Community Oriented Policing: Creating Transparency in the Thin Blue Line.

Sgt. Justin Belew

Prairie Grove Police Department

School of Law Enforcement Supervision (SLES), Session LVI

Abstract

The traditional way of addressing problems in policework of today has drastically changed from what it used to be. The traditional method of reactive policing has evolved towards a Problem-Oriented Policing (P.O.P.) and Community- Oriented Policing (C.O.P.) programs. My primary focus will be in the area of community-oriented policing and the effects that it can have on the community that you serve. The tension between society and law enforcement has reached a boiling point over the last several years. With this tension, the need for a more transparent department is even more necessary. With the help of a strong community oriented policing program, we as law enforcement officers can mend the wounds that have been created between the public and police departments.

Community Oriented Policing: Creating Transparency in the Thin Blue Line.

Law enforcement is based on a simple idea, to protect and to serve. This is the way that the United States and many other countries have operated for a long time. Law enforcement would not exist if there was not a need. A need for persons to enforce laws and to protect the citizens that the law enforcement officer has sworn to defend. Law enforcement is more than just a job to many of the officers, it is a duty. Within these duties, the officers provide services in numerous ways. These can be through the enforcement of traffic laws, protection of freedoms entitled by the U.S. Constitution, and enforcement of federal, state, & local laws. The law enforcement officer also provides a wide variety of specialized services as well. Police officers beside being a basic patrol officer, they can serve as detectives, school resource officers, drug interdiction officers, and many more.

Before we dive deeper into this topic let me briefly introduce myself. I am a fifteen-year veteran to law enforcement that has served at several agencies in Northwest Arkansas. I began my career after being honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps as a Sergeant after eight years of active duty. I was hired by the Washington County Sheriff's Office as an Adult Detention Officer that worked in the jail. After about a year I was able to transition to the Farmington Police Department where I worked patrol for around five years before accepting another position at the Johnson Police Department. After another period over five years, I moved again to where I currently serve as a Patrol Supervisor as a Sergeant with the Prairie Grove Police Department.

Now, more than ever, our country is need once more. The country has had a very rocky relationship the last few years with its law enforcement community. This tension that has developed has been inflated by the media and different administrations opinions of the matter.

This brings me to my point of the importance of a strong community relationship between the public and the department. This relationship is strengthened through the means of Community-Oriented Policing. With this community-based relationship, the department works in close relation to keep a transparent image and provide better understanding to the people for which they serve. By the end of this paper, you should have a better understanding on how a police department can better their image and maximize their service to their community by becoming a community-oriented department.

A Brief History of Law Enforcement and Community Oriented Policing

Law enforcement has formally been around for several hundred years. Some people credit Sir Robert Peel, who has been dubbed as the Father of Law Enforcement when he formed the London Metropolitan Police Department in 1829 as discovering community-oriented policing. One of Peel's nine principles of law enforcement as written by Lee (1901) and cited by McBride said, "the police are the public and the public are the police" (McBride 2016, para. 1). With that idea in mind, it sounds like even back then a community focused police department was being considered as a necessity for success. Community-oriented policing has also been said to have originated around the 1970's after the Vietnam War and the civil rights movements. Ren discussed the country's civil unrest as a major driving force to departments becoming more community friendly. (Ren et al., 2005). Whisenand and McCain (2016) also discussed seeing an increase in community-oriented policing programs during the 1960's and 1970's. Regardless of who and where created this great concept of bonding police departments with communities, one can definitely see the need.

Peel's Nine Principles of Law Enforcement

Sir Robert Peel in 1829 developed what he called his nine principles of law enforcement. This is what the "bobbies" at the London Metropolitan Police Department used as a guide for their police duties. (Lee 1901).

Principle #1. The first principle, "The basic mission for which police exist is to prevent crime and disorder as an alternative to repression of crime and disorder by military force and severity of legal punishment." (Lee 1901, para 1). This principle is the heart of why police departments exist and only goes to further strengthen the remaining principles.

Principle #2. Principle two discusses the police and their ability to perform their duties with public approval and also to maintain the public's respect. (Lee 1901).

Principle #3. The third principle as developed by Peel says that while maintaining the publics respect the officer secures the willing cooperation of the public and their voluntary observance of the law. (Lee 1901).

Principle #4. Principle number four discusses the use of physical force can diminish the degree of cooperation from the public. (Lee 1901).

Principle #5. The fifth principle, "police seek and preserve public favor, not by catering to the public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law..." can relate to community policing by showing impartiality in their service. (Lee 1901, para 5).

Principle #6. Principle six discusses use of force and the prohibition of excessive force. Even back then, the necessity of strict guidelines was seen in order to maintain a disciplined department that would be considered reputable.

Principle #7. The seventh principle says that "The police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police..." (Lee 1901, para 7).

Principle #8. Principle number eight discusses the abuse of power by police and says that an officer should focus on the problem and not give the appearance that they could be abusing their power. (Lee 1901).

Principle #9. The last principle, number nine is one that police department administrators fail to understand. Number nine says, "The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them." (Lee 1901, para 9). Judging an officer on his productivity is difficult to grade, no one is able to predict what the officer is preventing by his presence. But, with the officer's presence in the community that is based on strong relationship, then there is something visible that administrators can observe directly.

Community-Oriented Policing Today

Community-oriented policing today is similar to that of the past but has grown to change and adapt to the societal needs of today. Today's police departments see different challenges and encounter different barriers. This type of evolution has come with the development of newer, modernized equipment, different mindsets from younger more openminded administrators, and the overall attitude of today's society. Go back to law enforcement and the way it was conducted thirty years ago and think about what was new and improved back then. Now, back to present day, most departments now days are outfitting their officers with body worn cameras. These cameras which used to be restricted to only in the patrol cars are now also worn on the officer's

uniform. I myself wear a body camera while at work. Some officers do not like having the cameras thinking it is another way for the department to control them. I do not see it that way, I see it and also explain it to people when they ask, it's for your protection and for mine. I say that to give them the state of mind that since we are being recorded, that they are less likely to be victimized or treated unfairly. I actually see it as protection for me against false allegations of misconduct and a direct recording of factual evidence. With the addition of body worn cameras, departments begin to further bridge the gap between communities and police departments by becoming more transparent.

Transparency

In order for a police department to have a solid community-oriented department, then transparency is essential to ensure success. Transparency in law enforcement is essentially the agency being more approachable and open to the public. By creating an image of openness, the department will have the appearance that it is not trying to hide or conceal their activities. Now more than ever, police departments are falling under more scrutiny from the public. This is due to an increase in image portrayal by the media and past government administrations allowing and at times enabling this upsetting behavior. With a more transparent department stronger bonds can be made between the community and its officers.

The Need for a More Transparent Department

Brown discussed a need for a more community-oriented department by means of finding more effective ways to respond to their needs and also through direct interaction. (Brown 1989). There have been studies in numerous departments all across the United States including New York, Michigan, New Jersey, and Texas, just to name a few. In Newark, New Jersey and Flint,

Michigan, Brown discussed the successful use of foot patrols as a way to increase community

relations. These foot patrols saw success early with what Brown described as they "begun with

fanfare, that produced important results, and then faded…" (Brown 1989, p. 4). This shows that

in order to be successful, the department must make a continuous and conscious effort to ensure

success. According to article (*Importance of police-community relationships and resources*),

"Transparency is essential to positive police-community relationships." (p.2, para. 5).

Mending and Healing a Torn Community Relationship

Recent events in law enforcement have driven a wedge between the police and

community. Certain major incidents that have created waves in the sea of blue, has been the

shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri in March of 2014 or other media hyped officer involved

shootings. One of the more recent incidents between the police in the community that has had a

major impact towards law enforcement and community relationships was in Minnesota. The

incident that occurred in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020, rocked the nation and a

significant negative impact for law enforcement across the nation. The incident in question is

involving George Floyd and Minneapolis Police Officer Derick Chauvin along with three other

police officers. This incident occurred when a police encounter turned deadly and resulted in the

loss of life for Mr. Floyd. This particular incident regardless of the facts of the case, the opinions

of the public and experts, or even the outcome of the trial damaged the image of law

enforcement. This incident created another barrier that I have experienced firsthand.

These incidents have created a whole new atmosphere amongst the nation, sparking

outrage and protest. This negative light on law enforcement has been brought on by bias news

and media sources. The unacceptable behavior has been enabled and encouraged by some of the

country. This unrest has birthed catch phrases such as *#BlackLivesMatter* and the "hands up

don't shoot" motto, that I have personally been a victim to. In response to the civil unrest and tension between law enforcement and the community, President Barack Obama responded. "On December 18, 2014, President Barack Obama established the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing." (Hallinan 2016, para. 15). This task force was in place to observe law enforcement practices in order to restore the public trust while reducing crime. This damaged relationship needs to be fixed and can be with a strong community-oriented police department.

Community-Oriented Policing Programs

Having a community-oriented police department can be a fairly simple thing. There are many programs and events that a department could conduct to build relationships in the community be more community friendly. Examples of community relation events that my department and local departments in the area are having are Shop with a Cop, Trunk-or-Treat, citizen or junior police academies and a community movie night in the city park. Those are only just a couple of examples, where there are just too many to name. One of the first times I was able to experience community policing while was at Johnson when I worked as a bike patrol officer. The positivity that I received when riding the trails was always positive and definitely served to strengthen community bonds.

Shop with a cop. I've participated in Shop with a Cop since I became a police officer. Shop with a Cop is where families that are in financial need for the holidays can apply to participate at their local police department. The family then brings their child or children on a shopping trip with a police officer or sheriff's deputy to purchase needed items. The children are usually given a set amount to spend on clothing items and toys. This is a great program for building community relations between the department and citizens. Shop with a cop has proven to be so successful that some departments have decided that they wanted to expand their program

to encompass as many children as possible. Partnered with a local Fraternal Order of Police organization, the program gathered toy donations during a period between Thanksgiving and Christmas to distribute throughout the city. They accomplished this by means of a miniature Christmas parade conducted by all the members of the police department and mayor. The parade would drive through all the neighborhoods in the city and give out presents to anyone present. The program had gained popularity amongst the city and has had a lot of positive feedback.

Trunk-or-treat. Trunk-or-Treat is another great program that a department could use to become more community friendly. This is a simple and terrific way for the police department to create a safe environment for kids looking to participate in Halloween fun. My department would take several patrol vehicles down to the mall parking lot along with the fire department and anyone wishing to participate, where they decorate their cars and have a fun game set up. The children play the games to win candy and prizes. This brings the community together with all first responders and provides a safe environment for everyone.

Movie night in the park. Another wonderful way to bring the community together is by means of a community movie night. This can be as simple as having a movie projector on a wall or inflatable screen and you play your choice of a family friendly movie. Drinks and snacks are also an option, but not necessary. A small thing such as this can bring together neighbors who may have never met before. An example of this could be through the program of National Night Out.

National Night Out. This is an organization that developed from one simple idea to unite a local community that formed into a national organization that has reached 38 million neighbors and 16 thousand communities in over 38 years. The first National Night Out was in August of 1984 in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA. In 1984 NNO reached 2.5 million people and 400

communities across 23 states. According to the National Night Out official website, "National Night Out is an annual community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make our neighborhoods safer, more caring places to live. National Night Out enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community. Furthermore, it provides a great opportunity to bring police and neighbors together under positive circumstances." (National Night Out 2022).

Transition to a More Community-Oriented Police Department

Not all departments have become a community focused department, which creates the need now greater than ever. "Our behavior also needs to change if we are to build relationships with others." (Building communities 2016, para. 12). In order to allow for this transition to occur, the administrators at the department have to become more openminded to the concept. I'm not talking about sacrificing officer safety so that people feel better about the police, I'm talking about portraying the image that police officers are human just like the rest of the world. Hallinan (2016) wrote, "Transforming police to be effective in their communities requires significant effort and collaboration." (para. 6). In addition to community programs that connect the department with the people that they serve it also creates a more positive image. For example, at my agency I encourage the officers that I supervise to interact with the public whenever they can. This can be accomplished by saying hello or greeting people that they encounter during their day-to-day duties at the local convenient store when taking a break or getting fuel. Engaging with children at the local park when conducting a foot patrol. If your area has youth sports, these events are great for community interactions. I tell my officers to get out of your vehicle and walk into the football stadium or around the baseball fields. Your presence creates additional security and is welcomed by most people. Children will approach and begin to ask questions and you

need to stop and take a few minutes to engage with child because you do not know it, but that will be a memorable moment if conducted in a positive manner. I challenge you to do this, next time you are out in a more populated setting when you make eye contact with someone, smile and 9 times out of 10 it will be reciprocated. No words necessary and you are on your way to strengthening your department and public image.

Barriers

Barriers are seen when attempting to create change everywhere. Whether it is the fear of change itself or the concept of being too community-oriented that it becomes a danger towards the officer. This can be as simple as a handshake, a lot of officers I know will not shake hands with a person they do not know while they are working. We are taught as rookie officers, that shaking hands can get you killed. Now, put the shoe on the other foot and consider the negative impact that could have on a person you encounter on the street. "Demonstrate common courtesy; build trust one at a time." (Sanborn & Kocher 2016, para. 1). Another barrier you might encounter is a stubborn department, which is not willing to change. This is commonly found in older administrators who could have possibly "forgotten where they came from". Change tends to be a scary word in law enforcement. The concept of "this is how is has always been done" is an antiquated term. Instead, we have to move in the direction of current societal trends and adapt. Adaptation and fluidity are key in breaking the barriers are formed by society and the attitude towards police. In law enforcement, you have to adapt and overcome in order to survive. Terry (2016) discussed the idea that community-oriented policing was more complex than you might think. A department may have to take a different approach to achieve the same outcome as other departments. (Terry 2016)

In conclusion, police departments have begun on another change in the way that they operate from day-to-day. This evolution is constant, whether its new equipment, a new patrol car, or a different way of approaching the public, this change is constant. The Department of Justice released a report that stated, "community policing's goal is one of forging strong relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve" (COPS Office 2011, p 31). This only goes to support the need for a stronger community-oriented presence in law enforcement today. I discussed the early history of law enforcement and how Sir Robert Peel and his nine principles of law enforcement presented a community-oriented approach back in 1829. I also discussed the need for and importance of a department to be openminded to change in order to become a more transparent department. Transparency once established will benefit the department greater than a department that creates barriers between themselves and the public. Transparency is one of the most important changes that a department practice. It gives the public an opportunity to see the officers and agency firsthand and not allow it to give the perception that it is concealing truths. Barriers like that detract from the issue and do not help. I hope that with the examples provided a person could help move their own department in the right direction of serving the public through community-oriented policing as well as their traditional methods. This is not meant to become a replacement in a total sense, it is meant to strengthen and make the department even stronger than it already is.

References

Brown, L. (1989). Community policing: A practical guide for police officials. Washington, D.C.:

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice,

NCJ118001. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/118001.pdf

Building communities by building community. (2016). *SecurityInfoWatch.Com,* Retrieved from

https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.librar

yresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1843173929?accountid=33337

Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. (2011). *The impact of*

the economic downturn on American police agencies. p. 20-31 Retrieved from

http://www.ncdsv.org/images/COPS_ImpactOfTheEconomicDownturnOnAmericanPolic

eAgencies_10-2011.pdf

Hallinan, M. (2016). Are you ready for change? what the community expects from its police.

Journal of California Law Enforcement, 50(1), 20-27. Retrieved from

https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library

resources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1810493582?accountid=33337

Importance of police-community relationships and resources ... (n.d.). Retrieved March 30,

2022, from https://www.justice.gov/file/1437336/download

Lee, W.L.M. (1901), A History of Police in England, Methuen, London. Retrieved from

https://www.durham.police.uk/About-

Us/Documents/Peels_Principles_Of_Law_Enforcement.pdf

McBride, J. T. (2016). The essence of community policing. *Law & Order*, 64(1), 6. Retrieved

    from

    https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.librar

    yresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1763740057?accountid=33337

National night out. NNO. (2022, March 8). Retrieved March 28, 2022, from

    https://natw.org/

Ren, L., Cao, L., Lovrich, N., Gaffney, M. (2005). Linking confidence in the police with the

    performance of the police: Community policing can make a difference Original Research

    Article *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Volume 33, Issue 1, January–February 2005, Pages

    55-66 Retrieved from

    https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223464453_Linking_confidence_in_the_police

    _with_the_performance_of_the_police_Community_policing_can_make_a_difference

Sanborn, B., & Kocher, C. (2016). Mutual respect and building trust. *Law & Order, 64*(9), 6.

    Retrieved from

    https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.librar

    yresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1830836530?accountid=33337

Terry, D. (2016). Source of Good Ideas. *Law & Order, 64*(10), 52-54. Retrieved from

    https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.librar

    yresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1830839163?accountid=33337

Whisenand, P. M., & McCain, E. D. (2015). *Supervising police personnel: Strengths-based*

    leadership (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.