

How much risk are we willing to accept?

Frank Zappa once said The U.S. is a nation of laws, badly written and randomly enforced.

As we go through this period of unrest and uncertainty, one of the most significant issues being brought into focus is the state of and even the existence of police and law enforcement in our communities. Our approach to law enforcement throughout our history has evolved significantly from the days of the night watchman, a volunteer position created to watch businesses while they were closed and monitor prostitution and gambling.

Our history has shown that once we establish an entity to perform a task or take on a responsibility, with this assignment comes expectations. Those expectations inevitably change over time. One only needs to look at the FBI pre 9/11 and post 9/11. The role of responding to an attack became the mission of preventing the next attack. Any future terror attacks are considered a failure on the part of the FBI.

Ironically, the night watchman wasn’t exactly a highly sought-after job. And, early policemen, "didn't want to wear badges because these guys had bad reputations, to begin with, and they didn't want to be identified as people *that other people didn’t like*,” says Potter. And “if you were rich enough, you paid someone to do it for you — ironically, a criminal or a community thug.” – Gary Potter, Eastern Kentucky University.

Dare I say, the more things change, the more they stay the same. This is not based on any in-depth research, but for every fan of five fans of the police, you can probably find an enemy of the police. The existence of law enforcement and the role of law enforcement has always been met with varied opinions. In recent years, it has been more about the expectations of police. The obvious split is between those who believe the police will protect them and those who believe that we all have the responsibility to protect ourselves in conjunction with the police as a partner.

This is where we make the personal decision on accepting risk. Do I take on the responsibility to protect myself, my family, my home? How about my business and my assets? Or do I trust that if I call the police, they will respond and help me? Robert Peel, who was the founder of the London Metropolitan Police, after which U.S. law enforcement was modeled, said “The Police are the public and the public are the Police.”

The expectation in the early days was that the public/police partnership was necessary for effective law enforcement. Have the expectations of the police changed and therefore are these expectations feeding the current environment? Do police departments believe their role is different than in the past and has that impacted how they approach crime? A topic we discuss in my Master's class is the impact of intelligence collection on policing, a topic for a future Tripwire Report.

The general approach to Risk is prioritizing your Threats, identifying your Vulnerabilities, and assessing the Impact of the exploitation of those vulnerabilities. As we navigate the government's speculation regarding the role of and the need for policing in our communities, we also need to determine what level of risk we are willing to accept to protect ourselves and our world?

*Every kind of peaceful cooperation among men is primarily based on mutual trust and only secondarily on institutions such as courts of justice and police.” – Albert Einstein*

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