

Transforming Sheepdogs to Leaders and Sheep to Community Safety Champions

Those of us who have been in law enforcement for a minute know David Grossman's sheepdog, sheep and wolves analogy: police considering themselves sheepdogs, protecting the sheep (our community) from the wolves (criminals).

There's a major problem with that paradigm. There are only so many sheepdogs, and constantly more and more ways wolves can access the flock. Not only that, by thinking of our community members as sheep, we are giving them permission to abdicate their responsibility as productive members of our society, who do bear responsibility for public safety.

The New York City Police Department may have hit the nail on the head when they coined the brilliant phrase, "Shared Responsibility". While for decades, police have used the moniker, "To Serve and Protect", that slogan subliminally suggests citizens can sit back and let their police serve and protect them; rather than play an active role in their own safety. It's very similar to the entitlement we see and scorn today. But, haven't we been advancing the same thought by perpetuating the "thin blue line"; encouraging our community to sit back and let the police keep them safe?

From a communications standpoint, we must consider a return to basics and, and my former boss Commissioner Bill Bratton will love this, Sir Robert Peel. Any cop worth their salt will know the Nine Principles of Policing. Number seven is key. It reads, "Police at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public ... the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties **which are incumbent on every citizen** in the interests of community welfare and existence." Read that twice. Every citizen is responsible for public safety. Every citizen, every elected official, every public servant, every town, city, region, county, state and federal department. Every parent, every student, every worker ... everyone. For far too long, even city and county departments have abdicated responsibilities to police. Officers have become social workers, parole officers, sanitation workers, counsellors, aid workers, babysitters and parents. It's become too easy to point a finger at police and say, "It's their responsibility." Time for our profession to push back. No. It's everyone's responsibility. No one gets a free pass when it comes to public safety.

Social media is providing an excellent tool to further inform, engage and empower our communities. We are seeing time and time again, police reaching out to the community for information, and people in our communities taking a more active role in attempting to help solve crimes. A classic example is the Houston Police working across their entire community in an attempt to find the person responsible for shooting and killing seven-year-old Jazmine Barnes. The media and community have come together to crowd-source information about this crime, and I hope, by the time you read this article, Houston Police will have arrested the perpetrator.

It's our job as law enforcement leaders and communicators to ensure there are ways our community can engage with us – directly and how they want. If people are too busy to come to a Town Hall Meeting, consider a Facebook Live chat or Twitter discussion. Engage with your community on the platforms they are using – NextDoor, Instagram or GroupMe. Don't think of social media as a one-way communication tool, it's called **social** media for a reason – it's all about two-way, or symmetrical communication. You don't have to be creating new APPS to connect with your community – just be an active and visible participant in what they are already using.

The bottom line is this: we should be seriously considering erasing the 'thin blue line'. Using words like "my community" or "our community" as opposed to "the public" (i.e. "We are asking the public for assistance ...") is a good start.

Our community is not made up of sheep. Informed, engaged and empowered by law enforcement, our community becomes the force multiplier that no 'wolf' is interested in preying upon. Wolves prey upon the weak. They cull the weak from the protective herd. Let's help facilitate our communities to be empowered herds led by smart safety strategies and caring leaders.