

Community Policing in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The ability for law enforcement to provide effective service and leadership in today's climate requires a fresh look at community policing. Although polls demonstrate police are still at the top of the list of professions who hold public trust, there is a need to strengthen that relationship and further develop personal bonds. When there is a disconnect between government and the citizens, communication tends to deteriorate, leading to distrust and eventually disorder. As leaders we must look at the community-based programs that are working and for new ways to rekindle the trust and harmony between the Lafayette Police Department and the citizens we serve. In this capstone we focused on Community Policing in the 21st Century; what community policing means, how it started and why it is important, how to implement community-based programs, what programs are in place and needed, and the benefits of those programs.

Community Policing in the 21st Century

To understand the importance of Community Policing you first must understand the history of policing. Community involvement in policing has always been needed throughout America. This is especially true during the beginning of the Colonial Era when no true police force had been established. Seeing there was a need to deter crime and protect the township, a public police force was created. “One of the first organized public police forces were established in Boston in 1631” (Kelling, 2021, para. 1). During these times the colonies established the “night watchmen” whose responsibility was to, “guard cities against fire, crime, and disorder” (Kelling, 2021, para. 1). The “night watchmen” were local citizens who did not receive a salary but were in fact paid by some of the private citizens.

Large amounts of immigrants who had very little resources began migrating to the established cities during this period. Soon after riots and crime became rampant therefore it became apparent that the public police force was not enough to handle the issues that were arising. It was due to this that a more formalized police force needed to be created. According to Kelling (2021), “the first formal police department in the United States was established in New York City in 1844” (para. 5). Many cities followed this trend establishing formal police departments throughout America. As cities began establishing formal police agencies it became less of a requirement for the citizens and the policing was left up to the officers. It was most likely at this time the separation of policing and citizen involvement began in America.

While America was attempting to solve its policing issues the “London Metropolitan Police Force was established in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel” (“Sir Robert Peel’s Policing, n.d., para

1). Sir Robert Peel, later known as the “Father of Modern Policing,” understood the importance of community involvement within policing.

Sir Robert Peel established three core ideas and nine principles of policing all of which are needed for a cohesive working relationship with the community. The most known principle is “to maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence” (“Sir Robert Peel’s Policing Principles,” n.d. para. 7). This principle explains the most important reason why all agencies should establish an interworking relationship within the community.

A good community relationship with all members of the community is important on many levels. This is especially true in today’s turbulent times. The actions of our police officers are scrutinized more now than ever, sometimes causing protest and other dangerous situations within a city. Having a strong community relationship can minimize the effects to both the community and the police organization. An example of this occurred within the city of Lafayette in the year of 2019. During this incident, a fight occurred at the Martin Luther King Center where one of the suspects shot and killed the victim. Upon officer’s arrival, they began to establish a crime scene. However, several family members arrived and began surrounding the individual officers. Through the emotions of the loss of a family member one of the brothers of the victim pulled a handgun from his waist band and was demanding to enter the scene. Due to this the officers un-holstered their handguns and began giving verbal commands for the suspect to drop his weapon. While the officers began to give the commands several additional family

members arrived at the scene shouting at the officers. The scene became volatile, and officers believed they would have to shoot the armed individual.

While the chaos was occurring, a local pastor arrived at the scene. This pastor was a cornerstone of the community and was involved in the Police Departments Community Relations Committee. Having built trust with the community and the Police Department the pastor was able to defuse the situation, disarming the individual, allowing the coroner to remove the body. The involved officers later advised the command staff if it was not for the pastor's assistance, they believed that they would have had to shoot the suspect and possibly other family members. This is just one example of how violence can be avoided through a strong police and community relationship.

In light of recent events both in our city, along with cities across the nation, it is time to strengthen our community relationships. Strengthening the relationship will assist with building trust between law enforcement and the community which may prevent further incidents from occurring. Our goal is to review and refresh existing programs, as well as establish new projects that will further align our organization with other cooperating agencies and concepts to create a greater level of collaboration in our communities. This effort will focus on problem solving for issues directly related to cohesion within the Lafayette environment.

Implementation

Now that the need for a fresh look at community policing has been established, there must be a plan for implementation. Law enforcement agencies throughout the United States are faced with uncertain times, as well as a portion of the population demanding reforms. The climate has added stress to both the officers and public. To some degree, there is a certain level

of ignorance regarding community policing and may be construed as too “touchy-feely” for many officers. It could also be interpreted by members of the community as placing a band-aid on a bigger problem or simply reactionary. Therefore, a formalized plan and process would be required to affect the program and achieve buy in from both sides.

Implementation of such program would require effective leadership from individuals capable of authentic, credible and servant styles of leadership. During his lecture on Authentic Leadership, Dr. Anthony Normore asserted that during turbulent times people look to trustworthy and genuine leaders (Normore, 2017). To ensure a following the leaders will need to have strong relationships with their followers that is built on trust and strong values. Authentic leadership for community policing could only be achieved if the leadership completely believes in the goals and vision of the program. In addition to being authentic, the leader should be credible. Barry Posner said, “credibility is the foundation of leadership” during his lecture on credibility where he established people need to believe in the leader to follow them (TEDx, 2015). Finally, and most importantly is the need for servant leadership to make this type of program effective. The program needs leaders who understand it is about the people and then focus on the people. This type of leader will listen to the people, give them the power to achieve goals and trust them to influence and get to know the community. All these leaders will not only embrace the change, but also influence and inspire others through a higher emotional intelligence to do to the same.

Once the leaders from the law enforcement agency are selected to help start the program it is important to establish a stakeholders meeting. This will be an opportunity for leaders from the community and other professional organizations to meet and gain a consensus of the resources available. It will also be an avenue to gauge the initial commitment from all involved.

Examples of some of the professional organization leaders would include church leaders, charity/non-profit organizations, chamber of commerce, government housing, substance abuse program leaders, health/mental health care, human services leaders, school leaders, private business that are known to donate resources and public works leaders. The goal would be to include anyone who can help those in need of resources to add safety, health, and welfare as well as clean up the neighborhoods if needed.

The next part of the implementation process would be to provide an understanding of the community policing initiative to the entire agency. It is important they understand the goals and vision for the program. This is the first shot at buy in, so it's important that the vision is very clear and open lines of communication are established. We know from experience that everyone will not buy in to a change immediately. Terry Anderson (2017) concluded that those involved must understand why there is change and to be patient since it may take a little longer for some to truly buy in (Anderson, 2017). Leaders should seek out those individuals who understand the need and can typically lean on those officers who show higher levels of empathy. It is necessary to form a core group of these individuals and leaders to formalize the planning and implementation process. When they are included in the process, they generally take more ownership of the program.

As the program begins to take life, the core group and stake holders will need to continue regular meetings to ensure everyone is on the same page and the program is evolving in a manner consistent with everyone's vision. At the agency level training would be instituted for all involved. As obstacles became apparent it would give everyone an opportunity to resolve issues collectively if they cannot be handled individually. Leadership within the groups will need to keep an open mind and be flexible to changes. Documentation would be kept of what was

working, as well as what was not. Also, the meetings would provide a venue to celebrate the successes of the program and individual achievements. This celebration is necessary to continue the motivations of the group, as well as achieving a greater success of team building.

As a part of the implementation process, leaders need to consider there will be outside influence that may or may not be within our control, especially when dealing with a wide variety of professionals, citizen groups, and cultures. For enforcement, personality and human factors should be continuously considered. As previously mentioned, you want your core group to be officers and leaders with a higher level of empathy. The leaders need to be aware of their own personality styles and the personality styles of those in the group. Having this understanding will allow that leader to shift into a style more suited to the other individual's role when appropriate, which will help achieve the results the leader desires (Anderson, 2017). Being able to do so will potentially minimize or reduce escalated conflicts. The leader will also need to account for human factors in the officers to minimize conflicts and the potential of an embarrassing event. Rosalyn Harrington (2017) asserted that stress, fatigue, and physical fitness were the three primary factors that affect human performance (Harrington, 2017). It is incumbent that leaders are cognizant of officer's health and safety and take appropriate measures to minimize theirs and the public's risks.

Finally, as the program continues, there will be a need for the leaders to consider future training, future leadership, technology, transparency, and involvement, as well as recruitment and retention efforts directly related to the community policing need. It may be necessary to implement a continuous improvement team to ensure the life of the program and to help it to continue to evolve as the climates and cultures change. Planning for a continued investment in

the community will signal a long-term commitment to all members of the community policing team.

Community Policing Programs

When we involve the community in our life, we promote pro-social behavior and emotional intelligence, thereby creating a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, (Ellis, 2017.) Emotional Intelligence is defined as, “The subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Roberson, 2017.) Traditionally, Law Enforcement has been reactive in response and utilized a warrior type of mentality of protecting and serving, rather than being taught the concept of Emotional Intelligence to utilize as another tactic. Within the last few decades there has been a shift towards better education, more well-rounded training, and higher thinking rather than just physical tactics and reacting to an unfamiliar situation. In conjunction with this thinking there is movement towards community-oriented policing. Community-oriented policing is defined by the Department of Justice as, “A philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systemic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.” (“Community Policing Defined”, 2012, para. 1)

With these concepts in mind, a leader in today’s world would have to create a buy in for the department he works with and for his community. The Lafayette Police Department has done an excellent job with community-oriented policing in the last few years. Our Former Chief of Police took notice of the direction that policing was heading, and with the servant leader mind-set he formed a Lafayette Community Relations Committee. He decided to serve the

collective and empower others toward a common goal of the entire organization, focusing on teamwork and interpersonal skills, as mentioned by Spain, (2017.) Lafayette Police Department became involved in many community events and special sections were created to facilitate **Community-Oriented Policing.**

The Lafayette Police Department created the Community Relations Committee. The Community Relations Committee would meet with the North Precinct and the South Precinct monthly. Each meeting consisted of the Chief, the Precinct Commander along with his command staff, community leaders for the precinct being discussed, to include any guests with concerns for that section of the community. Depending on the topic discussed and the needs of the community, City Councilmen representing those precincts, were invited to discuss and problem solve with the committee. This led to a bonding and open communication of the Lafayette Police Department with Community Leaders that has served the Lafayette Police Department in times of crisis when Community Leaders step up in critical situations and take control to help assure the peace.

Another program that has been implemented and is highly successful, while reaching a large number in the community is the Lafayette Police Department School Resource Officer Program, (SRO.) “SRO programs across the globe are founded as collaborative efforts by police agencies, law enforcement officers, educators, students, parents, and communities. The goal of NASRO and SRO programs is to provide safe learning environments, provide valuable resources to school staff members, foster a positive relationship with students and develop strategies to resolve problems that affect our youth with the goal of protecting all children, so they can reach their fullest potential” (“About NASRO”, n.d., para 1). The SRO program has a tremendous impact on the community. The SROs interact and are seen by more people in the community

than any other law enforcement personnel. Our community entrust their most precious commodity, our children, to their SROs. The SRO must possess maturity and emotional intelligence. They are in the school to help problem-solve and counsel and use a great deal of discretion, as they are dealing with juveniles and domestic situations, along with school safety and security. SROs develop relationships with their students, the school staff and become invested in the school, which leads to trust and respect and impacts the students at school and at home. It also has an impact on the parents and often the student's home life. It is not uncommon for students, parents, and teachers to wait to report a crime or situation, and ask for advice from their SRO, rather than call 911.

Another great program geared towards the youth and bonding with the community is the Lafayette Police Explorers Program Post 911. This program is spearheaded and run by an Officer whose background is a Juvenile Detective and SRO. She was highly successful in both areas. The program was implemented on October 6, 2014 at the Lafayette Police Department. The program accepts participants from the 9th grade to the 12th grade. They participate in a selection process that is similar to being hired at a police agency, they have to provide an application and then go through an oral board process with officers who are part of the program. The applicant along, with their parent, must participate in an interview with the Explorer Advisor (leader of the program). If selected they must sign a contract pertaining to the rules, regulations and requirements of the program. Meetings are held bi-weekly, where explorers learn the policy and procedures necessary to be police officers. They not only gain book knowledge, but they are able to conduct activities such as traffic stops, defensive tactics, scenario training dealing with a variety of situations from domestic violence to talking to a mentally ill person. During the summer, a weeklong academy is held. The Explorers can put all that they have learned in the bi-

weekly meetings into action at the academy. Each day they focus is on a particular subject, to include a day at the firing range where they receive gun safety instruction, and then are allowed to shoot. At the end of the week, a banquet is held where they receive certificates of completion as well as various awards for excellence in specific areas. The Explorer Post 911 also participates in community relations activities. The 911 Explorer Post holds a Thanksgiving food drive at a local grocery retailer where they accept donations of food. The Advisor of the Explorer Post 911 gets the FOP and Police Union to donate turkeys. At the following meeting, the explorers fill baskets with turkeys and food, they then deliver the food to needy families. The Explorer Post participates in the Trunk-R-Treat program. They help decorate the trunks of Police Units and hand out candy to the community, as a safe alternative for families for Halloween. This program has helped our youth to understand the role of what, why and how Law Enforcement can make a positive impact on our community.

Social Media and the role it plays in Law Enforcement is extremely important. If we do not write the narrative, others will write the narrative for us. Our Public Information Officer section is responsible for our Facebook Page, and posts messages as necessary on critical incidents. They utilize the local media outlets, news and radio, and have formed relationships to try to get ahead of negative publicity. The PIO introduces Police Officers on our Facebook page with details about the officer and a quote from the officer to let the public get to know the officers.

Lafayette Police Department participates in Coffee with a Cop. The Department announces through media outlets a date, time and location where the Precinct Commander will be so that the public can stop and visit with the Precinct Commander. Lafayette Police Department holds community walks. The Chief, Command Staff and select officers will go into

a community and walk door to door checking on residents. During specific times of the year, school supplies may be handed out to the residents, or window fans if it is during the summertime.

In looking at Community Oriented Policing, we should look forward. Lafayette Police Department is lacking in its ability to deal with an ever growing mentally ill, and transient population. It is extremely important to understand that the United States is dealing with the growing population of mentally ill. A Critical Incident Team, (CIT,) is a community-based model whereby law enforcement officials are trained to successfully interact with a mentally ill person, (Normore, 2017). It is an innovative model of police-based crisis prevention, (Normore, 2017). The basic premise of all CIT Programs is to improve safety of officers, improve safety of consumers, and redirect consumers away from the judicial system and into the health care system. A successful CIT is comprised of 3 required core elements: Ongoing, Operational, Sustaining. The Ongoing element is a partnership, community ownership, policies and procedures. The Operational element is the CIT, curriculum such as, CIT training, mental health recovery facility. The sustaining element pertains to evaluation and research, in-service training, recognition and honors, and outreach. CIT should be flexible depending on the needs of the community, (Normore, 2017). We would need to create a collaborative effort by incorporating the coroner, police, city government, housing programs, mental health professionals and medical facilities to help to alleviate this growing issue.

In order to be effective, we must establish open and honest dialogue. We must form collaborative partnerships between our law enforcement agency and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police. The benefits are life-changing to the community and department.

Benefits of Community Policing

The benefits of community policing can be found in the relationships, communication, and dynamics within the community. Crime is not simply a police problem. By its very nature it is a problem of society. By implementing programs within the community as part of community policing it cultivates and grows opportunities for more positive outcomes. Let us examine some of the benefits or positive outcomes created by such efforts.

Peyton, Sierra-Arevalo, and Rand (2019) stated, “The intervention reported here provides evidence in support of the power of positive intergroup contact, extending these insights to interactions between uniformed patrol officers and the individuals they police.” (para. 15). This emphasizes one of the benefits of community policing programs by increasing more favorable attitudes towards police by the citizens they serve. This benefit is inherently helpful and supportive within the community and fosters an environment that builds stronger relationships. It is crucial to the relationship that the first or only interaction between the citizen and the police is not a negative interaction. The positive interaction serves to create understanding and mutual respect between the citizen and the police. This positive interaction leads to more favorable attitudes towards each other. The more favorable attitudes open the door to additional benefits involving the citizens and the police.

Second, trust increases among the citizens and police. The foundation of police and citizen relationships must be that of trust. Trust must be earned through developing positive interactions, mutual understanding, and relationships. These interactions and relationships serve to create bonds among the citizen and the police surrounding common beliefs, goals, and purpose for the community. This trust strengthens relationships and serves to help police and citizens navigate

difficult or crisis situations as they arise. This trust is important in enhancing a community's ability to face crisis situations involving police or enforcement action. If trust exists citizens will embrace the situation with more understanding and acceptance of the reasons given by the police. If a citizen does not trust the police it does not matter the reason for the police action, because the citizen does not believe what they are being told. Trust is crucial within the police and citizen relationship.

Thirdly, a benefit of community policing is more accurate information from the public about criminal activity within the community. If there exists a better relationship foundationally based on trust the community will feel more comfortable to engage the police and give them accurate information as to what is happening within that community. This information or intelligence is imperative within our criminal justice system to create accountability and solve problems within the community. For the police to effectively make a criminal case they need evidence. This evidence must be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a defendant committed the crime. Without accurate information and cooperation from witnesses within the community it is extremely difficult to successfully prosecute and hold criminals accountable for their actions. Community policing creates an environment and culture where citizens feel safe and comfortable giving the police accurate information. This accurate information helps the police to understand what is happening within a community that results in more effective resource allocation and crime solving activities.

Next, through community policing efforts the police gain invaluable insight and understanding of the needs and expectations of the citizens within the community that they serve. It is imperative to have a clear picture of what the needs are for the citizens in the community so that the police can more effectively address those needs. In addition, the police must understand what the citizen expectations are within their community. If you understand what is expected,

then you have the chance to fulfill that expectation. This prevents the failed expectations which leads to organizational failures. For example, if a group of citizens in the community expects the police to solve a perceived issue with panhandling on a certain corner of a community park it is imperative that there is interaction as well as discussion to create realistic expectations about the issue.

Conclusion

Our communities are made up of people of different cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. These differences bring varying beliefs about issues that affect us all. These differences are not a weakness; it is this diversity that woven together creates strength. We have common goals and desires for our future, we want to live and be happy, secure, raise families, grow, prosper, and enjoy life. We must come together, communicate, and find those moments of clarity that can only be found when people have sincere interactions for the purpose of good. In the law enforcement profession, we have great opportunities to create change within our communities. Too often, this opportunity is squandered by actions that end up driving a wedge within our community and tarnishing the badge we wear. We must recognize our badge is more than a piece of metal; it is symbolic of all that is good within our community. It represents fairness, honesty, and rule of law. When a person accepts a badge, they are no longer simply a citizen; they become a guardian of the rights and well-being of others in our community. The fundamental belief that no one understands the problems, issues, and challenges in a community better than those that work, play, and live in that community is ingrained within community policing. The benefit of community policing includes the relationships and culture developed that cultivates more effective problem solving in the community focused on realistic expectations and positive outcomes.

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