
BROKEN WINDOWS APPROACH TO PUBLIC SAFETY & CRIME PREVENTION

■ 15 years ago, criminologists identified a direct correlation they tagged with the metaphor “Broken Windows.” Today, this is the guiding philosophy producing such dramatic results in cities like New York.

■ The term was coined from the observation that when a broken window in a building is left unrepaired, soon all the windows are broken. The cause and effect and in reverse the solution is:

- minor crime causes fear and creates an atmosphere and perception of disorder....e.g.

public drunkenness
aggressive panhandling
street prostitution
abandoned buildings/drug houses
truancy

loitering youths and corner gangs
litter and unkemptness, graffiti, abandoned cars
vandalism
public urination
unlicensed vending and peddling
and other disorderly behaviors.....

- these less serious crimes create immediate fear in a neighborhood or community and at critical mass the fear and disorder create a perceived atmosphere of lawlessness that attracts, aides, comforts and encourages predatory criminals who murder, rape, assault, rob and steal.
- disorder demoralizes a neighborhood, undermines commerce, leads to abandonment of public spaces and undermines public confidence in the ability of government to solve problems; fear drives residents further from each other and paralyzes normal, order sustaining responses....
- in reverse, criminologists discovered that when these “lesser” crimes were curbed, order restored, fear abated, commerce resumed and shockingly serious crime also dropped.....dramatically.
- several communities have implemented “parts and pieces” of the “Broken Windows” approach such as community policing, foot and bike patrols, ordinance courts, BID’s, patrols trained to deal with panhandling, homelessness, truancy, mental illness etc.

■ New York City under Mayor Giuliani adopted “Broken Windows” as its overall policy and the results have been dramatic and rapid. Included in NY’s approach:

- combined three police departments into one, under the control of a single leader.
- redefined performance indicators from “arrests” to the incidence of crime at the patrol level.... implemented technological, statistical and forensic resources comparable to those of the FBI.
- shifted the existing paradigm of law enforcement and courts from serious crime to “Broken Windows and Serious Crime.”
- drew distinctions between “conditions” such as mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness and the “behaviors” which bring fear and disorder and a sense of lawlessness to neighborhoods and residents.
- addressed conditions, eliminated disorderly behaviors, held police more accountable for both the incidence of crime and their own behaviors.