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City of Phoenix
OFFICE OF THE POLICE CHIEF

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May 10, 2000

Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suit 930
Washington D.C. 20036

Dear Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee:

I would like to formally nominate the attached document for consideration for the 1999 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. As you know, the Phoenix Police Department is firmly committed to community based policing. In order to dedicate our department to the principles of community based policing; problem identification and solving techniques must be taught to all employees. The program described in this submission is a good example of the utilization of a problem solving model to work with the community in identification of the problem, analysis of possible solutions, execution of a response to the problem, and a follow up assessment to determine the impact the solution had on the problem.

This is not a program that was thrust upon an officer to work out and execute. The officer listed in the document performed every step in solving the problem. It was a project that took a great deal of time to complete. However, the results appear to be well worth the time spent on the program.

Again, please accept this nomination for the award.

Sincerely,



HAROLD L. HURTT
Police Chief

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1. SUMMARY:

Project Title: Auto Theft - A Comprehensive View on the Precipitating Factors to Phoenix's High Auto Theft Rate

Using the SARA model, a comprehensive written report was completed and subsequently submitted to the Phoenix Police Department's Executive Staff in January 1999.

Scan: According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), the State of Arizona became the top state in the nation in reported auto thefts in 1994, on a per capita basis, and has remained so through 1998. The City of Phoenix is the driving force behind this statistic as Phoenix alone reported over 44% of the state's auto thefts in 1998, yet it has only 26% of the state's population. An inquiry from the newly appointed Police Chief into the causes of Phoenix's high auto theft rate was the precipitating factor for studying this problem.

Analysis: Over 25 different agencies were consulted. A comparative analysis was made between this acquired input and all causes and effects with Phoenix's auto theft rate. Input from other agencies included similarities and differences in demographics; personnel strength; prosecution, laws, punishment, deterrent factors; policies; procedures; technology deployment; use and type of public awareness campaigns, etc.

Response: A 37 typed-page report (plus 7 addenda) identified several internal and external causes to Phoenix and Arizona's high auto theft rate. The report also included 10 recommendations that, if followed, would lower Phoenix's auto theft rate by an estimated 25%. By extension, Arizona's auto theft rate would also be reduced. Four of the five internal recommendations were implemented yielding a 9% auto theft reduction in 1999 compared with 1998. The five external recommendations involve changes to other agencies' operations, which have not yet been attempted.

Assessment: Five of the ten recommendations are internal Phoenix Police Department (PPD) policies and/or procedures and four of the internal recommendations have already been adopted. The remaining five recommendations are external and are therefore not solely under the control of the PPD. Subsequently, convincing another agency to adopt our view for change takes time, money and political will. Additionally, the NICB is usually a full 12 months behind in their reporting. The results of adopting any of the external recommendations, if done now, will not be known until sometime in 2001.

2. **DESCRIPTION:**

A. **Scanning:**

In June 1996, I transferred from an administrative assignment in the chief's office to the General Investigations Bureau (GIB) and filled one of the two existing auto theft sergeant's positions. At the time of this transfer, I was a 14-year veteran and had no investigative experience with the Phoenix Police Department (PPD), although I did have two years of investigative experience with the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID).

There existed only two 8-person squads in the Auto Theft Detail. Typical of an overworked unit, detectives rarely ventured from conventional investigative techniques and supervisors of the detail had not developed any strategy in which to address the high auto theft rate nor had they maximized the available resources. A majority of the cases that were "cleared" were the result of suspects being captured in the act by the patrol officers rather than through the Auto Theft Detail's investigative process. Morale was low and there was a constant turn-over of detectives. Within the first 12 months of my assignment there, I had three different supervisors.

Upon my arrival, I learned that since 1994, the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) had listed Arizona as the top state in the nation in auto thefts reported (ranking based on a per capita basis). My meetings with local, state and federal agencies made me aware that each agency believed they had the best answer in lowering the auto theft rate. Unfortunately, they had no data that would support their belief - subsequently, no agreement was reached with each other in coordinating or consolidating their efforts. Their "answer" in combating auto theft was usually shallow and involved a significant increase in budget and/or personnel.

In 1998, Harold Hurtt was appointed Chief of the Phoenix Police Department (PPD). In August 1998, I accompanied the GIB Commander to the weekly Department Staff Meeting to discuss, among other scheduled topics, Phoenix's high auto theft rate. After the GIB Commander gave a short presentation, Police Chief Hurtt asked a simple question that neither the GIB Commander nor I could answer. The question was, "Why is Phoenix and Arizona so high in auto thefts?" Department Staff continued on to the next topic(s).

Later that day, I advised my immediate supervisor of Chief Hurtt's question and asked if I could do a thesis on the matter, in addition to my regular duties. Permission was granted and I was given one auto theft detective to assist me. My initial belief was that the Republic of Mexico (hereafter referred to as Mexico) was somehow a contributing factor. Approximately 17 weeks later, in January 1999, I completed a report titled, Auto Theft - A Comprehensive View on the Precipitating Factors to Phoenix 's High Auto Theft Rate and distributed it to the department's Executive Staff. On February 3, 1999, I presented my findings and recommendations to the department's Executive Staff. Also in February 1999, I was promoted to Lieutenant and currently serve in the Patrol Division.

B. Analysis:

I began my analysis with a technique called "process mapping." I had never used this technique before and had never received any training or written material on the subject, but I was aware of its concept. I looked at a variety of auto theft cases, from the typical theft to more complex cases involving forged titles and VIN switching. Each category was then "mapped" to determine all factors that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the crime.

This was only the first step in determining the root causes for Phoenix's auto theft but was instrumental in *identifying* all *sources* - law enforcement, private corporations and governmental agencies, that failed to deter, prevent or detect a stolen vehicle out of Phoenix. Other areas of influence examined included those sources that tolerated, condoned, exacerbated, precipitated and/or caused auto thefts in Phoenix.

Empirical data, comparative analysis and other source methods were used to determine the *degree of impact* each source had. Those sources which had direct or indirect influence on the *crime* of auto theft included, but were not limited to: existing laws, prosecution trends, court decisions, length of incarceration and diversion programs. Additionally, the Auto Theft Detail's structure, mission, investigative techniques, supervision, transfer policy, policies and procedures were also identified in the process mapping technique and underwent a comparative and other source methods analysis.

The department's Police Automated Computer Entry system (PACE), line-level input, department's Planning and Research Bureau, Records & Identification Bureau as well as other resources assisted in identifying crime trends, to include: means of commission, victimology, suspect profiling and providing data for both sides of basic economics - supply and demand. Internal surveys assisted in evaluating understood missions, procedures, policies and attitude of the auto theft epidemic among PPD employees. External surveys, radio talk shows, newspaper headlines and other sources were used to gauge the level of public awareness and their degree of dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The process mapping technique identified all current or potential contributing factors to Phoenix's auto theft rate.

For example, using a stolen vehicle report, which involved a forged title and was sold in Phoenix and resold in Mexico, the following factors were identified: *(Note: not all steps in the process mapping are listed due to the word and page constraint).*

Car manufacturer (GM) > evaluated the effectiveness of inherent designs, theft deterrent and prevention systems available and deployed.

Victim > victimology - examines why suspects target or ignore specific make, model vehicles and target or ignore specific areas for committing auto thefts.

Means of Commission > examines the different methods used to steal vehicles to include levels of experience, tools used, etc.

Perpetrators > Examines and classifies suspects and their motivating factors.

Phoenix Police > Internal examination involving a general view of the department and a specific emphasis of the Auto Theft Detail in combating auto theft, to include: mission, attitude, structure, strength, funds, resources, enforcement, policies, procedures, record keeping, notification, investigative techniques, use of technology, training, etc.

Mexico > Examines the causes between Phoenix as the source of supplying stolen vehicles and Mexico's demand for the product.

Arizona Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) > Examines DMV's relationship with Phoenix's high auto theft rate.

Border Patrol > Examines the Border Patrol's relationship between Phoenix 's high auto theft rate.

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) > Examines INS' effectiveness in preventing and detecting a major contributing factor to Phoenix 's high auto theft rate - undocumented persons.

Prosecution > Evaluated trends; case turndowns, plea-bargaining, etc.

Courts > Evaluated sentencing trends.

Over 400 pages of policies, statistics and other relevant documents were received from the more than 25 different agencies that were consulted with. Differences and similarities were then identified between Phoenix's precipitating factors and those precipitating factors from other cities and states. Conclusions could now be drawn based upon inductive and deductive reasoning. This analysis ultimately led to an educated guess, or thesis, in answering Chief Hurtt's simple question, "Why is Phoenix and Arizona so high in auto thefts?" I also answered the expected follow-up question, "What can be done to reduce the city's auto theft rate to an acceptable level?"

This ambitious project took a first-of-its-kind "Gestalt" view of Phoenix's auto theft rate by examining *all* precipitating factors that cause, create, exacerbate or condone this epidemic. Seventeen weeks in the making, this 37 typed-page and seven addenda report listed ten recommendations. If followed, Phoenix's auto theft rate would be reduced by an estimated 25%. Lowering Phoenix's high auto theft rate would, by extension, also lower Arizona's lofty ranking as the top state in the nation in reported auto thefts, on a per capita basis. Phoenix had been averaging approximately 54 stolen vehicles per day during the five-year period between 1994 and 1998.

Similar to a college thesis, this project uses footnotes in citing sources of information to include; the City Attorney's Office, County Attorney's Office (Adult and Juvenile Divisions), State Probation, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Republic of Mexico law enforcement and Consulate, Arizona Department of Public Safety, National Insurance Crime Bureau, City Planning Department, Maricopa County Census Bureau, Immigration and Naturalization Service, seven out-of-state police departments and four in-state police departments, Arizona Department of Motor Vehicles, as well as various internal Phoenix Police Department Bureaus.

Reducing the number of auto thefts in Phoenix and by extension Arizona, contributes to the creation of providing a better quality of life for the owners of the estimated 4,000,000 registered vehicles in Arizona.

Those Arizonans who are fortunate enough not to experience having their vehicle stolen are still victimized by this epidemic through higher vehicle insurance premiums. As proof of this cause-and-affect, vehicle insurance rates in Phoenix and the State of Arizona are higher than the national average. Another adverse effect of Arizona's auto theft epidemic is the notoriety of its lofty ranking by the NICB. This may deter families and businesses from moving to Arizona. If correct, both Phoenix and Arizona's tax base would suffer.

C. Response:

The conclusions easily led me to the recommended responses. I listed 10 recommendations that, if followed, would reduce Phoenix's auto theft rate by at least 25%. The recommendations resulted in five internal changes - meaning that the PPD has total control of implementing, and five external changes - meaning that the PPD has no autonomous control to implement because they involve other agencies.

After presenting my findings to the department's Executive Staff in February 1999, four of the five internal recommendations were formally adopted. To date, none of the external recommendations have been instituted.

Beginning in August 1998 when the work on this thesis began, the problems within the department and the Auto Theft Detail specifically, were relatively quickly identified. Four of the five internal recommendations were subsequently instituted immediately as pilot programs in order to gauge their effectiveness. Initiating pilot programs has several advantages, including increase speed of implementation and lower approval level. If positive results are attained, credibility in my work is achieved - specifically my knowledge and use of the SARA problem solving model. The timing of the presentation to the PPD's Executive Staff in February 1999, allowed me enough time to acquire auto theft statistics for 1998.

The results of employing four of the five internal recommendations during the latter half of 1998 yielded a 9% drop in auto thefts in 1998 compared to 1997 (17,843 to 19,619, respectively). Armed with this positive result, I could now seek formal approval from the PPD's Executive Staff to permanently adopt four of the five internal recommendations as standard policies or procedures. More importantly, the results gave credibility to my work and allowed the PPD to champion the cause for the five external recommendations to the selected outside agencies. In my estimation, the adoption of the five external recommendations would have lowered Phoenix's auto theft rate another 16%.

A full year has now passed since formally adopting four of the five internal recommendations. Since none of the five external recommendations have yet been adopted, the expected result is that the auto theft rate would stabilize or continue to decline slightly in 1999. The Auto Theft Detail reports a modest 3% decline in 1999's auto theft rate compared with 1998's auto theft rate.

The first internal recommendation required an increase in detective and support staff. In the SARA problem-solving model's "analysis" phase, I learned that other adjacent city police departments had more auto theft detectives than the PPD, based on size of department and/or city's population. My use of the process mapping technique showed an already maximized use of the two 8-person auto theft squads. My comparative analysis technique showed how the detail's efficiency and by extension, its effectiveness, could be raised exponentially with each additional detective and with each additional support person. Subsequently, the Auto Theft Detail gained six detectives and one sergeant. Although there was no *permanent* increase in the Auto Theft Detail's support staff (three civilians), enough evidence had been collected to prevent a budget decrease in its staffing level. I overcame the need to increase the detail's support staffing level through the use of the department's Volunteer and Shadowing Programs.

These *temporary* assignments assisted in the increased workload caused by the increase in assigned detectives - without incurring any additional expense to the department. To supplement training and equipment costs for the increase in personnel, I solicited various outside sources such as the Arizona Auto Theft Investigator's Association and the state's auto theft task force.

The second adopted recommendation involved the use of the department's Shadowing Program. This department program, underutilized by the Auto theft Detail, allows a civilian or sworn employee to accompany or "shadow" a detective or support person (civilian) for one day. To raise interest among other PPD employees in "shadowing" members of the detail, I focused on improving the detail's morale. Emphasizing the use of formal and informal recognition of the unit members' accomplishments and displaying a caring attitude each morning by using a management-by-walking-around (MBWA) technique were just some of the methods used. Transfers out of the detail subsided resulting in a stabilization of technical expertise and experience. Experienced detectives were much more efficient and effective, partially because they don't have to re-experience the problems associated with a "learning curve. "

With an improved morale and stabilization of assigned personnel, a marketing campaign could now be launched. Word-of-mouth, voicing the detail's accomplishments in various department meetings and ensuring the publication of the detail's benefits and accomplishments in various internal newsletters were some of the methods used. Benefits, such as overtime, holidays and weekends off and a more manageable caseload were touted. Quality personnel began using the Shadow Program in the Auto Theft Detail to evaluate first-hand, whether they wished to pursue a permanent assignment there. Ultimately, the Volunteer and Shadowing Programs were credited with increasing the detail's staffing by an average of 6% one-day each week (based on the two 8-person squads), without incurring any additional budget costs.

The third adopted recommendation involved correcting a "coding" problem within the Planning & Research Bureau. Again, this problem was identified by using the process mapping technique. This correction made the department's record keeping and subsequent reporting more accurate and resulted in a modest decline in Phoenix's auto theft rate. The last approved recommendation involved the distribution of auto theft crime trends to the Patrol Division. This was accomplished with the help of the department's Planning & Research Bureau, which created electronic pin maps that could be updated daily. The pin maps were then sent to each patrol precinct for use in developing crime reduction programs. The method of relaying auto theft information to the patrol precincts is now done through each patrol car's Mobile Data Terminal (MDT).

Whether electronic pin maps or MDTs are used to relay the latest auto theft crime trends to patrol officers, its purpose and benefits remain the same. Current top ten stolen vehicle locations, recovery locations and top ten targeted make and model vehicles - indigenous to each patrol precinct, can be accessed by each patrol officer. The significance of providing this data cannot be over-evaluated. With an arrest rate of 6% in 1998 (1,132 out of 17,843 vehicles stolen), stolen vehicle suspects usually escape capture, primarily due to the lapse of time in discovering the crime by the vehicle owner/operator and reporting the offense to the police. Rather than react to the crime after it has been reported to police, patrol precincts can be more efficient with their limited resources. Armed with this data, patrol precincts can develop their own auto theft reduction campaign (i.e. use undercover techniques to capture or deploy marked patrol units to prevent the crime, etc.). The capture of one suspect, based on empirical data, could effect that particular month's auto theft rate by as much as 20.8% (commits an average of 10 per month and using the average of 48 vehicles stolen per day in 1998).

The five external and as yet, unrealized recommendations involve changes within other agencies, all of which are governments or government-controlled. As such, each agency's directors are either elected or appointed by politicians. Only when citizens express their displeasure with the lack of attention to the crime of auto theft, either through the voting polls or re-locating to another state, will these agencies seriously consider adopting my recommendations.

For example, during the analysis stage of the SARA model, and using the process mapping technique already discussed, I discovered that a large amount of stolen vehicles, not recovered within the first 36 hours from the initial report, had been taken out of the U.S. and into Mexico through one of the six border crossing points.

The Border Patrol, responsible for the security of our nation's borders, was subsequently contacted.

I learned of their laws, policies, procedures and other details that explained why they consistently fail to detect and subsequently recover a large percentage of stolen vehicles leaving the U.S. into Mexico. The Border Patrol attributed their lack of attention to the auto theft epidemic to inadequate staffing levels. Because of the lack of funds and personnel, their attention is primarily focused on vehicles *entering* the U.S. Illegal aliens and drugs were the two offenses specifically targeted. During my consultation with a multitude of other agencies in completing this project (my own included), budget constraints were often cited as the reason for failing to act against the auto theft epidemic.

However, even if the Border Patrol's staff increased by a factor of 10, the job of detecting and seizing stolen vehicles before they left the U.S. and entered Mexico could not be accomplished. In an average year, over 12 million vehicles pass through the Nogales border alone.

To conduct a NCIC stolen records check on every license plate on every vehicle *before* they are allowed to leave the U.S. would cause a traffic jam all the way back to Phoenix.

Again, in my analysis phase of the SARA problem-solving model, I learned that U.S. states that border Canada do not have a high auto theft rate. One of the many reasons for this was that the U.S./Canada Border Patrol employs a device called a "License Plate Reader." This machine can monitor one lane at a time and can instantly read a rear license plate on moving vehicles. The machine, set a few miles from the actual border, then searches for a NCIC match within a few minutes. If a match is made, agents are notified by computer and the stolen vehicle can be singled out before it leaves the U.S. without interrupting other vehicles and their occupants.

At \$30,000 each, these machines would not be considered inexpensive but they are far less expensive than one agent's yearly salary. Even more important, these machines are a one-time cost and are highly more efficient than *hundreds* of Border Patrol agents.

The other four agencies identified as requiring some degree of change in their current operation include; the County Attorney's Office, Arizona Department of Motor Vehicles, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Juvenile Correction Center (JCC). My recommended changes for these four agencies did not specifically require an increase in staffing or budget but rather a change in their operations.

D. Assessment:

The four internal recommendations that were instituted in 1998 are attributed to the 9% decrease in Phoenix's auto theft rate, comparing 1998's statistics with 1997' s statistics.

The fifth internal recommendation was very important, yet involved such a dramatic change in the way the Phoenix Police Department operates, that an ad hoc committee was created to consider its effects on the public. Over four months of discussions, surveys and reports had elapsed before the committee eventually rejected it. The committee was composed of representatives of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, our department's attorney and other sworn and civilian members of various PPD bureaus and precincts, as well as interested citizens.

At issue was the recommendation of instituting a Stolen Vehicle Deposition Form, intended to deter a large number of false stolen vehicle reports. False Stolen Vehicle DRs unnecessarily consume the department's limited resources as well as distort our auto theft rate. Instituting this form was not an artificial way of lowering our statistical standing compared with other cities and states. To the contrary, this idea was born in the analysis phase and if adopted, would have placed the PPD's policies/procedures in alignment with other successful agencies. Eventually, the committee rejected this recommendation due to political considerations.

The five external recommendations, to my knowledge, have not been instituted or even attempted (for the reasons already listed). Even if and when any of these five recommendations are adopted, a full year will have to follow before any result can be measured. Additionally, a study will have to be commissioned to determine whether the lower auto theft rate, if it does occur, is attributed to the adopted recommendation. The main reporting agency for each state and city's auto theft statistics is the NICB and they routinely report the previous year's results in June.

3. AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

The study of Phoenix's auto theft epidemic and subsequent thesis was completed with the direct assistance of one of my auto theft detectives and while maintaining my normal assigned duties and responsibilities.

I had great support for this project by all members of my chain-of-command as well as cooperation from the 25 agencies I consulted with.

My 2-year administrative assignment in the chief's office was critical to my knowledge of the inner-workings of the PPD, City Council, media and writing skills development. This assignment also created a platform in which I enjoyed credibility in my requests for information from both internal and external sources. In this capacity, I had access to the Police Chief and assistant chiefs and observed their attitude, preparation and teachings to various civilian and sworn groups in the Community Based Policing (CBP) and Problem Oriented Policing (POP) concepts. As such, the SARA problem-solving model is a key component of both concepts because it teaches a systematic approach in solving community-related problems.

There was no additional incentive to conduct this study other than the opportunity to positively impact a major PPD problem. Using the SARA model was the best and only way I knew to examine this issue. No additional costs were associated with my study of Phoenix's auto theft epidemic.

This experience of conducting such a large scale study did not expose any issues or problems with the SARA problem-solving model. It did however, uncover my own naivete in Problem Oriented Policing (POP).

Specifically, while other agencies were cooperative in my efforts of completing the thesis, they were not enthusiastic about my recommendations. Although none of the outside agencies formally rejected my findings, conclusions or recommendations, no actions have been taken towards making the recommended changes. I continue to believe that my thesis is persuasive enough to warrant the recommended changes, especially when coupled with the knowledge that Arizona continues to be ranked as the top state in the nation in auto thefts, on a per capita basis.

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