

Proactive Alliance: The Ethos of Broken Windows

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The *Proactive Alliance* approach integrates policing methods with adapted concepts from counseling psychology created by a licensed professional counselor and a police officer. This collaborative approach is a prevention model based on building relationships with the community in a variety of settings and using the humanity of the individual police officer as his or her most valuable instrument. We believe that the strength of this approach lies in the dovetailing of our professional knowledge and experience, especially when considered in the context of “Broken Windows” theory.

In 1982, criminologists George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson published an article titled “Broken Windows.” They asserted that police could prevent more serious crimes by resolving smaller criminal matters and maintaining order. Kelling and Wilson referred to a study published by the Police Foundation of the Safe and Clean Neighborhoods Program, an initiative to improve the quality of life in 28 New Jersey cities. The Police Foundation study was based in Newark, NJ and revealed that citizens felt more secure and had more favorable opinions of police in areas where police patrolled on foot rather than in patrol cars. From these results, Kelling and Wilson (1982) concluded that community members liked talking to police officers directly because citizens felt as if they were “doing something” to help their neighborhood and as a result, felt more secure

in their communities and believed that there was a reduction in crime. The exchange between citizens and foot patrol officers provided validation of citizens' concerns and propagated a sense of agency and helpfulness, further increasing a feeling of security. Comparatively, foot patrol officers in this study had a greater sense of job satisfaction, increased morale, and an improved view of the community. In summary, the direct interaction with police was mutually beneficial for both police officers and citizens and boosted a sense of safety and well being for both parties. Relatedly, Kelling and Wilson (1982) suggested that the role of police is to maintain order rather than merely enforce the law. They further concluded that the most effective police officer interacts as a member of the community itself, establishing relationships and using his or her personality and judgment as policing tools.

In 1993, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) hired William J. Bratton as police commissioner amid a historic rise in crime. Bratton applied “Broken Windows” theory attempting to reduce disorder, which included increased arrests for minor offenses. This approach became known as zero tolerance policing. Overall crime in New York City began to fall; however, crime was also declining nationwide during this time, including in major cities such as Los Angeles, which had not applied “Broken Windows” theory (Vedantam et al., 2016). Because the effectiveness of NYPD tactics related to the “Broken Windows” theory could not be explicitly proven to lower crime, Kelling acknowledged that “Broken Windows,” in the manner it was applied, might not have had such a dramatic effect on decreasing crime during this period. Further, Kelling and Wilson never intended their theory to justify zero tolerance or aggressive order maintenance approaches (Kelling, 2015).

In a 2015 *City Journal* article co-authored by George L. Kelling and William J. Bratton, “Why We Need Broken Windows Policing,” Bratton advocates for the relationship-based aspect of “Broken Windows” that is absent from zero tolerance policing, stating, “Going forward, the police must strengthen their relationships with citizens, civic organizations, and communities. This cannot be just a matter of testimonials or slogans from NYPD leaders. The approach must be embedded in every contact that officers have with the public.” Bratton endorsed the value of the officer’s personality and officers’ roles as members of the community, diverging from his previous application of “Broken Windows” policing.

Bratton’s assessment in 2015 is what we believe to be Kelling and Wilson’s true objective in writing “Broken Windows.” While the barrier that kept police from engaging with community members forty years ago was being in their patrol cars, the current barrier to positive community interaction with the police is a lack of trust and legitimacy, as identified in the Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (May, 2015). To erode this barrier, individual officers need guidance and training to learn how to join with the community in a purposeful, productive, and humane manner that uses their personality and discretion as instruments of change. Community policing efforts are successful in engaging those people and organizations that are motivated to partner with police, specifically to broaden the police’s appeal and create positive public exposure. Events such as “Coffee with a Cop” or “National Night Out” allow citizens to

interact with police officers outside of the enforcement realm. Although these events achieve the goal of creating and maintaining partnerships, results are limited in that community policing should not be used as a sole solution to complex, large-scale problems.

Although forging collaborative relationships has been suggested and encouraged to most police departments and in the context of the “Broken Windows” theory, exactly *how* to develop and improve existing skills to achieve this goal has been uncertain. The ability to create lasting, purposeful relationships with stakeholders is not an innate skill but can be taught. While some police officers have a natural talent for social interaction, all personality types are capable of learning how to build productive relationships with the appropriate training. Building a productive relationship requires effective communication and empathy, but must also incorporate collaboration. *Proactive Alliance* recognizes the value of the transactional de-escalation techniques that police use to defuse adversarial conflict and empowers officers to actively engage with the public before a conflict occurs. When a crisis does occur, the relationship acts as a problem-solving medium, giving the officer more options than enforcement alone, including the ability to draw from the community for the most effective solution.

Using an officer’s humanity and ability to establish rapport opens up the lines of communication, establishes trust, and is beneficial for all. Further, when employing empathy, officers engage in the tenets of procedural justice within the community they serve. As discussed in the *New Era of Public Safety: A Guide to Fair, Safe, and Effective Community Policing* authored by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (2019), “All officers should receive training on procedural justice, cross-cultural communication, cultural competency, implicit bias, and the history of the community. Officers should also receive training on *why* building relationships strengthens policing and public safety, including the concept of police legitimacy.” (p. 23)

Engaging reticent or distrustful stakeholders is an ongoing challenge. Certainly, there are no simple solutions when trying to change community fear and cynicism of police. Evolving from a culture of enforcement-first policing to a relationship-based approach requires a systemic shift. Encouraging officers to initiate consistent dialogue with community members and organizations enables police to listen to and understand specific worries, fears, and complaints and arrive at a mutually beneficial outcome: community members feel validated and more secure, and police have a better understanding of what problems could develop. As found in the Police Foundation study in Newark, NJ, engaging citizens and stakeholders successfully is a crucial first step for the perception of safety and maintaining order. Once a level of order and security exist, discussing and engaging in mutually beneficial goals can begin.

The concept of *Proactive Alliance*, developed by Molly Mastoras, LPC, is a method of collaboration among police, businesses, and community members fostered by active listening techniques, effective communication, and empathy to develop purposeful and productive relationships. This approach draws from and adapts counseling psychology concepts including Family Systems Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Person-Centered

techniques, the Stages of Change, Trauma-informed techniques, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Empathy is the foundation of a successful therapeutic relationship, the key element to establishing trust and safety in the context of counseling, and is the basis of all successful therapeutic techniques, most notably Person-Centered therapy created by the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. Unconditional positive regard, a term coined by Rogers (1961) is the concept of accepting and supporting someone without judgment of their behavior. When adapted to a relationship-based policing approach, unconditional positive regard can be an essential tool when interacting with community members in a way that is non-judgmental, supportive, and accepting rather than punitive. Although this approach is not appropriate when a situation is violent or threatening to police or the community, it can be a helpful perspective when establishing relationships with the public and building trust. Other therapeutic techniques based on the Rogerian approach including adapted concepts from Motivational Interviewing also assist police in working with the community to generate change. Ideas that originate in Family Systems Therapy, such as employing appropriate interpersonal boundaries, is another element that helps police use themselves as an effective instrument of change while protecting their emotional well being. The fundamental purpose of *Proactive Alliance* is the development of *responsive collaboration*, which is the act of standing beside a community member or stakeholder in cooperation so that when a conflict or crisis occurs, the relationship provides an environment of increased options and problem solving.

Communities, businesses, and police strive to create safe and economically viable nightlife areas. Using the concept of *Proactive Alliance* to build relationships, Dimitrios Mastoras created the first successful voluntary accreditation model in the U.S. to reduce alcohol-related harm and establish mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. A mutually beneficial relationship in the context of nightlife management is the commitment of the police, community, and business owners to work towards safety, economic viability, and improved quality of life. Initially, restaurant owners expressed resentment and distrust of police based on their past experiences with enforcement-only practices. With the implementation of *Proactive Alliance*, restaurant owners were ultimately willing to participate in a voluntary accreditation program requiring them to write employee policies and participate in safety training for their staff. Restaurant owners gradually shifted their perception of police from adversarial to collaborative. Concurrently, the police began to increasingly respect restaurant owners, value their perspectives, and use their input for collaborative problem solving. Beyond staff training and enhanced policies, restaurant owners welcomed other police initiatives including sexual assault intervention training and designated ride-share loading zones. This approach is not a quick solution focused on the number of arrests, but a long-term, relationship-based policing plan to maintain order and community safety. Police must sustain a long-term commitment to experience the qualitative results that develop over time.

The *Proactive Alliance* approach is a transtheoretical model that adapts concepts used in counseling psychology to teach police how to more effectively interact with the community, establish trust, and promote change. These strategies were organically formed using the combined knowledge of counseling therapy and policing. As

professionals with long careers of practical experience working with people in different capacities, we come from a practical problem-solving perspective in our fields. As we engaged in years of problem-solving discussions, we were able to both generate and apply strategies and techniques that are effective in promoting long-term change in the broader community. This approach is not the only answer and will not solve all issues; however, we adhere to the idea that people are people regardless of the setting and want to be listened to, accepted, and feel safe. These tenets are essential in a counseling room but are just as crucial in a bar, restaurant, or on a public street.

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