

Taking Performance Monitoring Seriously To Cut Crime in Half

New York City was averaging five murders a day (1800-2200 murders a year between 1989 and 1993) and 10,000 felonies a week. Those who could leave the city did so (further weakening the city's already crumbling taxpayer base).

Mayor Giuliani made "revolutionizing" New York City's fight against crime his mission. His underlying philosophy: "Broken Windows" policing. His main weapon: a truly revolutionary tactic called Compstat. The "Broken Windows" theory of policing states that major crime will be reduced by enforcing laws on minor offenses because, A.) The rigorous enforcement of standard of living crimes such as vandalism creates an environment that is hostile to the individuals that are likely to commit more serious crimes, and B.) individuals who commit smaller offenses are more likely to also commit more serious crimes.

"Broken Windows" policing worked. Compstat's effectiveness in fighting crime was due to its main areas of focus: the accurate compilation of crime statistics, and the accountability of those entrusted to fight crime. No major city police department had ever successfully implemented a program to collect and analyze crime statistics on a daily basis. This was the foundation of Compstat's strategy. The infrastructure needed to conduct daily data collection was thought to perhaps be 2 years from implementation. The Giuliani Administration had it up and running in three weeks. The Compstat reports were available to all levels of authority in the chain of command. Every person, from the Mayor to the police officer on the street, knew how each precinct was performing.

The most critical aspect of creating accountability was the twice weekly Compstat meeting, where each individual borough command was to account before the Mayor and all of their peers, their department's performance. Mayor Giuliani remembers that, "from the very start of these meetings, the NYPD realized that something special was taking shape. [Deputy Police Commissioner] Jack Maple would pepper the precinct commander with: 'Why are car thefts down twenty percent citywide, but up ten percent in your area?' Or: 'Explain how assaults have been falling for six straight months until last month then started rising.'"

Mayor Giuliani made sure that each precinct commander's entire staff be present for these meetings, which would make it difficult to "pass the buck" onto an underling who was not present, (again demonstrating how accountability was heavily factored into the structural processes of Compstat itself.) Decisions were able to be made on how to reallocate police resources to areas that needed them before the problem became out of hand. Fighting crime had moved into the 21st Century under Mayor Giuliani. Police were now able to respond to rising crime in real time.

The results of holding each precinct accountable for crime in their respective areas on a weekly basis speak for themselves. Major felonies fell 12.3% in the first year alone. Murder and robbery fell by the greatest one-year margins in New York City history-17.9% and 15.5%. In addition, shootings fell by 75%; rapes decreased by 1,200 per year from 1993 to 2000; robberies fell from 85,883 per year to 32,213; burglaries plummeted from 100,933 to 38,155, and auto theft fell from 111,611 to 35,673. Overall crime fell by 57% and the drop was citywide (as an example, Mayor Giuliani noted that there were 92 murders in Crown Heights and 35 in Harlem in 1993. By 2000, those numbers were 35 and 5.)

Compstat's success led to Harvard bestowing its prestigious "Innovations in Government Award" on the program in 1996.

Excerpted from a 2006 Blog Post by Mayor Rudy Giuliani