How Police and the Public can Create Safer Neighborhoods Together

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I’ve been a police officer for over 25 years.

00:28 And identifying as an African-American woman, I know things have gotten better. But even as I learned about public safety, I wondered if what I was doing on the street was hurting or harming the community. And I often wondered if, you know, how did they perceive me, this woman in uniform?

00:47 But there is one thing that I knew. I knew there was a way that we could do this, probably, different or better. A way that treated people better. But I also knew that police could not do it alone. It's the coproduction of public safety. That means working together.

01:17 The relationship between the African American community and the police is a painful one. They don’t trust each other. We all want to be safe. And our safety is connected.

01:43 And that we know, in order to have great relationships and relationships built on trust, that we're going to have to have communication. Social media and politics don’t always help. So, in New York, that meant "stop, question and frisk." Officers need to know the people in the communities they serve. But you see, there is a better way. And we know -- it's called coproduction. Working together.

02:31 So in the 1970s, Elinor Ostrom came up with this theory, really called coproduction, and this is how it works. You bring people into the space that come with separate expertise, and you also come with new ideas and lived experience, and you produce a new knowledge. And when you produce that new knowledge, and you apply this theory to public safety, you produce a new type of public safety.

02:57 And so, in New York, it feels like this. It is called building relationships, literally one block at a time. And it's "Build the Block." So this is how it works. You go to buildtheblock.nyc, you put in your address. And up pops location, date and time of your neighborhood meeting. The important part of this is you've got to go to the meeting. And once you go to that meeting, there, of course, will be NYPD, along with officers and other community members. Everyone talks together and tries to understand each other and agree. And what's interesting about this is that we know that it works.

04:29 So, another issue that always comes up in neighborhoods is speeding. How many of you in here have ever had a speeding ticket? Raise your hand. Oh, higher, come on! There's more than that, this is New York. So those are other issues that brought to the NCO. Speeding -- what the NCOs do is they collaborate with the Department of Transportation, they look at issues such as speed bumps and signs and all types of things. And when we come together to create this different type of policing, it also feels different.

04:59 The coproduction of public safety also means that officers need to understand the history and the power of their uniforms. They need to learn about stereotypes that often influence our decision making. And so, you can imagine, for police officers who have to make split-second decisions can be very difficult to make the right decision all the time. That's why the NYPD, along with other departments throughout the United States, are training all of their officers in implicit bias.

07:45 We also have to acknowledge that there are those folks that are in our community that are here -- they do want to do us harm. We also have to recognize that we have community members who did not get the benefits of a long-ago dream. We also have to acknowledge that we have put faith in a system that sometimes is broken, hoping that it would give us solutions for better. But we cannot walk away. Because there is a better way.

08:15 And we know this because the NYPD's neighborhood policing philosophy is grounded in the coproduction of public safety. And in order for us to move forward together, with our family, our friends and for our health, we have to make sure that we focus this way. And in order to do that, there are three fundamental ideas that we must all agree to.

1. There's no more wallowing in the why. We know why. We must move forward together. There's no more us versus them.
2. We must embrace the lived experience and our histories, and we must make sure we never go back to a place where we cannot move forward.
3. We must also make sure that truth and telling facts is painful. But we also know that no action is no longer acceptable. And agree?

09:35 TK: So we do know there is a better way. And the better way is the coproduction of public safety.