

Problem Solving Quarterly

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Fight Against Recycling Center Unites L.A. Police-Neighborhood

By Patricia L. Gerst

Los Angeles, CA—In June 1992, I discovered during my routine patrol a recycling center that was causing many problems in the Rampart area near West Beverly Boulevard. The area around this center consisted of residential apartment buildings and homes. It was located behind a liquor store in a fenced parking lot and the center's operator was paying the liquor store owner to use the lot.

The center took in and stored recycled materials for the operator to take to another collection site later. The facility had been open only for one month before the surrounding area started to deteriorate.

There was a dramatic increase in pedestrian traffic, as well as in abandoned shopping

carts along the sidewalk near the lot's entrance. The recycling business attracted a lot of homeless and transient persons from outside the community, who would bring in recyclable materials and loiter in the area. Loud noise came from breaking glass bottles.

The recycling facility had been open only for one month before the surrounding area started to deteriorate.

Scanning

I had previously been networking with four neighborhood watch groups in the Rampart area. Wanting to assess the recycling facility's impact on the local community, I developed a questionnaire and distributed it to the groups' leaders, who in turn gave it out to their members. Based on the questionnaire's results, the citizens agreed the center and its related problems created a nuisance for the community. They expressed a tremendous frustration and desire to close the recycling operation.

Many residents reported an increased theft of house plants and other items when left in their yards. Transient persons went around the neighborhood and looked through trash containers for glass and cans, and stole aluminum ladders and siding to recycle them for money. They set up sofas and cots in the alley behind the recycling center.

Trash and litter was another nuisance because the center was in the otherwise well-kept residential community. Burglaries from motor vehicles rose 10 percent in a two-month period, and citizens also noticed an increase in narcotics sales and use in the area.

Analysis

An investigation revealed the liquor store owner was allowing

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Leading the Change: Patience is Key

By Tom McCarthy

I have enjoyed Darrel Stephens' comments in the "Leading the Change" column. As a police chief, I have found maintaining the momentum necessary to successfully implement community-based, problem-oriented policing can be frustrating. It's helpful to read about the views of a police executive with a similar vision.

When asked to pinch hit for this issue's column, I quickly accepted. Darrel and his vision of POP have had a tremendous impact on my career. After all, as the Newport News (VA) chief in 1983, he had the courage to promote me to a management position. As Darrel implemented POP department-wide, he demonstrated the patience and perseverance to convince a traditional skeptic like me that POP was true policing.

When POP was first introduced in Newport News, I felt it was just another new program. But my attitude began to change as I watched the performance of other police officers. Detective Tony Duke provided the most significant impact. It was through his example that I learned of the significance and depth of problem-oriented policing.

Darrel's approach to introducing POP in Newport News served me well upon my arrival as chief of the Gaston County Police in 1987. Having myself been a cynic about POP, I definitely expected to encounter

similar views within my new department.

I wasn't disappointed. I discovered the same skepticism about POP I had felt myself in Newport News; plus, I was a new chief in an unfamiliar area trying to implement a new way of policing. While I came to Gaston County with an understanding of the ingredients needed to make problem solving happen, reality was much more difficult than theory.

When I honestly evaluate what has been the most significant barrier to the successful implementation of POP in Gaston County, I have to admit it most likely has been my own impatience.

Like many police executives, I like things to happen quickly. Unfortunately, the changes that are needed to make problem solving a reality take significant time. Trying to rush change has caused resentment and unnecessary organizational confusion frequently. This process often has required a reality check for me.

Fortunately, I have learned through personal experience that a converted skeptic often becomes a sincere believer. I've learned from observing Darrel and other officers that the key to successful implementation of POP is perseverance and patience.

After five years at the helm of a progressive police department, I am beginning to experience the benefits of such wisdom. POP has become an organizational philosophy, as well as an operational tool. Some of those skeptics I encountered in 1987 have evolved into the

department's most aggressive and effective problem solvers.

Recently I overheard one of our staff say, "Our job as police officers is to fix problems, not place blame for problems." Quite an interesting change in perception in a few years.

Today the criminal justice system appears to be in constant crisis nationally. The problems facing the police sometimes seem almost overwhelming. With the pressures that exist from both within and outside police organizations, patience is not an easy trait for any police officer to maintain, let alone a police executive. However, those organizations where the police chief has maintained the vision and patience to keep the department on course are now experiencing slow, but real, operational change.

Problem-oriented policing is certainly not yet a finished product. But it is developing into a method to provide more effective and responsive police service. The challenges the police will face over the next decade will demand significant modifications in how we function. It's important that the inevitable changes that result are led by persons with the vision necessary to "fix problems, not place blame for problems."

My advice to those attempting to move their organization towards POP is to persevere and be patient. You can make it happen!

Tom McCarthy is chief of the Gaston County Police Department.

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the recycling activity to occur on his property. He was not responsive to suggestions he voluntarily remove the recycling operator from the location. The operator was uncooperative about moving out the area and even cleaning up around the facility.

Response

I notified the Burglary Auto Theft Division of the Los Angeles Police Department about large quantities of equipment in boxes labeled Southern California Edison Electric Company (SCE) and stored in the lot. Officers from a special section of the theft division, the metal theft unit, and a SCE representative examined the property and concluded the recycling operator had legally bought the used materials.

Amidst efforts to close the recycling center, the **Department of Building and Safety** issued an extension to the operator's **license**.

I also contacted inspectors from the Department of Building and Safety (DBS) to advise them of the problems plaguing the community because of the recycling operation. But amidst efforts to close the operation, DBS issued an extension to the recycling operator—one inspector said to set up a hearing date on the case.

During the next three months, I **maintained** contact with the community and monitored the



Officer Patty Gerst monitors the dean-up efforts of high school students from the Los Angeles Conservation

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status of the case. The noise, debris, narcotics and theft problems steadily increased.

I contacted the city's homeless coordinator. We offered the transients vouchers and an opportunity to move to area shelters, but they refused. I arranged for weekly clean-ups of the area through the L.A. Conservation Corps, and monitored the **workers as they cleaned up the alley**. We posted the clean-up times to notify the homeless persons. Additionally, the local grocery store picked up its abandoned shopping carts more frequently.

I talked with Field Deputy Kathy Godfrey of Councilmember Michael Woo's office to obtain further guidance in closing the recycling operation. The neighborhood groups composed and circulated a strong petition opposing the recycling operation, and obtained over 300 signatures from residents to gather support from the city council for having

the center closed. The petition accelerated our efforts to close the recycling center by making the necessary city agencies aware of the community's concerns.

Field Deputy Kathy Godfrey, community members and myself testified before the DBS hearing board and presented the petition. As a result, the board issued a formal denial for a further extension to the recycling operator.

Assessment

I used several agencies and numerous resources to solve the problems involving this recycling facility. During six months of work on the project, I had contacted 19 different persons and agencies, including the neighborhood groups, five DBS inspectors, the liquor store owner, the auto theft division officers and representatives from the **SCE and DBS** hearing board.

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PERF Annual Meeting to Address Variety of Progressive Issues

The 1993 **PERF** Annual Meeting, scheduled from May 2-5, will tackle a range of issues encountered by postmodern police executives. Selected workshops include:

- Are You Managing or Leading? A View From the Street
- Beyond Coalition Building: Leading a Multi-Disciplinary Team
- Carjacking, Highway Shootings and Other Public Relations Nightmares: **Taking a POP Approach**
- **Defining a Federal Role that is Beneficial to Local Police**
- **Civilian Review: Can't Live With It, Can't Live Without It**
- Trends in Racial, Ethnic and Gender Representation in Large Police Agencies
- Police Officers' Bill of Rights: **Is It Progress?**

The meeting will feature addresses by members of the Clinton administration on the appropriate role of the federal government in local law enforcement, a town hall meeting on national gun policy and the annual congressional reception on Capitol Hill. On the final day of

the conference, PERF will also be sponsoring a community policing symposium. (See p. 6 for more details.)

The meeting offers progressive police executives the opportunity to keep one step ahead of their more traditional counterparts by participating in PERF's first-ever, two-mile fun run.

The meeting will be held at the Sheraton City-Centre Hotel, 1143 New Hampshire Avenue NW, in Washington, DC. The registration fee is \$250.

A block of rooms have been secured at a rate of \$118 for a single room and \$133 for a double room per night. Call (202) 775-0800 to make room reservations for the conference.

A full conference brochure will be mailed to PERF members in early March.

For more information on the conference, please contact **Dawn Blackburn** at (202) 466-7820.

/Note: PERF will also be presenting its annual Gary P. Hayes and Leadership Awards at the annual meeting. The Hayes Award recognizes a person who has demonstrated the capacity to make a unique contribution to policing and the potential to be among its future leaders. The Leadership Award is presented to a candidate, who through his or her contributions as a renowned leader in policing, stands as a model for leadership for the entire profession. Contact Martha Plotkin at PERF for further information on nominating someone for these awards before the March 26 deadline.]

PERT" Offers Problem-Oriented Policing Training

PERF provides POP training for command staff, mid-management, first-line supervisors and field officers. The training can be specially designed to meet your department's needs. The basic training program covers:

- The evolution of problem-oriented policing
- The problem-solving process
Examples and case studies in problem solving
- Implementing problem solving in your department

PERF trainers use a wide range of training tools including lectures, videos, and interactive workshops. The workshops allow participants a chance to apply the problem-solving process to the kinds of crime problems their agencies experience.

PERF is currently planning a marketing initiative for its POP training, primarily through the distribution of a new brochure to police agencies, law enforcement advocacy groups and criminal justice organizations.

If your agency is interested in obtaining this brochure or in POP training, please contact **Susie Mowmy** at (202) 466-7820.

The Role of First-Line Supervisors

By Diane Hill

This article is a reprint from the spring 1988 issue of PSQ.

The influence of the first-line supervisor in a POP agency is paramount. From the beginning of the problem-solving process, when the supervisor must share in the responsibility of prioritizing and assigning identified problems, to the final assessment, when the supervisor must share in the accountability of problem-solving efforts and results. Throughout this process, the first-line supervisor is, or at least should be, the central component of problem-solving efforts.

The first-line supervisor's responsibilities are varied. **First, for the most part, assignment of problems falls on his or her shoulders.** That rails for knowing the staff—their strengths, weaknesses and interests. Successful problem-solving efforts are most often realized by conscientious individuals who have some interest in and commitment to addressing particular problems.

How the supervisor conveys the assignment to the officer is just as important; a negative, condescending attitude exhibited by the supervisor toward the usefulness of problem solving stands a reasonable chance of eliciting the same kind of attitude from the officer assigned the problem. He or she may ask, "Why should I put a whole lot into this, when my supervisor doesn't even think it's important?"

Second, the supervisor is responsible for following up on officers' efforts. At no time should the officer be assigned a problem and then told, "Come back when you have the solution." Sure, officers are to be encouraged to use their own discretion, creativity and resources, but they should also have the continued commitment and support of their supervisor.

Officers should be encouraged to use their own discretion, creativity and resources, but at the same time have their supervisors' commitment and support.

The supervisor's role is not to stand over someone with a nightstick; instead, the role should be more that of a facilitator or coach—probing for more creativity, encouraging broader resolutions and removing barriers, both internal and external when necessary. Existing practices and procedures may in some cases hinder exploring alternatives for responding to problems. Personnel of particular agencies may not feel it "appropriate" to speak directly with the patrol officer or may believe it more "suitable" to approach a ranking officer.

Third, the supervisor must see that officers get the necessary time to work on problem-solving efforts. Analyses, strategy building and assessment take time. If an agency has made the commitment to adopt POP, then it should give its officers a realistic amount of time to conduct

problem-solving efforts. If officers are expected to conduct problem-solving activities during their routine work hours, then time requirements for completing tasks must be flexible. It's here that the supervisor must accept responsibility for assuring that officers don't abuse this flexibility.

Finally, the supervisor should be one of the first to formally and/or informally recognize his or her officers' efforts and results. Not every effort will result in a dramatic impact on the problem; in fact, some efforts may end up having no impact at all. But that doesn't have to mean an officer's efforts were useless.

If departments are committed to POP, then they should also make it clear that problem-solving efforts are not only expected and important, but that these efforts will not go unnoticed. Departments should announce that individuals will be rewarded for demonstrating problem-solving skills, knowledge and practice just as individuals are rewarded for good investigative skills, traffic control skills and felony arrests. Moreover, departments should say that it's okay to take the risk of trying strategies that may not work.

With such varied responsibilities, how could the supervisor be seen as an important link in the entire process? When the supervisor does not share in the accountability of problem-solving efforts, then the results achieved will surely reflect less than desired outcomes.

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PSQ Readers' Reply

Question: Isn't it true that problem-oriented policing is nothing more than getting back to the "good old-fashioned" police work that we did years ago?

Answer: No, because I don't feel that when I started at the department 20-odd years ago that we did problem solving on a day-to-day basis. We may have known the community, but we never got to the root causes of the problems. Today, we can call it community-oriented policing, neighborhood-oriented policing or problem-oriented policing, but what you have is a synergetic approach with community leaders, other city agencies and other community organizations working together to solve problems. I don't believe we did that 20 years ago, or even five or ten years ago. What we are doing now is a combination of police theories and practices that have evolved from over 20 years of studies.

—Lt. **Bill Fitzgerald, Joliet (IL) Police Department, 22-year veteran**

Answer: No, because "good old-fashioned" police work was **kicking butt and taking names**. The only way to solve a problem was by putting people in jail. We were totally reactionary. We did what we

had to do for the moment, and we didn't worry about whether or not the problem would be there tomorrow. It was the chiefs job to worry about tomorrow. Those of us on the street just worried about today; in fact, we really only worried about the eight-hour shift we had to work. We did some of the same things involved in POP, but for different reasons. We never went the distance we do now. We were only concerned about what the police thought was a problem and didn't really need, or want, the community to help us.

—Lt. **E. R. Mowry, Jr., Newport News (VA) Police Department, 25-year veteran**

Answer: No, it is much more. While it may be true some of the tactics, skills and strategies used are similar, there some very basic differences because in a POP environment, the police work with the community to identify "problems," thereby becoming more reflective of the values of the community. In the past, we dictated our services and imposed our values rather than to draw upon the expertise and needs of the community. Plus, today officers are being called upon to assess their action after implementing a problem-solving intervention. This "going back" to evaluate the effectiveness of their action is certainly different from the past.

—Lt. **Bill Tegeler, Santa Ana (CA) Police Department, 13-year veteran**

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Over the past five years, PSQ has provided law enforcement professionals and agencies with the most authoritative information on problem-oriented policing. So you can continue to receive PSQ without interruption, renew your subscription today!

See p. 8 for more details.

Community Policing Symposium Wednesday, May 5, 1993 -1-5:00 pm Sheraton City-Centre Hotel, Washington, DC

What are police departments actually doing when they say they're doing community policing? Join us **to** find out at a special symposium on community policing in conjunction with PERF's Annual Meeting in May. The symposium will feature preliminary findings from a six-city study on community policing, presentations by practitioner-investigators and an extensive discussion of critical issues common to all of the departments studied. Findings from Las Vegas (NV), Philadelphia (PA), Santa Barbara (CA), Newport News (VA), Savannah (CA) and Edmonton (Canada) will be featured.

This symposium is free, but advance registration is required. To register, call PERF at (202) 466-7520.

POP in Your Neighborhood

To help POP departments across the country communicate with each other, PSQ is featuring agencies that have participated in PERFs training. The fall issue featured departments from the midwest region. The following is a partial listing of agencies that have implemented POP in the northeast region:

Maine

- Lewistown Police Dept.

Massachusetts

- Boston Police Dept.

New York

- New York City Transit Authority
- Suffolk County Police Dept.
- Yonkers Police Dept.

Rhode Island

- Providence Police Dept.

Vermont

- Vermont Criminal Justice Academy

Upcoming issues of the newsletter will feature agencies from other regions of the country.

Problem Solving Quarterly is published four times a year by the Police Executive Research Forum and seeks faster exchanges of information regarding problem-oriented policing.

Susie Mow Editor
 Terraine Griffin, Managing Editor

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The most important factor to resolve these problems was following up on what further contacts I could use to solve them. For a police department facing a similar situation, this strategy can help POP officers get a broader picture of how to solve neighborhood problems.

Without the strong support of the community, this recycling business would still be in operation, bringing various forms of blight to the community. But since the recycling operation has closed, the area is visibly cleaner of trash and debris. The transients have moved on, and theft and burglary crimes have dramatically decreased in the area.

The neighborhood residents are extremely pleased with their success in working with the police department to solve these problems. Citizens are now much more confident of their power to influence the system and make a real difference in their community.

Patricia Gerst is the senior lead officer of the Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division.

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When the immediate supervisor does not see and respond to the significant impact he or she has on successfully implementing POP, then the entire problem-oriented policing agency may suffer.

Diane Hill was a former editor of PSQ and research associate at PERK.

Submissions

When submitting descriptions of problem-solving efforts to PSQ, remember to consider the following questions:

- What is the problem?

For whom is it a problem?

Who is affected by the problem, and how are they affected?

How has the department handled the problem in the past?

What information was collected about the problem?

Were there any difficulties in getting the information?

- What was the goal of the problem-solving effort?

What strategies were developed; to reach that goal?

What agencies assisted the police department in achieving the goal?

Was the goal accomplished?

What would you recommend to other police agencies interested in addressing similar problems?

Send submissions to:
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