

PRINCIPLES OF CRIME PREVENTION

BY GEORGE KELLING

CitiesOnAHill.org

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

Kasia Zabawa

Press Officer,

Manhattan Institute

212-599-7000

Contrary to three decades of conventional and professional wisdom, cities need not be hapless victims of high crime rates. During the mid 1990s, some community leaders, fed up with the diminished quality of urban life and armed with research evidence, took charge and instituted reforms leading to the steepest crime declines in history. This is not to say that a crime control template was developed that can be overlaid onto any city's policing strategy or that crime spikes might not hit a community despite good policing. It says instead that astute leaders, ranging from police to private sector and political leaders, can pull together basic crime prevention principles and successfully adapt them locally.

In this essay I identify those principles. They are based on my own research and experience, and on the work of other researchers and practitioners—including patrol officers. In some cities their application will have an immediate and dramatic impact; in others, progress will be gradual; and in others, their failure will require reassessing problems, the tactics developed to manage them, and/or the partners involved in crime prevention strategies. Regardless, experiences from New York City to Los Angeles and from Newark (NJ) to Denver give evidence that these principles work.

The principles are as follows:

1. Identify a vision. Develop a clear crime prevention vision that identifies the nature of crime problems and a framework for addressing them. This vision must motivate all segments and levels of city government, neighborhoods, private sector institutions, and criminal justice agencies. Whether it is the mayor, the chief of police, or another leader, the crime prevention vision must be articulated in ways that are clearly understood at all levels and implemented aggressively and persistently. While this vision may not originate with the mayor, he or she must be committed to it for police to succeed.

2. Provide leadership. In a sense, a leader embodies the vision of an organization. While managers possess capacity and skills, leaders offer character: integrity, dedi-

cation, self-reflection, intelligence, focus, high standards, and other qualities that inspire both those immediately surrounding the leader and those who work at a distance. Leaders are guardians of the vision.

3. Develop partners. There is not one problem that I have helped manage, from panhandling in New York's subways to homicide in Newark, that police alone can own. Regardless of the problem, community resources can and should be mobilized to manage it. Partners should include district and city attorneys, probation and parole departments, neighborhood organizations, business improvement districts, and other private and governmental agencies. Different problems will require different partners but "going it alone" is a recipe for failure.

4. Do it right—legally and morally. There is no need for police to cut corners or to engage in illegal behavior to achieve crime reduction. Whether it is managing emotionally disturbed citizens on the street, serving warrants, or mobilizing to deal with gangs, police must maintain community support by scrupulously occupying the high moral ground. "Do it right" goes beyond police to other governmental agencies: If other arms of government are not doing their jobs (whether dealing with the emotionally disturbed homeless or controlling gangs), police should not be turned into "dirty workers," "doing what has to be done," and then "covering ass."

5. Develop and maintain a CompStat-like capacity. This means, first, that police departments must develop and maintain the capacity to monitor and analyze crime on a real-time basis. Second, it means that commanders are held accountable for crime levels in their areas of responsibility. The CompStat management system couples crime-mapping technology with analysis and accountability to help area commanders, their peers, their superiors, their staffs and crime/problem analysts craft policing solutions through face-to-face interaction.

6. Monitor progress. CompStat data and community feedback should be used to monitor crime prevention progress on several levels: neighborhood, district/pre-

cinct, “hot spots,” citywide, and special projects. If crime patterns are not responding to current tactics, review both the understanding of the problem and the approaches being used to deal with it.

7. Identify neighborhood priorities. Analysis of crime and call for service data alone are not sufficient for determining neighborhood problem priorities. Police must engage face-to-face with neighborhood residents, interests, and institutions to understand their priorities. These may be the same as police data suggest, but they are often quite different.

8. Restore order. We now have ample evidence that order maintenance—broken windows policing—reduces serious crime. It does this by supporting citizen control over public spaces and by increasing police contacts with high rate offenders (who commit a lot of minor offenses as well as felonies). But the reduced fear and civil order that go with order maintenance are ends in themselves—necessary ingredients if communities are going to support family life, education, and commerce.

9. Persuade “wannabes” to behave. In several cities, aggressive law enforcement targeting repeat serious offenders has been used in face-to-face encounters with high-risk youths and their families to dissuade them from proceeding further into crime. This has come to be known as a “pulling levers” approach.

10. Ask the next question. Whether dealing with known offenders or suspicious persons, ask the next question. Serious offenders are very busy; they commit a lot of minor and serious offenses; they “hang around” other serious offenders. Thus good police will ask: Who else is involved? Who else is carrying weapons? Where did they get them? And so on. Arrestees, major or minor offenders, whether sophisticated or not, are vulnerable during their arrest. They will give up information in the hope of “trading” for lesser charges or more lenient handling.

11. Be transparent. Although in the past police departments have sheltered themselves from scrutiny and accountability by invoking the confidential nature of their business, in reality, very little policing need be or should be hidden from the public. To be sure, details of investigations must be kept confidential; however, overall policies and tactics are of legitimate public concern. Such information can alert citizens to their own responsibilities, identify the contributions (or lack of them) of other agencies and interests, and even serve as a deterrent to “wannabes” who are on the verge of risky behaviors.

12. “De-market” 911. Rapid response to calls for service has failed both as a preventive (dissuading offenders from committing crimes) or law enforcement (apprehending offenders) tactic. Keeping police officers in cars as an emergency response capacity undermines community policing, thus interfering with both the ability of officers to integrate their activities into neighborhoods and police implementation of crime prevention. Citizens must be familiarized with the limitations of 911 policing; police departments must not consider sending a car as the sole means of delivering police services. Many calls for service can be handled to citizens’ satisfaction via telephone. This does not mean that police should not rush to emergencies; it means that police should not be held in their cars waiting for the next call.

13. Finally, ramp up the capacity of police organizations to prevent crime. (A) Crime patterns are not random. Make certain that police, including detectives and special units, are working when and where crime occurs. (B) Maintain beat integrity—by this I mean keep officers in their neighborhoods to ensure beat familiarity, both police with citizens and citizens with police. (C) Recognize that most crimes are solved by the information that patrol officers gather during their preliminary investigations. (D) With C in mind, reconsider the detective function. In the investigative process it is well understood now that detectives, while focusing on cases (say, an individual homicide), inevitably gather information about the problem (say, revenge homicides between gangs), yet these data are neither collected and systematized nor shared with patrol officers who could use them for preventive purposes. Investigators should be as aggressive in their attempts to stop the next crime as they are in solving the last. (E) Involve patrol officers in all crime and problem analysis and solution development. In virtually every problem-solving activity I have been involved in, I have relied on patrol officers to develop solutions. It takes time, they are not used to thinking on their own, but once they begin to they can contribute enormously both to specific police tactics and to overall strategy.

In sum, we have come a long way from the mid-century reactive tactics that dominated policing until the early 1990s. Mayors, civic leaders, and police officials have no excuse for not capitalizing on the lessons of the last two decades. Preventing the next crime and maintaining order are core responsibilities of city and police officials, prosecutors, and probation and parole departments.