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COMPSTAT – THE START OF A REVOLUTION IN POLICING

By Arthur Storch, Retired Inspector NYPD; Worldwide Law Enforcement Consulting Group, Inc.

Picture yourself as Kwai Chang Caine, the Shaolin priest in the old TV series “Kung Fu.” The opening scene shows student Caine standing in front of a target, while senior priests throw spears at him. Due to his training and hard work, he deftly deflects every spear, even as the priests speed up the action. Captains in NYPD are like the students at the Shaolin Temple. Those like Kwai Chang Caine, who learned their lessons and put in the effort, deflect the spears. Those that don’t get wounded, not with spears but with pointed questions by the COMPSTAT inquisitors, who can be like sharks on blood; once the first spear hits, i.e., the first question without a good answer, they sense the weakness and increase the frequency and combativeness of the questions. Wounded captains lose their commands. Captains with answers and results get promoted. Caine becomes a priest; captains become Deputy Inspectors.

In 1994, I was a new captain in NYPD, attending COMPSTAT, our monthly crime strategy meeting, when Police Commissioner William Bratton addressed us, stating that one day, we would look back on our time as precinct commanders and take pride in how we turned NYC around; we would make history by reducing crime like it never had been done before. He made us believe it and proved to be prophetic, and COMPSTAT was the engine that drove the reduction. COMPSTAT is not the answer; it is the forum for finding and demanding the answers. When the COMPSTAT meetings are conducted properly, innovative crime strategies are introduced, developed and shared. All members of the Department realize their critical roles and small victories start a cascading effect to major crime reductions. That’s the magic of COMPSTAT. It unifies all the units and members of the Department towards a common goal.

The 1980’s through the early 1990’s was a period for NYC of crime spiraling out of control. Violent crime, including Murder and Robbery was increasing to record setting numbers. Businesses were leaving New York and tourism was down. Under Mayor Dinkins and Police Commissioner Lee Brown, Safe Streets – Safe Cities legislation was passed to increase the size of NYPD by approximately 5,000 police officers to implement Community Policing in NYC. During the 2 years that this new strategy was in effect, the beefed up Department was able to achieve crime reductions of 1 and 2 percent, which was considered a victory then. After the elections, the new mayor, Rudy Giuliani, hired Police Commissioner William Bratton, who predicted double digit crime reductions, something that never happened during the history of modern policing in NYC. I was a witness and a precinct commander when we made Bratton’s prediction come true, not just in the first year, which was historic, but in year after year. Every Part I index crime went down dramatically immediately and continuously. The 14-year record of COMPSTAT led NYC to a 74% reduction of all Part I Index Crimes (see the below chart for individual crime statistics).

As the story of NYC's dramatic crime reductions spread, representatives from police departments around the world started attending COMPSTAT to find out how it happened. NYPD, at the request of other Departments, sent teams across the US and overseas to share the lessons learned. I brought COMPSTAT upstate to Rome, NY, while Chief Anemone brought it to Rome, Italy. I also presented COMPSTAT to a regional seminar for the Port St. Lucie (Florida) Police Department. When my police consulting company, Worldwide Law Enforcement Consulting Group, gave its first COMPSTAT seminar, police departments from as far away as the Philippines and Hawaii sent representatives. What is COMPSTAT? How did it produce such amazing results, capturing the attention of so many diverse police departments?

COMPSTAT is really a process, a forum and a system of accountability. The best way to explain it is to describe who attends the meetings, what actually happens there and what the participants leave the meetings with.

Every police unit, city agency and private entity that has anything to contribute to crime reduction attends COMPSTAT. Since NYPD is so large an agency and NYC is such a large city, our COMPSTAT meetings are borough specific, i.e. there are 7 separate COMPSTAT meetings to accommodate the 7 NYPD boroughs. The chart at the end of this article illustrates who participates in every Manhattan South meeting. In addition to that list, invitations to COMPSTAT will be given to any agency or organization that could contribute to an emerging problem. To insure a free flow of information and cooperative efforts throughout NYC, precincts that border the borough attending COMPSTAT also attend, e.g., the 19th Precinct (located in Manhattan North) will attend to be available to explain cooperative efforts with the 17th Precinct (Manhattan South), its border command. Selected precinct commanders from that borough (chosen by crime rates or patterns), take turns at a lectern to present their crime statistics, patterns, programs to address these issues and results achieved. Standing with the precinct commander will be the precinct detective squad commander, RAM (Robbery Apprehension Module) commander, Transit District commander, PSA commander, Field Intelligence Officer, Gang Division supervisor and any other unit supervisor who worked that precinct's crime problems that month. Ready to add information are representatives from any of the units mentioned in the Attendee Chart. Even though a precinct commander may not be scheduled to present at COMPSTAT, a recent crime or condition, could change that so all are prepared (hopefully) to speak.

There are two types of preparation for COMPSTAT. Most important is the work done every day that month to analyze problems, design and implement strategies to address them and modify those strategies, as needed, to successfully reduce crime and satisfy the public. The second type of preparation is the same done by a doctoral student defending a thesis; know the facts and truthfully present the results. Today, Captains come to COMPSTAT with a 4-inch looseleaf binder, containing as many facts that they could gather, anticipating tough questions. The skilled interrogators at COMPSTAT, consisting of the Deputy Commissioner of Operations, the Chief of Department (highest uniformed position) every Bureau Chief and selected other deputy commissioners, often surprise these prepared captains with questions from areas previously unaddressed. At my first COMPSTAT, I was prepared to talk about every index crime and was pleasantly surprised when my first question was about servicing complaints of the public. During my initial weeks as a precinct commander, I attended every community meeting in area of responsibility, e.g., Community Council, District Cabinet, Civic Association, Political Party, etc. Some meetings were attended by over 100 people and some by as few as 7 but all had a common complaint, the person answering the phone at the precinct was rude and officers rarely responded on quality of life complaints. I addressed this immediately and followed up to make sure that things changed. In addition, I noticed that complainants (crime victims) often waited on a bench outside the Complaint Room for a half-hour or longer to have their complaint recorded, while numerous officers walked past them, all concerned with their own assignments and disregarding the people they were sworn to serve. This lack of attention gave the wrong impression to the public so I made it an issue that an officer in the precinct without a prisoner who sees a person waiting to lodge a complaint will stop and take the report to expedite this service. Therefore, when asked by Chief Anemone (Chief of Department) if it was "business as usual" in the 106 Precinct regarding service (or lack thereof) to complainants, I smiled and related my experience and how things changed. It was only after responding to this non-COMPSTAT-like question that we started talking about crime. This just illustrates how it's the everyday effort that prepares you more than the memorization of data.

As stated above, the presenters stand at the lectern while the inquisitors face them at the dais. Behind the presenters are 3 large computer screens that display the following:

- Digital map, depicting specific crime complaints and arrests by special units or by all personnel for those crimes
 - This gives a visual picture as to deployment of personnel in regards to problem areas, e.g., is the Anticrime Team patrolling where the robberies are occurring or looking for easy felony arrests in other areas.
- Bar chart that illustrates the time of the day and day of the week of those crimes vs. the time of the day and day of the week of the arrests.
 - If a crime pattern or trend occurs after midnight on weekends, personnel should be deployed at those times.
- Pie chart that indicates the percentage of the command actively making arrests.
 - Is everyone engaged in police work or are a few officers responsible for 90% of the activity.

These basic charts/maps and others specific to local issues give a clear picture of the effectiveness of the strategies, deployment of resources and commitment of personnel. All unit commanders get a chance to tell their story but also must explain what the images present. If there are no arrests near a cluster of complaints, the most acceptable explanation is that an undercover operation is going on there and arrests are imminent. As a Narcotics Borough Commander, I used to chart our narcotics buys to show that our personnel were on the street at times not indicated by arrest activity. This was an especially important issue when there were shooting incidents late at night near bars or gang locations. Another visual display that would be depicted on the computer screens were digital video of quality of life conditions, e.g., street prostitution, homeless camps, panhandling, graffiti, etc. These conditions do not show up on crime charts but effect crime, the perception of lawlessness and the thus the sense of safety for the public. Just as precinct commanders do not want to see crime dots showing up on the map every month, they do not want to see the same quality of life problems displayed on the screen.

Commissioner William Bratton recognized that though every precinct throughout NYC experiences the Part I Index Crimes, albeit at different rates, the methods and victimization may vary from command to command. Therefore, no one strategy could be applied to every robbery or sex crime pattern or trend. However, lessons learned by commanders who successfully or unsuccessfully who addressed these crimes should be shared to foster the development of new strategies. Commanders were encouraged to be creative in their strategies. If crime was up, what was the plan? If crime was down, what made it happen? Don't just show up with plan A. It's too late to develop a new plan after the initial plan fails. Be prepared with plan B. The idea was not to chase crime trends around the neighborhood by not only putting out the fires but analyzing the real problems, addressing immediate emerging problems and including a crime prevention component to every strategy. Every crime strategy that I developed had short, medium and long-term components, to build on successes and insure continued success. A common complaint by some captains is the fear that they would have to compete with their own good numbers. That is only a problem for captains without a real plan, whose success was built on one-time solutions like overtime. Crime prevention programs, such as, Blockwatchers, target hardening, VIN etching, Safe Corridors, school/community lectures, Scared Straight, etc., payoff down the road. They offer some immediate impact but, more importantly, they offer continued impact, preventing future victimization by making potential victims more knowledgeable and allies of the Department. They not only learn how to protect themselves but assist the police in protecting others.

At the monthly COMPSTAT meetings, I and my fellow precinct commanders, listened to the presenters and learned from their strategies, adopting those parts that would help address the problems unique to our commands and adding our own twists to make them more effective. In addition, as stated before, NYPD has 7 borough COMPSTAT meetings each month. To insure that everyone is informed regarding the crime strategies and issues, every borough commander sends a crime analyst to record the issues, strategies and comments by the COMPSTAT inquisitors. These minutes are disseminated to every unit commander. Some of my most effective crime strategies were formed from lessons learned by what occurred in other boroughs. In smaller Departments, there may only be the need for

one COMPSTAT meeting for all units. In either case, minutes must be taken and disseminated. It reminds everyone about the issues and helps focus them on their mission. The COMPSTAT inquisitors will remember what was said at the last meeting so the unit commanders must be prepared to explain how they addressed those problems.

The underlying managerial principal to COMPSTAT is accountability; police officers and supervisors will successfully deal with those problems that they will be rated on, i.e., with those questions that they know they will be held responsible to answer. Prior to COMPSTAT, Robbery was the only crime that was given continued significant attention by the Police Commissioner because, traditionally, it was the one that most Departments measured the safety of their cities by. At that time, little attention was given to Burglaries and Larcenies. Today, all the Part I Index crimes are given significant attention and all have been reduced dramatically. A second important principal is that giving responsibility requires giving authority to address the problem. It would be unfair to hold a precinct commander responsible to reduce robbery while not giving the necessary resources or allowing him/her to utilize those resources as needed. Police Commissioner Bratton blurred the lines between patrol, investigation and special operations. Certain operations, due to their unique operational or corruption hazards need to be done by specialized units, but patrol commanders are allowed to conduct many other operations that were previously reserved for those units, e.g., surveillance, Operation Losing Proposition (prostitution), anti-fencing operations, underage drinking operations aimed at stores that sell to minors, business inspections, etc. With the success of COMPSTAT as a tool in addressing these crimes, COMPSTAT has been expanded to dealing with other agency goals. NYPD created TRAFFICSTAT to reduce traffic accidents and NARCOSTAT to focus on drug gangs. The NYC Department of Corrections used it to reduce inmate violence. Other city agencies use it for their unique missions.

Finally, it should be noted that conducting meetings on a monthly or weekly basis and talking about crime does not mean that a Department has COMPSTAT. That would be the equivalent of a Department instituting foot patrol and calling it Community Policing. Without community partnership in identifying the problems and developing the strategies to deal with them, there is no Community Policing. Without giving authority to match responsibility and without encouraging creativity, there is no COMPSTAT. Agencies must not be tempted to employ a cookie cutter approach, assuming that its hierarchy knows better than the local commander how to deal with local problems. Agency management is needed to keep the Department going in the right direction, to identify and empower local leaders to fight the local battles, and to identify captains that do not have the requisite quality of leadership. By rewarding success, encouraging innovation and replacing those who fail to do either, progress will continue in the battle against crime and in service to the community.

NYC CRIME STATISTICS

(*Current through April 2007)

Crime	2007	2006	% Change	2 Yr % Chg	6-Yr % Chg	14 Yr % Chg
Murder	128	167	-23.3	-17.4	-36.3	-79.0
Rape	452	536	-15.6	-10.8	-24.4	-54.3
Robbery	6,024	6,963	-13.4	-15.7	-29.0	-77.7
Fel. Assault	4,845	4,982	-2.7	-4.6	-30.7	-59.5
Burglary	6,323	7,138	-11.4	-13.8	-36.8	-80.2
Gr. Larceny	13,162	13,887	-5.2	-6.5	-7.7	-48.6
GLA	3,895	4,840	-19.5	-30.1	-57.5	-89.4
TOTAL	34,829	38,513	-9.57	-12.7	-29.99	-74.26

*Crime statistics published on NYPD website.

COMPSTAT ATTENDEES

NYPD Units	Other Agencies
Precincts	Port Authority Police
Transit Districts	Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority
Public Service Areas (Housing Bureau Units)	NYS Division of Parole
Patrol Borough Task Force	NYC Department of Probation
Peddler Task Force	District Attorney's Office
School Safety Division	Special Narcotics Prosecutor
Highway District	Mayor's Office of Community Assistance
Manhattan Traffic Area	
Precinct Detective Squads	
Borough Robbery Squad	
Special Victims Squad	
Intelligence Division	
Gang Division	
Major Case Squad	
Special Frauds Squad	
Missing Persons Squad	
Joint Robbery Task Force	
Narcotics Division	
Vice Enforcement Squad	
Organized Crime Investigations Division	
Legal Bureau – Civil Enforcement	
Management Information Systems Division	
Office of Management Analysis & Planning	
Community Affairs Division	