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## Crime Prevention Is Not Just a Police Function

About a million years ago (circa 1985) while serving as the Law Enforcement Planning Coordinator for the Los Angeles County Sheriffs' Department, I undertook the task of developing an empirical method for determining the number of crimes prevented from occurring as a result of directed patrol and strategic law enforcement operations. I labored over the assignment for a considerable period of time and eventually developed what was deemed to be an exceptionally well crafted methodology for incorporating time-series analysis and linear regression, along with post-operational empirical measures of crimes reported and loss prevention computations to derive a crimes prevented estimate. I even created a cost-benefit analysis procedure that measured police expenditures over and above normal enforcement, versus actual loss savings, on a week by week basis, so we knew when a program was no longer cost effective.

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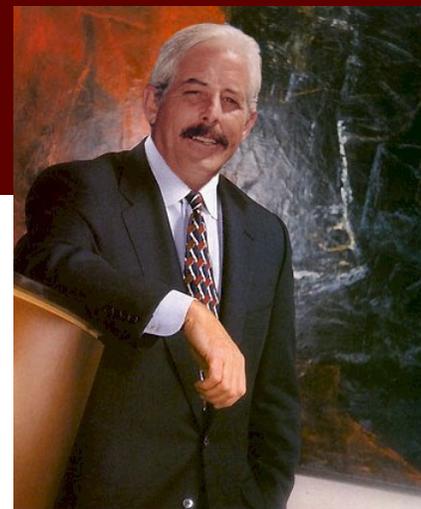
Clearly well ahead of its time, the methodology was not well received by the Sheriff because of his fear that it could be used to hold him accountable, but this methodology was widely adopted by the patrol divisions of the department and I was even asked by the California Peace Officers' Association to travel the state to conduct lectures on this innovative procedure. (A fully narrated lecture of the methodology can be obtained by clicking on reference 1 of this article.)

In hind sight however, now well after thirty years has come and gone and I have changed roles from police administrator to college professor and even a term of service as a judge, it occurs to me that crime prevention isn't primarily a police function. Obviously based upon the types of enforcement programs being employed and the tempo of law enforcement operations, there is some residual effect of these types of directed patrol activities relative to crime prevention, but I am convinced that crime prevention, in the purist sense of the word, isn't a function of law enforcement at all, and it is more appropriately a responsibility of political leaders, city councils, and county commissioners. The reason for this assertion is predicated upon the realization that criminality is a product of a very complex multivariate array of as-

sociated and desperate factors, almost none of which are within the control of police departments. Certainly active enforcement and the probability of getting caught serve as a deterrent to crime, and that function rests within the providence of law enforcement organizations, but almost none of the other factors that typically aggregate to result in criminality have a relationship to the mission of traditional policing.

Departments have, through their own initiatives endeavored to address the crime prevention task thrust upon them by creating a host of public service programs, school visitation programs, athletic league programs, Just Say No, DARE, explorer programs, and alike, but well beyond the reach of America's Finest are the truly correlated factors that aggregate to influence an individual's criminal propensity. Almost any criminology text book will postulate that there are an enormous number of independent variables associated with criminality and human behavior. A sense of assuredness that there is hope of a better life just over the horizon is paramount to instilling the conviction for all individuals to choose a path of social conformance and to resist temptation to engage in crime.

### About the Author:



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Hal Campbell currently serves as the Executive Director of JusticeAcademy.org. He also serves as a member of the teaching faculty for the University of Maryland concentrating in the areas of public policy strategy, criminal law, constitutional law, justice administration, empirical analyses, and higher education.

Judge Campbell recently concluded a term of service as a member of the judiciary in the State of Montana. His appointment to the bench was bestowed by the Montana Supreme Court, Commission on Courts of Limited Jurisdiction. Prior to this appointment to the bench, he served for over twenty-five years as a tenured professor and department chair with the California State University. His public policy and law enforcement experience includes a variety of senior management positions with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. From 1978 to 1989 he held positions in the department including Law Enforcement Planning Coordinator, Chief Analyst, and began his career as a Deputy Sheriff.

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It just isn't worth it if you have hope of attaining something you truly desire someday and there exists a path toward achieving this goal. Ask yourself why you personally elected to refrain from engaging in criminal behavior, or why you choose now to avoid such temptations and the answer, more often than not, is because you have too much to lose if you get caught. There is also a morality aspect to it and a reverence for human decency, but largely you elect not to be a criminal because you have something you refuse to sacrifice.

When faced with insurmountable challenges relative to overcoming poverty and low economic status, personal existence within an uncomfortable population density, drug or alcohol addiction, overt discrimination against you, a propensity to be a victim of crime yourself, racial profiling vulnerability by police authority, poor academic performance, peer group pressures to conform to a deviant life style, poor parental role models, and other such environmental and experiential factors, combined with no promise of a better life through job training, internship opportunities, college advancement programs, trade school outreach initiatives, military service opportunities, or other important social improvement methods, the stage is set for personal failure. People who engage in crime as a form of rebellion or life style typically rationalize it, and point a finger at society for not giving a damn about them. What they mean is that they had no hope of a better life for being good and there was no reward for playing by the rules. All of these factors combine to create an absence of hope or optimism, a keen sense of inequity, an expectation of the lack of prosperity, and a point of view about absence of a fair chance for them to succeed. As you will note none of these factors are within the bailiwick of a police department, nor is there a line item budget that permits the department to create innovative programs that mitigate these challenges.

Such matters are only within the reach of private industry and governmental organizations to address such factors through capital investment strategies and open door access to meaningful life advancement opportunity programs. There are innumerable good deed doers out there who try to make a difference. There are individuals, foundations, and corporate sponsors engaged, here and there, which have a conscience and who try to help where they can because of the philanthropic viewpoint of their leaders or their understanding of the importance of nurturing a workforce. But, as we can all attest, this social conscience and sense of focus demonstrated by these few isn't ubiquitous. The same is true for city, county, state, and federal authorities. Some do good work, but the vast majority I would assert, have more work to do relative to the goal of innovating solutions and securing meaningful social change. There are also very few best-practice strategies available that serve as a model for those who lack decades of experience at social engineering and engendering positive social change.

We can see what happens when hope is absent from the equation and despair takes over. Just look at what is going on in Chicago these days and you get the idea. I come from the law enforcement era of the 1970's and 1980's, when virtually every city saw significant increases in violent and property crimes. These frequencies were intolerable and only subsided as a result of the prosperity of 1990's, when our economy boomed and people had hope for a better tomorrow. Our prison populations continue to grow, our probation and parole caseloads are at staggering rates, and yet we do not see political leaders or corporations routinely step forward with an answer that incorporates a solution to each of the factors just mentioned.

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Nor do they address the plethora of other challenges that I do not have time to articulate in this article. Our courts have had their hands tied by determinant sentencing requirements, despite occasionally innovative evolutions such as drug courts and family courts, and it seems apparent that there is a sense of frustration that things have gotten out of control and an awareness that people simply do not respect one another anymore. It also appears that they do not value the societal mores and norms of the past. Respect is a thing of the past. Which makes sense if there is no hope that you are respected by those you seek to emulate. Our laws also fail to address the solutions to crime, as evidenced by the absence of options within the penalty clauses of such statutes that provide alternative sentencing options. Instead our statutes simply prescribe a period of confinement. This translates to mean that our legislatures are populated by people who not only fail to understand the causes of crime, but who also have little regard or reverence for dealing with the issue associated with recidivism and criminality.

Offloading this task of crime prevention to police authorities, by politicians, simply isn't fair. Perhaps it's time to revisit our local, state, and federal criminal justice strategies so that they include a real crime prevention plan that is sponsored by public-private partnerships, innovative city and county advancement programs, realistic zoning and city development plans that afford a quality of life measure, meaningful diversion programs that are required and imposed by the courts as a matter of routine, and which create an opportunity for individuals to change course. Even federal programs that aren't merely wasteful and bleeding capital resources away from sovereign states and local governments should be examined for efficacy and relevance to resolving crime. Enabling local prerogatives to succeed and engendering a sense of ability to deal effectively with local challenges through open ended legislation and innovative sentencing strategies might well prove more effective than simply prescribing a period of confinement. Certainly we can begin with a national dialog about this critical issue and the development of a comprehensive plan that seeks to build upon the successes of the past. But, expecting police departments to deal with this complex issue alone simply isn't fair.

If you have an interest in participating in the national discourse relative to this issue please contact us at [director@JusticeAcademy.org](mailto:director@JusticeAcademy.org) or get involved by advocating a solution.

### References:

1. [CRIME FORECASTING LECTURE](#) , JusticeAcademy iShare, Campbell, 1987—Click Title for Access
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