The Big Picture On Crime Prevention

As we look at our site visitors' questions and comments about crime in your communities, we often feel three contradictory professional instincts:

1. Yes, in urban neighborhoods where crime is a real issue, as opposed to a perceived huge issue among a few, the neighborhood should include watchfulness about crime as a major agenda item. This includes reporting suspicious behavior, individuals, and activities, and insisting on arrests and tough-minded justice. In most suburban and rural neighborhoods where violent crime may be rare,

addressing any form of antisocial behavior still is important to maintaining and enhancing a great community where people want to live.

2. But secondly, we notice that if crime is front and center at every single neighborhood meeting and discussion, newcomers to the group often feel the negativity and don't want to come back. And an equally poor outcome is that people active in the neighborhood become discouraged, pessimistic to an unwarranted degree, and eventually burned out.

3. When we see neighbors rise above the fray of strident voices every once in a while to wonder about root causes of the problems they see, we feel energized about working on those big issues.

Let's not forget what they are, and let's not forget that we are the ones who can insist on actions that will help us trend upward. We hear from many of you that you just don't have the time or energy to work on every public policy issue. We understand. Neither do we. But maybe as autumn comes, or spring if you're in the Southern Hemisphere, you or your neighborhood can choose just one of these to work on.

Notice that you could work on the Big Picture right in your own city or neighborhood too. In fact, that's where most of you will want to start.

Here's the root cause list:

- Inequality, leading to reduced opportunity for some segments of society
- Chronic poverty, resulting in desperation (for a brief summary of 9 ways to reduce poverty, see this Raising of America link, where you should click on Dig Deeper)
- Unemployment and underemployment, which certainly lead to poverty but also to alienation
- Too little emphasis on education in some communities, which can cause poverty
- A strange lack of interest in doing enough to prevent and treat drug and alcohol addiction
- The uphill battle for proper diagnosis and treatment of mental illness (see our community mental health page for a different take)
- Dysfunction in the criminal justice system, encompassing issues such as mass incarceration, lack of rehabilitation in jail, poor sentencing, and creating criminal records for those who cannot pay fines

So if you're concerned about crime, whether that means random shootings or kids rifling through unlocked cars to find spare change, we suggest the one third-one third-one third approach.

That would be one third of your time and energy on being a neighborhood watch type, one third of your energy on talking your own neighborhood into dialing down any over-emphasis on crime, and one third of your volunteerism on big causes. Without some people working on the latter, the forces truly are bigger than your neighborhood.

Let's get busy.

Start Something This Upcoming Season

With new beginnings for many in the next month or so, it's a time when we're receiving many inquiries about our e-book on how to start a neighborhood association, as well as our briefer treatment of that subject on the website. Also a couple of people have asked about starting a community development corporation. If both of those are too much for you, consider starting up a block unit if you live in a neighborhood where there are quite a few folks living right in your block. Get to know someone new. It will be fun.

New Website Content This Month: Court monitoring for communities, increasing trust in police, and the civilian oversight board approach, as we continue to build out our crime prevention section. New visitor submission and comments from editors: Creating impactful public fountains. Visitor questions answered: How to deal with a business that is never open

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