

Abstract

In order to understand contemporary law enforcement, we should recognize the conditions that impact our profession. It is agreed upon by many scholars that major changes in law enforcement occur every five years. Policing is sometimes characterized "... like a sandbar in a river, subject to being changed continuously by the currents in which it is immersed..." (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, p. 2). However, in recent years some major changes have occurred in a shorter time period.

Innovations in law enforcement

During the past two decades, I have observed major changes in the viewpoint of society towards police officers as the symbol of trust and dignity, the technological advances of communication and information systems in law enforcement, and the revision of selection and hiring practices for police officers. Organizational change occurs both as a result of internal and external agents (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, p. 664). These changes have manifested both positive and negative reverberations in the way we perform our job.

Police officials have contemplated for years over the key to maintaining a positive image for their organization. Unfortunately, several incidents in the past years have altered society's perception of police in some communities. Police in America are no longer strangers to innovation born of scandal. Law enforcement agencies nationwide have repeatedly been shaken by controversy and forced to make undesirable concessions. Has law enforcement failed to maintain the high standards required by the profession? The cost of public trust is high. It increases each time faith must be regained.

Historically, law enforcement agencies throughout the nation have experienced periods of low confidence in communities preceding episodes deemed to be a breach of trust. Early pioneers in law enforcement history such as August Vollmer (1902 - 1932). Berkeley Police Department and J. Edgar Hoover (1924) the Federal Bureau of Investigation made numerous advancements towards improving the professionalism of law enforcement (Anderson and Newman, p. 119 - 120). Other attempts were made in 1956 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police adopted "The Law Enforcement Code Of Ethics" (Wilson and McClaren, p.8)

Examples of several historical events locally have attributed to society's decline in respect for police. For example, nine members of a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department special narcotics squad were charged with misappropriating tens of thousands of dollars confiscated in drug raids (L. A. Times, p. 4, Sept. 9, 1989). Another local incident involved 80 Los Angeles police officers stormed and wrecked an apartment and allegedly beat several residents on "Dalton Street." The city was forced to settle in a civil law suit by the resident with a settlement of \$3 million dollars of taxpayers money (L. A. Times, p. 1-2, August 1, 1988). This incident generated major outcry from the minority community to overhaul the use of force policy and procedure within the department.

Nationally, five New York City police officers were charged with murder in

the slaying of a suspect in Queens. All five officers were arraigned on murder charges in the death of Federico Pereira, 21 years of age, a car theft suspect who was punched, kicked, and strangled as he was being arrested. This is one in a string of accusations of brutality made against New York officers in recent years (The New York Times, March 21, 1991, p. A 1). In the south, the incident of Officer Donald Jeffries who was honored as Mississippi's officer of the year in 1993. He alleged that mental stress was a factor in his robbery of a bank, however, a federal judge in Mobile ruled that he was competent to stand trial for the charge (USA Today, May 13, 1994, p. 8 A).

The case of Arthur McDuffie (Dec. 17, 1979) in Miami, a black male died after a high speed police chase. The police reports indicated that McDuffie died from being thrown from his motorcycle during the chase. The results of an investigation disclosed that the McDuffie's death may have been caused by police instead of an accident. After being indicted and found not guilty by an all white jury, riots broke out in black neighborhoods, especially Liberty City resulting in arson and looting that left 18 persons dead and more than 300 injured. This catastrophe forced the Miami Police Department to reexamine and revise their use of force policies and procedures (CQ Researcher, p. 645).

The Jeffrey L. Dahmer Case characterize a situation when the police fail to properly handle a call of a suspicious nature. Dahmer was charged with murdering at least 15 young males. On May 27, 1993, two Milwaukee citizens reported a naked young male in the middle of the street bleeding and unable to stand. The boy name was Konerak Sinthasomphone, a 14 year of laotain boy. Dahmer was able to persuade the officer that the boy was a live in lover. The boy was later slain by Dahmer in his apartment after the officers left the scene. A storm of portest came from the minority and homosexual communities accused the officers of displaying racial prejudice. The officers were also criticized for dismissing the incident as "a boyfriend-boyfriend thing" (CQ Researcher, p. 637).

One of the most celebrated cases in recent times was the beating of a black motorist by several white police officers in Los Angeles. It stirred nationwide concern about police brutality. On March 3, 1991, Rodney Glen King, 25 years of age, was severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers after being stopped at the termination of a vehicle pursuit, which was originally started by the California Highway Patrol. A videotape of the incident is shown repeatedly on television over the next few days. The aftermath of the trial that acquitted the officers involved in the Rodney King beating speaks highly of the sentiment felt in the minority community (ICLAPD, p. 14-15).

Another discouraging sign that little has changed is the continuing pattern of police abuse. Most recently on July 29, 1994 Compton Police Officer Michael Jackson was captured on videotape striking a 17 year old male in the head with his baton. This scene did not win sentiment from the public nor revitalize the compassion felt by many after the Rodney King incident. While this incident appears unjustified and even later deemed to be justified, it will not help the image of law enforcement.

Some citizens truly believe the police represent the wealthy and not the poor. Two researchers Geoffery P. Alpert and Roger G. Durham (1988) examined different ethics diversified communities in Miami. There, they discovered much more negative and suspicious attitudes toward the police and regard them as "representatives of the majority class", not "agents of social control" (CQ Researcher, p. 650). The media have also contributed to the fracturing by playing up differences and tensions.

As citizens spend more time working with the police, they learn more about the police function. Experience has shown that as citizen's knowledge of the police increases, their respect for the police increases as well. This increased

respect, in turn, leads to greater support for the police. The image of the police might benefit from the implementation of Community-Involved Programs in today's organizations. The Los Angeles Police Department and many other agencies are exploring Community-Based Policing to help heal the wounds left by conduct perceived by the public as police brutality (Los Angeles Times, April 17, 1994). Police administrators must be aware of public opinion because... Public confidence in a police department is directly related to the image that citizens have of their police, and these images are formed from the impressions people gain about law enforcement..." (Earle, p. 20).

As society changes, technology changes to address the enormous demands of the world. Police managers across the country are faced with the dilemma of decreased fiscal resources and the same responsibility to maintain high service levels. In order to be effective, law enforcement agencies must aggressively exploit the new technological advances in radio and telephone systems. For the last two decades several technological advances have aided law enforcement in becoming more efficient and effective in serving their communities.

For example, in November 1992, the Morgan Hill Police Department's implementation of mail-out reports were handled by the computer system. The department made minor modifications to their PC network-based Computer aided dispatching (CAD) system. The process begins when the police dispatcher receives a call from a victim and types the basic report information into the computer. The computer automatically generate a partially completed, pre-addressed incident report form, which is then mailed to the victim. After the victim completes the form, he or she returns it to the police department. The department received a favorable response from the community on its Citizen Assisted Reporting System (CARS) (California Peace Officer, p. 15).

The new technology and equipment available to law enforcement is only limited by the imagination. Several years ago California was the pioneer in the use of mobile data terminals (MDTs) in its patrol cars. These low-band radio-driven systems allow officers to access all of the available law enforcement database systems to receive and send messages. Officers could type messages meant just for the dispatcher, and they could send typed messages back and forth to other mobile units (California Peace Officer, p. 13).

With the introduction of radio and satellite driven system on the market, law enforcement agencies will be able to link each patrol unit through a laptop computer to a broad array of databases and systems which include NCIC, DMV, CLETS, CJIS, PIN, county records, departmental databases and more. Some systems are capable of displaying a geographical map depicting all previous crimes in an area by type and where they occurred. The reports of all crimes in the last 48 hours can be called to see what was written about the occurrence. These Personal Data Terminal (PDTs) or Mobile Data Computer (MDCs) can also be used to input, transmit or download reports at the station (California Peace Officer, p. 13).

The more advanced mobile computer terminals feature built-in peripheral devices such as mobile printers, automatic vehicle locator (AVL), fingerprint scanner, mobile camera, magnetic stripe card reader, and bar code scanner with a color display screen.

In summary, the profession of law enforcement is continually changing because of the demands placed on it by society

