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***Focus on Police and the Community***

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**The Cover:** SAT officers on patrol stop to make friends with a youth from the neighborhood. See article p. 2.

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# Community Policing Is Not Police-Community Relations

By  
ROBERT C. TROJANOWICZ, Ph.D.



Confusion persists concerning what community policing is, how it works, and what it can accomplish. Much of the continuing criticism suggests that community policing merely retreads shopworn elements of police-community relations and repackages them with a trendy new buzz word.

This misperception is used to argue that community policing, therefore, cannot address serious contemporary problems, like crime and drugs. It also provides detractors with hope that community policing will someday be discarded as yet another great-sounding gimmick that failed to make a valid difference in the real world. As one



sergeant recently said to me, "We waited the chief out on other programs, so we can wait him out on community policing, too."

Much of the blame for this persistent misunderstanding rests with academics, myself included, because we have hesitated to state clearly that police-community relations was not an evolutionary step on the way to community policing, but an unfortunate detour. In 1972, I wrote a piece bemoaning the loss of the decentralized and personalized police service provided by foot patrol officers: "The direct, extended, face-to-face relationship between police officers and citizens is missing."<sup>1</sup>

But we were like the automakers in Detroit who tried to solve deep and fundamental problems with the quality of their cars by tacking on more chrome and bigger fins at the end of the process. We knew that the police had to forge new positive links to the law-abiding people, particularly in inner-city minority communities. We also understood that the police had to shift to becoming more

proactive. And, we were beginning to see that fear of crime, heightened when people feel powerless to protect themselves, was becoming as big a problem as crime itself.

However, instead of proposing a restructuring of the overall mission of the police and insisting that the community take a more active part, we invested our energies in police-community relations. The benefit of 20/20 hindsight makes it seem obvious that such monumental challenges could not be met by merely tinkering at the margins. From today's vantage point, it seems clear that these piecemeal programs all too often ended up as token add-ons—peripheral to the day-to-day operation of the "real" police in the community. Likewise, the community could continue to have unrealistic expectations of the police.

This is not meant to denigrate the many well-meaning, dedicated, and sincere people who struggled to try to make these doomed efforts succeed. The failure was not in the nobility of our intentions, but in the scope of our vision. Police-community relations advocates argued that social conditions of the time required that something be done, because improved police-community

relations was a necessity and focusing efforts in a Police-Community Relations Unit was practical and made sense.

To meet the challenge of becoming more proactive, many departments inaugurated or expanded Crime Prevention Units, and these efforts offered concrete help to the community by showing people how they could do more to prevent their own victimization. In part, it was the success of these efforts that helped to spur interest in how to do more to help communities help themselves. Most crime prevention specialists are enthusiastic supporters of community policing, and many work closely with community officers, training them on the latest techniques and assisting them in presentations in the community.

## COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

By comparing and contrasting the differences between community policing and police-community relations, we can clear up lingering confusions. At the same time, we can clarify how community policing works.

### Theory

Both community policing and police-community relations are grounded in their respective theoretical frameworks. Community policing is based on organizational theory, open systems theory, critical theory, normative sponsorship theory, and public policy analysis. Police-community relations is based on conflict theory, intergroup relations theory, and communications theory.<sup>2</sup>



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 ”

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## Mission

Community policing requires a department-wide philosophical commitment to involve average citizens as partners in the process of reducing and controlling the contemporary problems of crime, drugs, fear of crime, and neighborhood decay, and in efforts to improve the overall quality of life in the community.

Police-community relations is not a philosophy, but rather a limited approach that was often viewed as public relations aimed at reducing hostility toward the police among minorities. In essence, police-community relations implies a narrow, bureaucratic response to a specific problem, rather than a fundamental change in the overall mission of the department and increased expectations of the community.

## Organizational Strategy

Community policing requires everyone in the department, sworn

and civilian personnel at all levels, to explore how they can carry out the mission through their actions on the job. Equally essential is that the department must permanently deploy a portion of its patrol force as community officers in specified beats so they can maintain direct, daily contact with average citizens.

Police-community relations is an isolated specialty unit, made up exclusively of staff personnel whose duties are bound by the narrow definition of their goals. These units have limited ongoing, intensive outreach to the community and no mechanism to effect change within the police department itself.

## Operational Goals

A department-wide commitment to community policing means that everyone's job must be reassessed in light of the new mission. For example, this may mean providing motor patrol officers new

freedom to experiment with problem-solving techniques. It can also mean small courtesies, such as providing civilian personnel a revised telephone directory designed to allow them to connect a caller to the right person on the first try.

Yet, the ultimate success or failure of community policing rests primarily with the new community officers, the generalists who operate as mini-chiefs within their own beat areas. They act as full-service law enforcement officers who react to problems as they occur, but their mandate also requires them to involve average citizens in short- and long-term proactive efforts aimed at the department's expanded mission. The resulting improvement in police-community relations is a welcomed byproduct of delivering decentralized and personalized police service, but is not the primary goal.

Freed from the isolation of the patrol car and the incessant demands of the police radio, community officers serve as the department's community outreach specialists and problem-solvers. The community officer must both overcome apathy and restrain vigilantism, recognizing that the police alone cannot hope to maintain order and solve crucial contemporary neighborhood problems. Citizens can no longer expect the police to be "guns for hire." They need to discard the "mask" of anonymity and become actively involved.

As the community's ombudsman and liaison, community officers not only have the right

but also the responsibility to mobilize others, individually and in groups. Many situations require input and assistance from other government agencies—code enforcement, animal control, mental health, sanitation. Other solutions require help from nonprofit groups, such as advocates for the homeless. Community officers also involve local businesses in developing new initiatives. The scope of these community-based, police-supervised local efforts is bound only by the time available, the collective imagination and enthusiasm of the community officer and the citizens involved, and the specific resources available.

Because community officers work so closely with people in their neighborhoods, they build trust and they often generate more and better information than other officers and units can. Therefore, the job requires them to share what they know with other units in the department.

In contrast to this grassroots approach that involves average citizens who live in the neighborhood, police-community relations officers tend to communicate most often with the elite, both inside and outside the department. Their outreach consists of meetings with blue-ribbon panels and community leaders, particularly those who represent the predominant ethnic, religious, and racial minorities (and who may or may not have their fingers on the pulse of their constituents).

These sessions usually focus on resolving formal complaints and

discussing issues and concerns, but police-community relations officers have no direct authority to implement change. Instead, the officers serve as advisors to police command, which means that results depend less on the officer's specific actions than on the willingness of top police administrators to take action.

Since police-community relations officers enjoy few sustained contacts with the community, they are unlikely to generate specific information on crime, drugs, and disorder to share with the rest of the department. Conversely, these jobs

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also provide no opportunity for the officers to identify local priorities or to initiate and follow up on creative community-based initiatives. Unlike the community officer, they do not have a stake in specific neighborhoods and are viewed as outsiders.

#### **Performance Measures**

Community policing implies moving away from narrow quantitative measures of success—number of arrests, average response time,

clearance rates, number of complaints against officers—toward qualitative measures, such as citizen involvement, fear of crime, improvement in quality of life, and real and perceived improvement in chronic problems.

#### **Accountability**

Community officers are not only supervised by superiors but the new relationship with the community also means that average citizens serve as an additional check on their behavior. Community officers must confront every day the people who care most about whether their new solutions are working.

Since police-community relations officers have no direct authority to make changes, they are often perceived by the community as “flak-catchers”—bureaucrats with no real power who are there merely as a buffer between the community and the police department. Particularly in departments where there is little commitment to resolving

problems, police-community relations officers often find themselves trapped between angry community leaders and a defensive police administration.

The problem is compounded because police-community relations officers are never the officers who respond directly to the crime calls, so people cannot hold them directly accountable. It also removes them from the feedback loop that might allow them to tailor their recommendations to local situations.

## Comparison of Community Policing to Police-Community Relations

### Community Policing

- Goal: Solve problems—improved relations with citizens is a welcome by-product
- Line Function: Regular contact of officer with citizens
- Citizens nominate problems and cooperate in setting police agenda
- Police accountability is insured by the citizens receiving the service
- Meaningful organizational change and departmental restructuring, ranging from officer selection to training, evaluation, and promotion
- A department-wide philosophy and acceptance
- Influence is from "the bottom up." Citizens receiving service help set priorities and influence police policy
- Officer is continually accessible, in person or by telephone recorder in a decentralized office
- Officer encourages citizens to solve many of their own problems and volunteer to assist neighbors
- Success is determined by the reduction in citizen fear, neighborhood disorder, and crime

### Police-Community Relations

- Goal: Change attitudes and project positive image—improved relations with citizens is main focus
- Staff Function: Irregular contact of officer with citizens
- "Blue ribbon" committees identify the problems and "preach" to police
- Police accountability is insured by civilian review boards and formal police supervision
- Traditional organization stays intact with "new" programs periodically added, no fundamental organizational change
- Isolated acceptance often localized to PCR Unit
- Influence is from "the top down"—those who "know best" have input and make decisions
- Intermittent contact with the public because of city-wide responsibility, contact is made through central headquarters
- Citizens are encouraged to volunteer but are told to request and expect more government (including law enforcement) services
- Success is determined by traditional measures, i.e. crime rates and citizen satisfaction with the police

Civilian review boards and "blue-ribbon" committees are often viewed as the appropriate methods of insuring police accountability.

In general, the public perception is that community officers are real, personalized police officers who offer concrete help, whereas police-community relations officers are strangers whose assistance, although well-meaning, is sporadic and limited.

### Scope of Impact

A department-wide community policing mission carried out directly by community officers on the streets can make dramatic changes fast. Particularly in the case of illegal drugs, community policing has demonstrated the flexibility to respond to emerging problems in creative ways. People who live in crack-infested neighborhoods need relief not only from the dealers but also from intoxicated addicts on the street. Involving average citizens in community-based, police-supervised anti-drug initiatives to drive drug dealing from their neighborhoods offers new solutions that do not focus exclusively on arrest, which rarely does more than clog the rest of the criminal justice system. Citizens are expected to take an active part in solving many of their own problems, using the officer as a leader and catalyst when necessary. In community policing, unlike police-community relations, the officer educates citizens on issues like response time and how they can effectively use scarce resources rather than expect increased services.



Also, in community policing, average citizens nominate the problems and cooperate in setting the police agenda. This process often reveals that the community views social and physical disorder—from potholes to panhandlers—as higher priorities than actual crime. Because they have been involved in setting priorities, they are more willing to cooperate in finding solutions.

Within departments as well, community policing has a much greater impact than police-community relations. In police-community relations, change trickles down from the top with “blue ribbon” committees and top command having the most influence. With community policing, change can bubble up from the bottom. The entire department benefits from enhanced understanding about the underlying dynamics and concerns at street level as viewed by average citizens and patrol officers. When this information reaches the chief and other high-ranking officials, it allows them to balance the needs of powerful special-interest groups, who have always had access to the top, with the needs of many who might otherwise be ignored. The chief of police sees a broader picture and becomes an advocate for the effective delivery of both law enforcement and social services in the jurisdiction.

### THE FUTURE

Most police-community relations programs have faded away,

and unrelenting budget pressures will no doubt mean that others will die—often so that the department can put those resources directly into community policing.

The advent of community policing has also threatened budgets

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for crime prevention units. However, because the goals dovetail so well, many departments find that community policing can help reinvestigate crime prevention. In larger units, budget cuts can mean some staff officers in crime prevention simply switch to a line function and become community officers. Most prove to be “naturals” at the job, because of their experience in organizing block watchers and neighborhoods associations and in teaching proactive techniques.

Those who remain in staff positions in crime prevention often find themselves serving more as a resource for others in the department than as direct providers to the community. Many work closely with community officers, providing training and keeping them abreast of the latest advances and assisting them in community projects.

Community policing owes a debt to both police-community relations and crime prevention for clarifying the scope of the problem and attempting to solve it. However, community policing most directly addresses the need to restructure and refocus officer selection, training, evaluation, and promotion. As we approach the 21st century, we see that community policing is the wave of the future because it delivers direct services and challenges the community to do its share.

Among the trendsetting big-city police departments nationwide, more than half have formally and visibly adopted community policing. As urban, rural, and suburban police departments of all sizes follow their lead, community policing makes the transition from being a promising trend to becoming the mainstream.

The challenge ultimately will be to drop the “community” from community policing, as everyone recognizes that it is synonymous with quality policing. As the police continue to strive for excellence, community policing is rapidly becoming the standard by which all departments will be judged.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Trojanowicz, “Police-Community Relations: Problems and Process,” *Criminology*, vol. 9, No. 4, February 1972, pp. 401-425.

<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion, refer to *Police Management in the 21st Century*, Robert Trojanowicz and Bonnie Bucqueroux, Prentice-Hall (in progress).