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A Question of Police Role?

By

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Listening to National Public Radio, the discussion concerned how the police must change, acquire new training, adopt a different philosophy, demonstrate more tolerance, and other “police only” issues. No conversation about contributing factors and people who are part of all incidents being examined. The debate focused on conjecture about police; however, there are others whose presence at the table is critical for a change to occur.

Laws are created and passed by civilian legislative bodies to include: (a) the stated statute, (b) the elements of a crime, (c) criminal procedures, and (d) prescribed punishment if found guilty. Moreover, appropriately these become the duty of the District Attorney, Judge, and Jury. Civilians make the law, not the police! Police are created to enforce the law. Citizens are expected to adhere to the law. A broader picture often lost in the discussion as some feel any behavior, any attitude, any disdain for society is acceptable. Not so!

So, given that society through its elected leadership has dumped mental health, substance abuse, social problems, medical response and other social issues on the police; we can say it is not useful problem-solving. We have requirements, standards, and certifications to be mental health workers, substance abuse counselors, workforce development, medical treatment all of whom are adequately licensed for that role. Not the police, they are certified to enforce the law; respond to emergencies and specific duties. They too often unfairly become the scapegoat. This tactic is not an efficient strategy as it does not result in sustainable solutions to persistent Problems. However, what it does do is make the role of police distorted, creates impossible compliance, and gives those in society, who are less concerned about social order, a pathway to disorder and dysfunctional behavior.

Thus, we are discussing individual behavior and actions that civilian lawmakers identify as regulatory. They also create police to enforce the statutory laws. Moreover, when all the non-police problems are placed on them, the police are singled out as faulty. We need our elected officials on the front lines assisting in finding solutions. Not in the safety of City Hall, Congress and the White House (in partnership and collaboration), alongside those who deal face to face with the public. It would add to their credibility.

Moreover, people need to stop acting like they have some galactic pass to act the way they do, for they do not! We need to stop the wholesale uproar, damage, and harm until facts are known. To some, that is unimportant as there are other agendas involved. Perhaps, the most important step, hire trained and certified people skilled in handling social problems of drugs, mental health, personal feuds, special interest laws and other

nonsense that is not in the job description of police. Now, that would make sense and might achieve success.

Police role must be redefined and ensure that requisite skills, knowledge and abilities are in their toolkit. Perhaps if the constant stress of the job were managed appropriately, there would be a less adverse reaction to the barrage of negativity they encounter with every duty shift. Resilience training, a return to appropriate duties, adequate staffing and time are all positive improvements that can be made. We seem loath to solve issues, only complain and seek to chastise and that, in my opinion, is an ineffective response. We can do better as demonstrated time and again.

A proposed agenda to define police roles:

We are a Nation of laws, but that expectation is frequently ignored. People of all character break the law each day. Illustrations include speeding, stealing, abuse, white collar crime, lying and cheating all manner of persons out of their property and money, robbery, violence and murder, illegal drugs, and dozens of other problems where a call for police assistance is made. This list is long, it is disturbing, and it is unlikely to change. Some people are thieves, perjurers, murderers; they cheat and bilk people of goods and money for their personal gain. This behavior is not some Robin Hood aspect; that simply is an illusion.

So, can we admit there are those who contribute to society and those that do not? The continuum of justice process falls along a line of reasoning with many definitional areas, descriptions of where other people and function lies and the limits to which they fall within the categories determined. Certainly, there are standard components to this maze of social existence? Yes, the extent to which we insist on behavior that is not as a predator behaves, rather as someone who contributes to social well-being.

That role management frequently becomes a police problem as first responders. If an arrest is made the case is sent to a prosecutor, as the second step in the system, courts as third and the array of correctional services and institutions as other actions.



Police are expected to engage with all types of social deviance and disorder and in that process please 100 percent of the population. That is the most arduous concept yet, but it gets worse. When a disagreement arises, the sorting out rests with layers from the above continuum of the justice process, yet it never seems to rise to that level. We get stuck attacking the police, demanding change, arguing innocence and being singled out, and other sound bites that have become so familiar. We see political persons in positions located in level two making instant decisions without facts, data or even completed investigation, leveling blame, ordering the arrest of police and becoming an image of self-endorsement. However, what is it based on and if found false, silence and the incompetence continue to unfold? Have we a diminished sense of responsibility, to do

what is right, to forgo worry about a personal position, to maintain an image or an agenda that is self-serving? That goes to individual character.

Perhaps it is time to revise the role of police? Elected officials have made all manner of change to society and not knowing what to do with the fallout, only dump it on the

police. Examples include decriminalization of public drunkenness, community-based mental health, and closing of mental health institutions, dependence on law enforcement to stop illegal drug trade and a growing addicted population. Meanwhile, education, substance abuse treatment and other problems remain underfunded. We have calls to 911 because a parent cannot control the 4-year old and want the police to become the parent, calls to cars parked out-in-front of a person's house and they want someone else to settle the issue.



The list of examples continues, and if time were applied to the equation, we would be astounded at the cost of police response to issues that the public has abdicated for convenience sake.



The remaining question, what is the role of police, what is cost prohibitive, what are the limits of available personnel, and how can we reign in the out-of-control

demands from a public who accepts little to no personal responsibility at times? One model might include the following:

Table 1
Community Capacity Building: Determining Police Role and Services

1. Community consensus based on discourse, decision and implementation principles.
2. Development of mission, vision, values, goals, and objectives utilizing community capacity building principles.
3. Defined services supported by adequate funding and personnel to carry them out.
4. Adequate facilities, equipment, technology, training, & organized management to achieve the mission, vision, values, and goals.
5. Police and community evaluation body to ensure that the delivery of services following the description in numbers 1 and 2 of this list.

When the society and its police are not communicating, the silence indicates problems exist. To be ignored is to invite rumor or supposition, neither of which is appropriate. It is important to simply determine ways the police, from the office on patrol to the chief, find the means to spending time together.

The role of job satisfaction.

E. Programs that address cause, symptoms, and strategies to maintain balance in life.

Albrecht¹ (1979) theorized that there were eight universal factors that come into play when job satisfaction is achieved, thereby reducing stress and adversity. Employees will vary in their individual level of comfort at work and management can improve balance and reduce stress when they implement programs and policy to address the following:

1. Job status.
2. Accountability standards.
3. The extent of human contact.
4. The degree of the physical challenge.
5. Mental/emotional challenge.
6. A variety of job tasks undertaken.
7. The workload on the individual employee.
8. Physical conditions and environment of the individual's work.

SKAME Model² (skills, knowledge, abilities, motivation and experience)

Each employee has individual strengths and abilities and will perform their duties based on their personal skills, knowledge, abilities, motivation and expertise (Albrecht; 1979; Williams and Huber, 1986³). They offered action steps that managers can implement to reduce stress in the workplace. They are:

1. Clear and unambiguous work assignments, limits of responsibility and authority, and how employee performance will be evaluated.
2. Introduce the manager's leadership style and secure employee understanding.
3. Delegate effectively and empower subordinates where it is situationally feasible.
4. Be clear in establishing and conveying goals and decision-making criteria.
5. Establish work and vacation policies for all employees.

Lawless (1991)⁴ identified employer programs effective in helping employees with stress, adversity and burn out. He stated the results were reduced levels of employee burnout and a lowered stress related illness, at a reduced cost. The programs are:

¹ Albrecht, K. 1979. *Stress and the Manager*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

² The role of management is to determine job fit with the individual's SKAM Albrecht, K. 1979. *Stress and the Manager*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

³ Williams, J. C., and Huber, G. P. 1986. *Human Behavior in Organizations*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing. Not treat all employees as a "one size fits all" to elicit maximum performance with minimum stress and adversity.

⁴ Lawless, P. 1992. *Emplis*, MN: Northwestern National Life Employee Benefits Division.

1. Flexible work hours.
2. Supportive labor and family policy.
3. Effective communications by management with employees
4. Health insurance that covers mental health and chemical dependency issues.
5. Steps to increase personal durability and lower adverse effects of stress, adversity, trauma or disaster.

As people, we handle adversity using a variety of strategies that we have acquired and which are shaped by culture, society, family, and others.

Factors that constitute Endurance.

1. Awareness of your feelings.
2. Optimism and outlook on life.
3. Ability to confront and deal with feelings.

We will discuss these in more detail when we consider strategies to reduce adversity and stress and increase our personal Durability.

Isolation allows for misconceptions to arise, to lose significant concerns that each group may have, but not discussed remain unresolved. The simple concept of “stop and talk” allows people to know the officers and vice versa, to learn of the others name and to share some of the concerns that exist. In time, discussions lead to identifying and finding solutions to persistent issues, to reduce crime and disorder and to improve the quality of life for that community.