

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 taking a life. In more dangerous professions, employees cannot claim fear of life or the presence of a firearm to terminate another's life and not suffer societal consequences. Even in the military, fear of life or the 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 escalation and killings of citizens are learned and tolerated behaviors. Therefore, it appears that police injure or kill citizens because of their training and culture, as well as their leadership that rewards them for violent responses against minority citizens.

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

The escalation, injury, and termination model often result in punitive high dollar payouts from taxpayers to the victims or their families and negative community relations. 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 depend and eliminating or minimizing deaths.

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 the 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 death per year, and changes should occur quickly if the goal is not met.

Supporters of police fatality models have erroneously argued that policing is highly dangerous. Such an 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 not to rescue individuals or to let assets burn to the ground. Instead, 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 involve 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 corrupt leaders and rank and file members that are unable to change their affinity towards a violent police culture.

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