

Bad policing and police killings are Leadership Problems

By Byron A. Ellis



[The Jethro Project](#) - When police shoot unarmed citizens they often claim fear for their life or that they believed a gun was present. For most police chiefs, city officials, prosecutors, judges and many citizens that is enough justification.

However, fear or the presence of a gun is not enough justification for taken a life. In more dangerous professions, employees cannot claim fear of life or the presence of a gun to terminate another's life and not suffer societal consequences. Even in the military, fear of life or presence of weapons does not, by themselves, justify the taking of human lives.

Stimulus and response (S-R) theories posit that human (police) behaviors are learned. Moreover, leadership reinforcement facilitates the frequency and predictability of responses in each environment; with reinforcement, typically being a stimulus or reward for desired responses.

Thus, S-R theories indicate that police escalations and killings of citizens are learned and tolerated behaviors. Therefore, it appears that police injure or kills citizens because of their training, as well as their leadership that rewards them for violent responses against certain citizens.

Most businesses and institutions do not train or reward their employees to escalate confrontations with customers or to kill them. So, why is the current policing model of escalating confrontations, injuring and terminating citizens acceptable? Mainly, because the justice system is not accountable to citizens.

The escalation, injury and termination model often results in punitive high dollar payouts from taxpayers to the victims or their families and negative community relations. Clearly, the payouts are not out-of-pocket costs from city officials or the police. Thus, there is no disincentive to curtail police violence and killings.

In most industries, leadership is responsible and held accountable for fatalities occurring under their control. Thus, leadership remuneration and continued employment depends and eliminating or minimizing fatalities.

Policing strategy and training, appear geared to maximize police escalations, injuries and fatalities against targeted citizens.

However, if excessive police escalations, injuries and killings resulted in loss of remuneration and even employment, city and police leadership would use policing and training models that minimize escalation, injuries and fatalities. Citizens should demand that police safety goal be set at zero police and citizens fatality per year and changes should occur if the goal is not met.

Supporters of police fatality models have erroneously argued that policing is highly dangerous. Such argument is a lame excuse for continuing with bad policing models that rewards the killing of citizens.

Policing is not the most dangerous job in the USA. In 2014, police and sheriff's patrol officers were fifteenth on the list of most dangerous jobs. Per [Time](#) magazine, the most dangerous job, based on fatality per 100,000 people in 2014 was that of logging workers.

Firefighters also risk their lives fighting fires and rescuing citizens, but they are not trained to use fear or the presence of fire as an excuse to not rescue individuals or to let assets burn to the ground. Rather, they are trained to protect human life and assets in dangerous situations. The leadership, training and culture of firefighters are different from that of most police departments. Police departments should examine the training and culture of fire departments to learn best practices.

Policing, firefighting and many other jobs involves risks. However, it is only the police departments that use risk as an excuse to escalate confrontations, injure and kill citizens. The excuse works because too many government officials, prosecutors, judges and citizens support the current fatality prone policing model, and even reward violent police behaviors.

It is incumbent on all citizens to force public officials to adopt a more humane policing model and that may require replacing bad leaders and rank and file members that are unable to change their affinity towards a violent police culture.