

## Our Police

### Soft Skills, Community Relations Are Necessities To Improve Policing Efforts In 2017

(NAPSA)—Police officers today face very different challenges than a decade ago. Social media and an increase in overall visibility of officers' actions place them under increased scrutiny, and may have fueled disconnect between law enforcement and the communities they protect. According to a Gallup survey, only 58 percent of whites and 29 percent of African Americans trust police officers, up slightly from the lowest point it reached in 2015. Recent incidents with minorities and limited community presence may contribute to the lack of trust.

Understanding the efforts police departments undertake to prevent crime is especially important as the United States Congress in 2009 designated March as National Criminal Justice Month. The month is meant to promote societal awareness of the causes and consequences of crime and better help civilians understand the strategies to prevent and respond to it. Many experts believe a return to community-oriented policing (COP) and an emphasis on soft skills for officers could help police departments make strides toward rebuilding community trust.

Daniel Barry is one expert, who says police departments need to make a shift in philosophies. Barry is the criminal justice chair for the University of Phoenix College of Security and Criminal Justice Las Vegas Campus and spent 30 years as police captain for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. He and other current and former Las Vegas officers started the Police Athletic League to help officers and youths form a bond through sports. Barry says initiatives like these go a long way in improving community relations.

"People need to understand that COP and soft skills are a philosophy, not a style of policing," Barry said. "We live in a more connected, more exposed world. Police departments need to embrace efforts to be more involved with the communities they serve."

Police departments are in fact transitioning back to a COP philosophy. Traditional policing has historically taken a reactionary approach, responding to crime after it occurs, which could make individuals feel unsafe. With COP, officers are proactively engaged with community members to address immediate concerns and stop crime before it occurs. Programs such as D.A.R.E. and bike patrols were examples of successful



**Many police officers have found the more they learn about technology and social media, the safer and more efficient they can be.**

past COP initiatives. Today, COP initiatives include expanding social media presence and becoming more active in community projects.

Soft skills and training on how to best de-escalate a situation are key focuses for police departments. Much like how officers are expected to undergo firearms training, teaching soft skills like interpersonal communication and critical thinking must also be prioritized. Studies have shown that the officers with higher education degrees are less likely to use force when making an arrest than those without a degree or only a GED. In fact, officers with two- or four-year degrees used physical or verbal force 56 percent of the time when making an arrest, compared to 68 percent for those with only a high school education.

Moreover, police departments should focus on educating officers on technology and encouraging social media use. According to a Pew Research survey, 44 percent of officers rated their agencies use of social media as "fair," and fewer than one in 10 rated it as "excellent." Despite a lack of understanding and budget cut restraints, social media can be a helpful tool to enhance a department's reputation and quickly spread information.

University of Phoenix offers degrees and certificates that focus on security, public administration and criminal justice that teach the necessary hard and soft skills to pursue a career in criminal justice. Students learn how to make a difference in their communities, protect people and contribute to improving society.

For more information about each of these programs, including on-time completion rates, the median debt incurred by students who completed the program and other important information, please visit [www.phoenix.edu/programs/gainful-employment.html](http://www.phoenix.edu/programs/gainful-employment.html).