guiding, coaching, teaching, holding each of their subordinates to the established standards, and not be adversarial in nature. They can and will ensure that behavior and service are delivered correctly, but not without a depth of preparation and a full toolkit of skills and abilities needed for this most critical of agency positions. Yes, I hold that belief without apology.

3. All employees (sworn and civilian) must be well-versed in the organization's mission, vision, values, and goals. They must be able to discern how their job fits within each of them and how their work is judged against these criteria. In many agencies, few can tell you what these four foundation principles are, what they mean, or that they even exist. We can change that condition by schooling employees and hold them accountable to following these precepts. It is not about us; it is about the community and the community's quality of life. This example was aptly illustrated by Retired Deputy Chief Stan Cook, CMPD when he was a District Captain.

When an employee follows his or her tangent, they need to be realigned and held accountable by their supervisor. There often is way too much "*I prefer not to do that so that I will do the following!*" Administrators, as well as line staff, are also guilty in this aspect at times, and that too must stop. It is not "*do as I say, not as I do!*" as that illustrates stupid. This mantra means more training, accountability, and evaluation to ensure compliance. Does your agency post its mission, vision, values, and goals in every unit of the organization? Are employees ever asked about their level of understanding and application of them to their work? Moreover, does part of the annual evaluation examine compliance with these foundation principles; probably not! There is way too much individualism in policing and in my opinion that is what leads to the derailment of the train. Citizens pay for these services and should expect top notch response. The mission and other aspects describe what should be and help people understand and apply them to their duties.

4. Police chiefs need to spend more time out of their office. The walls and desk effectively keep the leader in isolation, regardless of reports from others. Spending more time in the community and among the activities of officers, pays huge dividends. Moreover, why not, is that not what you love most about the job? Chiefs have a competent staff that can work from behind a desk and attends meetings of less importance. In obscurity, police chiefs diminish in agency and community knowledge, and they are the one person who needs to lead in this area.

5. The media should adopt a more responsible reporting of the news, not "Headline" or "Breaking News," now so routine. This sensationalism reporting offers little but entertainment. We all need to ignore the hype and keep to what is known, wait for the

investigation in high profile cases, and stop contributing to the “rush to judgment” that is destructive.

6. Finally, elected and appointed officials also should set aside their bias, act responsibly, stop the gamesmanship and make appropriate decisions based on facts and policy. I do not see this in some instances, and it only increases dissension while sustainable problem solving suffers as a result. Put your social media rating scale aside and do what is right!

Achievable! The current examples of loud and boisterous, or silent and out of sight, along with other ineffective actions are putting this country into a hole that is becoming more and more difficult to avoid. Time to stop, take a breath, and examine the issues and then make appropriate decisions. With all the noise, it is hard to do at times!

The isolation of services, the separate silos of people with specific duties and service roles, are costly, ineffective, and inefficient. We often spend money through separate agency engagement and sharing the same client. The child suspended from school that becomes the focus of police in that simple example now involves two different budgets. The following example is a scenario showing where overlap, duplication of costs and time exist. Often not achieving the desired outcome goals.

A Continuum of Cost

Day 1: A student is suspended from school and finds himself aimless without any specific goals or place to be. The school system is receiving money for that student, who is funded to be in school. **The 1st cost.**

Day 2: He comes across a group of others who also do not attend school and naturally is drawn to being with them, something to do, a sense of belonging. The problem is time and needs for money, and other possessions lead to criminal behavior.

Day 3: The police in conducting an investigation of criminal activity, arrest the former student on criminal charges. **The 2nd cost.**

The individual is now on a second budget, that of the police. Additionally, Victims of crime suffer a loss, trauma and other adverse outcomes due to the behavior of the individual.

The 3rd cost.

Day 4: The individual is turned over to juvenile authorities, held in a youth facility, a new cost center engaging with the same person. **The 4th cost.**

Day 5: Often a psychological and physical examination is conducted. **The 5th/6th cost**

Day 6: There is a background check carried out by some agency of the State, usually Probation & Parole. Time is required by an officer of that unit. **The 7th cost**

Day 7: A Court hearing is conducted, and some scenarios can take place including, (1)

Probation, (2) incarceration, (3) perhaps treatment if substance abuse is present, or mental health treatment, social services, and other public, private services that are deemed necessary. All costs included in the many services.

Taxpayers fund these separate silos, and the demand for efficiency seldom is addressed in the present system.