

**WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY
POLICING STRATEGIES ON CALLS FOR SERVICE
RESPONSE AT THE OCEANSIDE POLICE
DEPARTMENT BY THE YEAR 2009?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

**MICHAEL D. SHIRLEY
OCEANSIDE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

COMMAND COLLEGE CLASS XXVII

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Captain Jones called Lieutenant Jones into his office. Although not related, these two officers had worked together on many projects. Captain Jones said, "Larry, you've got to do something about the graffiti on the wall enclosing Marlborough Heights. The homeowners association is writing letters to the Mayor and emailing the Chief.

"Lieutenant Jones straightened his tie. "I'll do what I can, but you know I've got three officers out injured and you told me last week there was no more money for overtime."

"Then get creative," Captain Jones said.

This interchange at a medium sized police department is not far from the reality faced by many police managers. Because there are inadequate resources for departments to do all they want and should do, scarcity exists. Businesses as well as governments compete for limited resources. Many municipalities struggle to do more with less.

Elected officials, pressured by constituent demands, in turn pressure professional government workers to keep the politicians in office by the delivery of timely, efficient and cost effective services. Law enforcement professionals have felt the pressure to delivery timely service as much or more than other local government service providers. Citizens demand accountability on the service value of their tax dollar.

A significant investment of tax dollars has been in the calls for service model of policing (CFS). The aim of CFS is to place government emergency response in the hands of citizens, at the touch of three buttons, 9-1-1. Those buttons activate

a sophisticated electronic system designed to send emergency response personnel rapidly to the citizen. The problem with CFS for law enforcement is its fundamental premise, rapid response. CFS is triggered by citizen crisis. Police intervention diffuses the crisis but does little if anything for the underlying conditions that created the crisis.

To counter the shortsightedness of CFS, public safety thinkers have envisioned a variety of strategies. Some are called directed patrol, some are called community policing, some are called community oriented policing, and some are called community oriented policing and problem solving. The names are not as important as their purpose, which is to overcome the inadequacy of CFS.

Unfortunately, citizens continue to call police, demanding rapid response and effective police action. On busier shifts, officers rush from one call to the next, filling their logs with multiple entries, thinking to themselves what high quality work they are providing, the evidence being the quantity of calls for service.

Neighborhood Watch is the sales forum for CFS. It trains citizens to be the eyes and ears of the police department. It teaches them to call police when they observe suspicious activity. For their part, police promise to respond quickly to take care of the problem. And citizens expect police to keep their promise.

Today, citizen requests for service are changing. They are demanding solutions that last. They are doing more than just calling 9-1-1. They are writing chiefs of police, city managers, and elected officials. They are using email. In response many departments deploy officers to work directly with citizens. Some are called neighborhood officers in an attempt to capture the nostalgia of an earlier

era of policing. But calls for service are relentless and many agencies lack sufficient personnel to even staff existing beats. The agencies are unable to break officers free from the demands of calls for service. Like Lieutenant Jones, police managers complain, "I can only do more if you give me more."

Generally, however, additional resources are not forthcoming. Police managers have what they have and it will never have enough. Enough means being able to fulfill the demands of CFS and have sufficient remaining to staff alternative modes of deployment. Actually, the issue is one of perspective not resources. Police who command uniformed officers see themselves in the business of CFS response. Any other policing activity is extra, elective, optional, second in priority, and to be done if possible; but not at the expense of CFS. First take care of the crises, then deploy to prevent them. This traditional thinking is counter-productive.

Police leaders need a different perspective; not a new one, just different. For years, time management experts have taught us to take care of the important tasks before the urgent ones. The expert's perspective is that handling the important prevents the urgent. Police leaders need to focus on the important in an effort to prevent the crises inherent in CFS. They need to balance problem solving with response to the crisis generated by the problem.

Many agencies operate special programs to focus on what is perceived as important. Among these are traffic units, narcotics and gang teams, neighborhood officers, DUI teams, and various task forces. While these programs are of value they may or may not reflect community concern. To be certain of community

concern some departments regularly survey citizens for input. A key, yet untapped method, for determining community concern is the analysis of calls for service.

Calls for service represent continuing citizen input. As citizens request service, police leaders ought to be asking two questions. The first seeks a determination of the necessity for the call. Why was it necessary? Is there a different way to handle this call? Does this call mandate a police response? The second question seeks ways to prevent the call in the first place. What could have been done to make this call unnecessary? Of course, it is not possible to prevent that which has already happened. It is possible to learn from the past to prevent similar events in the future. That which is at stake is the real suffering of potential victims.

In one community a recent call was of a drowning child. The fourteen-month old girl had wandered outside the house through an open patio door, tripped into a five-gallon bucket, and drowned in six inches of soapy water. The reason for the call from the crisis stricken parents is obvious. The reason for police and paramedic response was obvious. But the question of future prevention was never asked. Had it been, what answers might it have revealed? Perhaps it could have led to the development of a brochure concerning hazards in the home or to announcements in local schools where older siblings attended or to door-to-door canvassing by volunteers to warn others away from similar dangers.

Police agencies regularly respond to crimes that have already occurred. Officers or their civilian counterparts write detailed reports on these crimes. A few reports have sufficient information to justify follow up investigation. Most are

simply filed. Of those investigated, detectives ask the question, "How can I find out who did this?" But until the crime becomes a crime wave, few ask the question, "How could this crime have been prevented?"

Investigating officers should consider the victim, the victim's environment and the criminal in terms of prevention as well as apprehension. What the victim could have done to prevent the crime? How could the victim have behaved differently? What was there about the victim that advertised readiness to be victimized? How can the environment be changed to prevent the crime? What about neighborhood blight removal? Can landlords evict unsavory tenants? Is police presence adequate? Do citizens and police have partnerships? How can the criminal be changed to prevent crime? What about increased parole and probation sweeps? What about truancy sweeps? What about changes in school hours or bus schedules? What about renewed employment opportunities? By looking at the victim, his environment and the criminal, the investigating officers builds two cases. The first case supports prosecution. The second case prevents a future service call.

Analysis of the underlying causes of calls for service can create resources for the department. Every call that is prevented generates the availability of time that would have been devoted to the call had it occurred. Every minute saved from one activity is available to be used to prevent others. In addition to documenting crime, officers ought also to document their analysis of the call aimed at future prevention.

Police leaders need to analyze calls for service, identify patterns of calls and search for underlying causes. Police leaders should identify community environments that contribute to the necessity of calls for service. Where feasible they should train citizens in problem resolution so that neighborhood disputes do not reach the crisis stage. Police officers need to be given as much credit for activities that prevent crisis as for their professional response to crisis. Officers need to give officers the time on calls to investigate both the symptom and the cause.

When police leaders face decisions over the allocation of resources, equal weight needs to be given to activities that prevent calls as to the calls themselves. They need to be willing to speak with citizens to explain this change in emphasis, defend it if necessary, and even to sell it as a viable use of tax dollars.

Police leaders bear the burden of leading change. To police leaders falls the responsibility to see the world differently and to enable others, police service providers and citizens, to embrace a more productive perspective. The ability to provide guidance into an uncertain future is that which contrasts leadership with management. Management deals with today. Leadership achieves a better tomorrow.