

Proactive Alliance

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The *Proactive Alliance* approach integrates policing methods with adapted concepts from counseling psychology created by a licensed professional counselor and a police officer. This collaborative approach is a prevention model based on building relationships with the community in a variety of settings and using the humanity of the individual police officer as his or her most valuable instrument.

Although forging collaborative relationships has been suggested and encouraged to most police departments, exactly **how** to develop and improve existing skills to achieve this goal has been uncertain. The ability to create lasting, purposeful relationships with stakeholders is not an innate skill, but can be taught. While some police officers have a natural talent for social interaction, all personality types are capable of learning how to build productive relationships with the appropriate training. Building a productive relationship requires effective communication and empathy, but must also incorporate collaboration. *Proactive Alliance* recognizes the value of the transactional de-escalation techniques that police use to defuse adversarial conflict and empowers officers to actively engage with the public before a conflict occurs. When a crisis does occur, the relationship acts as a problem-solving medium, giving the officer more options than enforcement alone, including the ability to draw from the community for the most effective solutions.

Engaging reticent or distrustful stakeholders is an ongoing challenge. Certainly, there are no simple solutions when trying to change community fear and cynicism of police. Evolving from a culture of enforcement-first policing to a relationship-based approach requires a systemic shift. Encouraging officers to initiate consistent dialogue with community members and organizations enables police to listen to and understand specific worries, fears, and complaints and arrive at a mutually beneficial outcome: community members feel validated and more secure, and police have a better understanding of what problems could develop. Once a level of order and security exist, discussing and engaging in mutually beneficial goals can begin.

The concept of *Proactive Alliance*, developed by Molly Mastoras, LPC, is a method of collaboration among police, businesses, and community members fostered by active listening techniques, effective communication, and empathy to develop purposeful and productive relationships. This approach draws from and adapts counseling psychology concepts including Family Systems Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Person-Centered techniques, the Stages of Change, Trauma-informed techniques, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Empathy is the foundation of a successful therapeutic relationship, the key element to establishing trust and safety in the context of counseling, and is the basis of all successful therapeutic techniques, most notably Person-Centered therapy created by the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. Unconditional positive regard, a term coined by Rogers, is the concept of accepting and supporting someone without judgment of their behavior. When adapted to a relationship-based policing approach, unconditional positive regard can be an essential tool when interacting with community members in a way that is non-judgmental, supportive, and accepting rather than punitive. Although this approach

is not appropriate when a situation is violent or threatening to police or the community, it can be a helpful perspective when establishing relationships with the public and building trust. Other therapeutic techniques based on the Rogerian approach including adapted concepts from Motivational Interviewing also assist police in working with the community to generate change. Ideas that originate in Family Systems Therapy, such as employing appropriate interpersonal boundaries, is another element that helps police use themselves as an effective instrument of change while protecting their emotional well being. The fundamental purpose of *Proactive Alliance* is the development of *responsive collaboration*, which is the act of standing beside a community member or stakeholder in cooperation so that when a conflict or crisis occurs, the relationship provides an environment of increased options and problem solving.

Communities, businesses, and police strive to create safe and economically viable nightlife areas. Using the concept of *Proactive Alliance* to build relationships, Dimitrios Mastoras created the first successful voluntary accreditation model in the U.S. to reduce alcohol-related harm and establish mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. A mutually beneficial relationship in the context of nightlife management is the commitment of the police, community, and business owners to work towards safety, economic viability, and improved quality of life. Initially, restaurant owners expressed resentment and distrust of police based on their past experiences with enforcement-only practices. With the implementation of *Proactive Alliance*, restaurant owners were ultimately willing to participate in a voluntary accreditation program requiring them to write employee policies and participate in safety training for their staff. Restaurant owners gradually shifted their perception of police from adversarial to collaborative. Concurrently, the police began to increasingly respect restaurant owners, value their perspectives, and use their input for collaborative problem solving. Beyond staff training and enhanced policies, restaurant owners welcomed other police initiatives including sexual assault intervention training and designated ride-share loading zones. This approach is not a quick solution focused on the number of arrests, but a long-term, relationship-based policing plan to maintain order and community safety. Police must sustain a long-term commitment to experience the qualitative results that develop over time. This approach is not the only answer and will not solve all issues; however, we adhere to the idea that people are people regardless of the setting and want to be listened to, accepted, and feel safe. These tenets are essential in a counseling room but are just as crucial in a bar, restaurant, or on a public street.

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