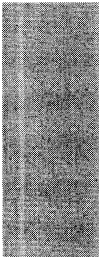


It's 11 p.m.

Do You Know Where Your Community Is?

John F. Shirey

n the days following April 7, 2001, there were front-page newspaper stories and lead stories on every television news broadcast in Cincinnati about the shooting death of an African-American man by the name of Timothy Thomas at the hands of a white police officer named Stephen Roach.

These stories covered not only the tragic shooting but also the three days of rioting that ensued. Now-familiar footage of young people running through the streets throwing rocks, turning over vendor carts, and setting trash fires were played on local and national television news programs.

I use the word “rioting” cautiously because I also lived and worked through the Los Angeles riots of 1992, in the wake of the acquittals of police officers in the Rodney King case. Those were *real* riots; what happened in Cincinnati was a skirmish by comparison. But viewers would not necessarily have known this fact from the way it was portrayed by the electronic media.

Not Good News

Nothing positive for Cincinnati came of those stories. There were no follow-up reports one year later on how much things have changed for the better since the disturbances. The news has continued in a negative vein since the shooting that led to the unrest more than a year ago:

- The U.S. Department of Justice was called in to do a "patterns and practices" review of the Cincinnati Police Division. Its report has been released, and negotiations continued for months among various parties as to which changes would be implemented. The city has spent more than \$750,000 on legal representation on this study alone. Reforms will cost millions of dollars.
- A lawsuit on racial profiling, which became an innovative community collaboration process overseen by a federal judge, was settled in April 2002.
- The officer involved in the Thomas shooting was tried on two counts, and in a ruling from the bench, the judge found him innocent. Two other trials of white police officers charged in the death of an African-American in an earlier incident also resulted in findings of innocence by juries.
- A high-profile task force of community leaders sanctioned by the mayor has had trouble advancing an agenda of visible and meaningful reforms.
- Groups of dissidents decrying the lack of progress on their somewhat vague demands have been able to keep their names and comments in the news.
- A call for an economic boycott of Cincinnati has had some effect. Bill Cosby cancelled his appearance at a show on March 15, 2002. Wynton Marsalis, Smokey Robinson, and Whoopi Goldberg followed suit and cancelled performances. A convention of the Progressive Baptist Church, which would have brought 10,000 attendees to Cincinnati in August 2002 was cancelled in response to the boycott.

But this article is not intended simply to reflect on events and issues in Cincinnati. It reviews the conditions and indicators that could signal trouble ahead for any community and gives advice on what to do when things go wrong. It also includes what local government admin-

istrators can do to build a police agency that will gain confidence and trust within a community.

Several years ago, there was a national campaign to reach parents and guardians to urge them to take greater responsibility for the whereabouts of their children. Researchers had found that young people out late at night unsupervised were committing considerable numbers of crimes and acts of mischief. Readers might remember the public service announcements that went along with this campaign. Just before the 11 p.m. newscast each night, a deep voice would come on, following a gong, and would state in an ominous tone: "It's 11 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?"

In a similar way, do you know where your community is? I contend that a number of localities in America have an undertow of racial conflict that with the right set of circumstances could boil over, as happened in Cincinnati. If you think it can't happen where you serve, you may want to reconsider.

Danger Signs

To some extent, Cincinnati was in a stupor leading up to the events of last year—not asleep but not fully conscious of what was going on. Certainly, many people had some level of understanding that all was not well in the community, but there might also have been the belief that things would get better in time. What are some of the conditions that can lead to trouble or the signs that danger is ahead?

In no particular order, the conditions can include:

- Complaints and stories from minority communities over a long period of time about not receiving equal treatment at the hands of police officers. These included stories of being stopped by officers for seemingly no reason or for trivial reasons, and they might come even from the more prominent members of these communities.

- High-profile incidents, and/or series of incidents, over an extended period of time that resulted in injury or death to minority members from encounters with police officers.
- General distrust of police by the minority communities. (One of the great ironies of our time is that the people who need police the most also fear them the most.)
- A police organization whose members feel increasingly that no one appreciates how difficult their jobs are.
- The presence of a significant minority population that also is disproportionately poor.
- Perceptions of racism and discrimination in the community.
- White flight. Managers should examine the 2000 Census figures carefully to make sure they understand the changing demographics in their communities.
- Underrepresentation of minority-owned businesses, particularly in the more viable business sections of the city.
- Complaints from the minority leadership that the minority communities do not share equally in the economic commerce of the area, particularly in publicly funded projects.
- Complaints from minority businesspersons about difficulties in raising capital and securing financing for their businesses.
- Absence of minorities in business leadership positions.

These may be some of the most obvious indicators that trouble could lie ahead for a community. But there may be other, more subtle signs:

- Resentment in the community over the fact that most police officers live outside the city where they work.
- A relatively young and inexperienced police force whose officers may not be as skillful at avoiding confrontation or handling conflict as veterans are.
- New officers who may possess the

academic and physical requisites for the job but who may come from middle-class backgrounds that do little to expose them to, or prepare them for, the societal elements found in urban policing.

- « Gentrification. *The New Republic* ran a story not long after the riots in Cincinnati, speculating that the repopulation of poor African-American neighborhoods by wealthier, mostly white persons may have contributed to the unrest.
- Aggressive police tactics for keeping order in neighborhoods. These have become more acceptable as an effective means of controlling crime, but poor minorities may see these tactics as harassment.
- A criminal justice system that leads minority groups to perceive that they are treated differently, and more harshly, than other citizens.

Prepare for Local Incidents

Based on my years as a local government manager, I believe the following steps should be taken when a serious local incident occurs, although not necessarily one amounting to full-scale civil unrest. An example would be a police shooting. Managers and safety personnel in command positions can take these actions to prepare for this type of event:

Discuss and plan together what you will do before a serious incident takes place. All police organizations conduct continuous training and feel that they are prepared for any eventuality. This preparedness sometimes brings with it the attitude of "We can handle anything." This might be true for tactical responses, but it probably is not true for the political implications of serious incidents.

Have a game plan. The manager and police chief will need to act in concert. This means having a clear understanding of how each will keep the other

informed and of how public comments will be given and by whom. Once this game plan has been developed, the manager will want to share it with elected officials.

If a serious incident occurs, the best policy is to give out as much information as possible about what happened and to do it as soon as possible. This does not mean holding a press conference at the scene. My experience is that the first information reported about an incident through official channels is wrong. Wait until calm prevails and a reasonable package of reliable information can be assembled. A public press briefing, for example, can be scheduled for later on the same day. It is a "given" that not all the information will be known at the first briefing. Explain what information is yet to be gathered, and explain the next steps that will be taken.

A dilemma exists when there is a suspicion that the officer(s) involved may be criminally negligent. In this situation, management must preserve evidence and sources in the case, against a possible criminal charge. Involved officers might assert their right to remain silent, resulting in much of the investigation proceeding in secret and a delay of the internal investigation of the conduct of the officer. These circumstances are maddening to those community members who won't understand criminal investigation procedures and will clamor to know everything immediately, even if it jeopardizes a criminal case.

This situation also can present another problem for the manager. The manager needs to know as much as possible, but it is inappropriate for him or her to be involved with or have knowledge of certain details in a criminal investigation. In this case, the manager has to let law enforcement personnel do their jobs. On the other hand, the police chief needs to update the manager regularly on the progress of the investigation.

Expedite these investigations as much as possible. Sometimes, police department investigations of serious incidents, particularly those in which their own personnel may be implicated, take longer than necessary. Investigations should not be done hastily or sloppily, nor to appease public outcries. They should be done thoroughly and professionally, of course, but additional resources can be used and other matters delayed to move the process along if needed. The public needs to know that the matter is not being swept under the rug.

Solutions

We once counted more than 50 programs in the Cincinnati Police Division aimed at improving community/police relations, but obviously they were not enough. Programs and initiatives by themselves are inadequate to keep a lid on a community's problems. One incident or a series of incidents can quickly outweigh years of good intentions.

Good policing and good relations with the community must be built on foundations of confidence and trust. To achieve this confidence and trust, a manager must begin by examining the very nature and culture of the police organization.

Where to begin? Begin at the top. The police chief and other police executives must establish credibility with all segments of the community; the manager will have to give the police chief the latitude to establish his or her own identity in the community.

I know that some managers can be control freaks! But there is no substitute for the attendance at community meetings of people who wear the uniforms with brass buttons and lots of stripes, to build credibility in the eyes of citizens. If a manager feels that he or she can't trust the chief to say the right things in a public setting, the manager needs to think about finding a new chief.

Chiefs should not do this alone. Assistant chiefs, captains, or other ranking

officers need to get out from behind their desks and into the community regularly. Minorities also need to be represented in the upper-level ranks.

Establish an ongoing dialogue with the community on police matters. Citizens should know what standards and practices have been established for the field personnel. For instance, citizens might ask:

- How can I expect to be treated if I am stopped by a police officer?
- What constitutes use of force?
- To whom do I talk if I have a complaint? How do I know that it will be addressed, and what assurances do I have that there won't be reprisal?
- What is the process for investigating and adjudicating possible wrongdoing by police officers?

Members of our communities need to know such things, and sharing with them and educating them on these subjects will build confidence and trust.

It also is important that managers know the answers to these questions. Policy-making decisions in police departments should include the input and concurrence of the manager, and police executives need to recognize the essential role of the manager in making police policy.

By the same token, managers need to recognize and respect the experience and background of police executives in the policy-making process. A good place to start this collaborative process is by examining the police department's policy on the use of force.

To further the building of a police culture that will bring about community confidence and trust, expectations about what behavior is acceptable must be sent down into the organization so that police officers, including new recruits, are aware of what is suitable. Managers need to ask questions about the type of training young officers receive and the messages being conveyed by the trainers. Find out if they are learning the socialization skills needed to deal with today's

tough challenges in urban policing.

The next dimension of inculcating a good culture into the police organization is ensuring that the right administrative systems are in place to see that the department's values and policies are being adhered to. This involves putting such obvious things as internal audit and monitoring mechanisms in place. It also means having methods for soliciting and receiving feedback from the community on officers' performance.

A third element in creating and sustaining the right culture in an organization is the presence of positive reinforcement tools. (At the graduation ceremony for every police recruit class in Cincinnati, awards are given to top-performing students. An award is given for scholarship, for example, but there also is a Top Gun award given to the best marksman. I question whether we have sent the right message with this one.)

If a police organization's recognition

and reward systems—both formal and informal—do not match its values, then a mismatch in behavior by officers will be seen on the streets. Above all, stress the importance of the courtesy and respect to be shown by officers in dealing with citizens.

The seeds of unrest in our communities have put down roots that have grown deeper than the policing considerations discussed in this article. Yes, we need to improve relations between the residents of our neighborhoods and our police officers. Yes, we need to build confidence and trust in our institutions of government. But we also need to address social ills, economic disparities, injustice, and racism in order to get to the root of the problem. **PM**

John F. Shirey, a former city manager of Cincinnati, Ohio, is a management consultant based in Cincinnati (ctymanager@cinci.rr.com).

Retirement Planning

Achieving a comfortable retirement requires sensible, lifelong personal financial management, especially for local government managers whose career paths do not necessarily provide large vested retirement benefits. There are seven practices or “secrets”

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that I consistently find practiced by families who are financially successful. Here is one of the seven practices:

They manage their debt. Financially successful families are cautious about borrowing and debt. For far too many of us, debt management is a major stumbling block to achieving financial success. It is far too easy to borrow far too much. Responsible borrowing is possible. It would be impossible for many of us to buy a house, or even a car or refrigerator, without borrowing. Stretching out payments too long (seven years for a car, for example) greatly increases the cost of what we buy. Borrowing against your retirement savings for short term spending makes reaching our long term goals that much harder.

—Gordon Tiffany, director of financial and retirement planning for the ICMA Retirement Corporation, will speak at a session on retirement planning at ICMA's annual conference in Philadelphia. His article “Seven Secrets of Family Financial Success for Local Government Managers” will be published in the November issue of PM magazine.