

Turnaround by william bratton with peter knobler book review

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Not everyone is as enthusiastic as Patrick O'Hara who wrote in his review of this book that it is not only " must reading" for prospective law enforcement personnel but should also be " shackled to the wrist of every social science professor " and " to the ankle of every business and public administration savant " . However, it is an great choice for a Law Enforcement Process and Policy Class. Community based policing is proven way to reduce the crime rate reduce the arrest rate at the same time. William Bratton pioneered this approach to law enforcement during the 1970s, in the Fenway district of Boston, Massachusetts. Since then, he refined the idea in a series of law enforcement roles starting from the original Massachusetts position to the New York Transit assignment that finally made the general public sit up and take notice. Turnaround is an honest story of his successes, but his failures. No system is perfect, but few individuals are as honest about their own failings as William Bratton is in " Turnaround."

One of the reasons for Bratton was able to turn around policing systems is his willingness to embrace not only new policing concepts, but new technology as well. When he started back in the 1970s, personal computers were unknown. At that time, he used " Billy Boards," which were maps with different color pushpins, to track different types of crime. This created easy to see patterns of crime, arrests and successes. As technology got better this developed into Compstat. Compstat is often misunderstood; people think of it as a software package. While there a number of software developers who offer programs that provide Compstat capabilities, Compstat itself is really just a way of using and showing data that is not limited to a single software program. Remember, computers are just one of the tools of a modern police

force, and no computer system, no matter how sophisticated, is going to reduce crime by itself, and no force can police a community without its respect and consent.

That is the genius of William Bratton, after some initial failures, he asked the people in the community what would make a difference to them And He Listened! That is when he started to make a real difference; he cleaned up crime by cleaning up the neighborhood, literally. At a time before Kelling and Wilson had yet to write “ Broken Windows” Bratton was applying those concepts to the Fenway. He got the neighborhood cleaned up so it was no longer a good place for crime. It made crime more visible. By enforcing the housing codes and boarding up vacant buildings he cut out some of the places where crime could hide. He got the City Departments to help by towing abandoned cars and shed light on criminals by repairing broken streetlights. As his community saw their neighborhood improve, they responded with enthusiasm. They could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it was not another train.

He used these ideas with his staff as well. Many supervisors “ clean house” by getting rid of or demoting managers loyal to the old regime. Then they promote the next level of management up to create a group of managers loyal to them. This makes it look like things have changed when they really haven't. Bratton was different. He kept the good managers, no matter who they were loyal too and promoted capable people, even if they were from lower ranks. He looked for the talented, the innovative and the creative staff and rewarded them with the tools and recognition they needed to get the job done. Not everyone succeeded, however he understood an honest mistake.

(Dishonesty he did not tolerate). When the force saw a leader who would “go to bat” for them knew they could put out their best effort, and they did. Bratton brought together the citizens, police force and city to create real change. Compstat was a big part of this. By getting the commanders of the various precincts along with city officials and other top executives together in one room it cut out a lot of red tape. Time wasn’t lost as messages are transferred down to support staff across to a different department and back up to a decision maker. The decision makers were all in one room. Once a week they got together, looked at the problem areas, and talked. Instead of a hierarchy where the “top brass” is isolated from the force on the street, they are part of a team. This changes their role from being a commander to being a leader who provided the resources so that their people could get out there and get their job done; and they could do it knowing that the community and the government are behind them. The community knew who to go to when they had a problem, or could see a possible solution. Community based policing may not be the only way to do this, but it is a proven method. “Turnaround” shows how this approach evolved, because of this it is a “must read” for anyone who wants to lower crime and arrests. Maybe, it will inspire some other budding genius to come up with some more new ideas on how to reduce. If they do, rest assured, William Bratton will be willing to give them a shot.

References

Bratton, William and Peter Knobler. Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic. New York: Random House, 1998.

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