

Embracing Key Strategies for a Rational Probation System

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By the

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Strategy #1: Place Public Safety First

- > Must be mindful that the primary concern of the public is to be free from crime.
- > Public Safety is defined as “the extent to which persons and property are free from attack or theft, that is, from the threat or risk of harm in particular places at particular times.”
- > This definition requires a systemic, yet local focus on the social ecology of crime. With respect to probation practitioners, it requires a commitment that extends well beyond individual offenders on assigned caseloads. In fact, it requires a proactive and daily engagement in the wider arena of community and victim vulnerabilities relative to those locales and times of the day where the threats to public safety are greatest. It requires, ultimately, an approach to probation that is community-centered and neighborhood-based.

Strategy #2: Supervise Probationers in the Neighborhood, Not in the Office

- > For too long, probation has embraced a “fortress” or “bunker” mentality, where supervision, such as it is, takes place in the office setting of probation officers. For probation supervision to be effective, it must take place where the offender lives, goes to school or works, and engages in recreational and other activities. Firsthand knowledge of where the offender lives, his family, and immediate and extended environment are critical elements of meaningful supervision. In addition to just being in the community, probation should be highly visible, and this visibility must be positive in nature.
- > Effective supervision must focus on achieving public safety. For probation officers, this requires reaching out beyond the management of their individual caseloads to form active partnerships with the local police, community members, offenders’ families, those persons who are important to offenders, neighborhood associations, and other indigenous organizations and groups.

Strategy #3: Rationally Allocate Resources

- > Conducting supervision in local neighborhoods and communities must be guided by a commitment to rationally allocate staff and other resources where they are needed the most.
- > The importance of accurate, information-driven decisions when dealing with offenders under community supervision cannot be overstated. Probation practitioners should develop as much information as possible on the offenders they are expected to supervise through comprehensive presentence investigation reports, related juvenile records, psychological evaluations, and risk and need assessments. Probation agencies must rely on sound assessments at the front end of the system to make placement decisions and they should continue to use a variety of assessments for specific offender types to monitor their progress and maintain a proper match relative to programming.
- > Probation officers should be strategically assigned for supervision purposes to specific geographical areas. This will foster a more rational allocation of probation's resources.
- > "Place-based" supervision strategies seek to counter passivity in case management with a commitment to managing offender risk in those neighborhoods and other locales where probationers present the greatest public safety hazards to those who live or work there.

Strategy #4: Provide for Strong Enforcement of Probation Conditions and a Quick Response to Violations

- > Probation practitioners must be committed to the strong enforcement of all probation conditions and to providing timely responses to all violations. Each and every condition of a probation sentence must be enforced, and all violations must be responded to in a timely fashion.
- > There are many avenues short of incarcerating the offender that represent appropriate and proportionate graduated responses, or "sanctions," to the violation, e.g., an increase in reporting requirements, curfew or house arrest,

electronic monitoring, mandatory drug treatment, etc. A carefully calibrated continuum of graduated sanctions offers probation officers a range of measured responses short of revoking and placing the offender in custody.

- > This type of approach requires unannounced home visits, field work during the evening hours, and a sure and swift response to those offenders found to be in violation.
- > Alongside the strict enforcement of supervision conditions, probation agencies need to adopt tough-minded and proactive policies relative to apprehending absconders from probation. For OCJB, that means we do not simply “dump” a youth into the “buckets” on JOLTS where youth are unassigned and left until they resurface.

Strategy #5: Develop Partners in the Community

- > Within a community justice framework, the need to establish enduring partnerships with the citizenry, other agencies and local interest groups is critical to the success of probation. Forming such partnerships increases probation’s leverage in dealing with offenders and contributes to a shared co-ownership for managing risk such offenders present under community supervision.
- > The need to maintain a paramount focus on achieving public safety requires active partnerships with community and neighborhood groups and with law enforcement and human services agencies. Focusing on and achieving public safety goals is premised on the very necessity of engaging the community in offender supervision and accountability.
- > Probation agencies must move collaborations and partnerships from the margins to the center of what they do. In so doing, they must work with other agencies and community groups to establish a shared co-production for managing the risks presented by offenders under supervision.

Strategy #6: Establish Performance-Based Initiatives

- > Probation administrators must rely increasingly on evidence-based practices when justifying the continued operation or retention of particular programs.
- > A commitment to performance-based initiatives requires that probation agencies develop appropriate and effective programming, draw on research that speaks to what works, and pay careful attention to program design, implementation and evaluation.
- > Reducing the threat or risk of harm presented by offenders *requires* the development of programmatic interventions that connect offenders to environments that have prosocial supports and structure.
- > Probation agencies need to employ performance-based initiatives that are properly implemented and that meet their stated goals. In doing so, managers and staff will be better positioned to deploy their limited resources more effectively. The development and implementation of strong program models are essential elements of managing probation agencies now and they will remain so in the future.

Strategy #7: Cultivate Strong Leadership

- > In the final analysis, **leadership** is the most important element in reengineering probation towards a system that has clear values, emphasizes public safety, rationally allocates resources, provides meaningful supervision and a quick response to violations, practices inclusiveness and assumes accountability for results.
- > Leadership comes from individuals---individuals who care about probation, and who are not satisfied with the *status quo*, and who possess the courage to acknowledge that all is not well with the profession and the vision and dedication to do something about it. *The leaders and practitioners of probation must consider how and in what ways their vision and actions move their agencies toward the creation of public value.*

- > Effective leadership requires a willingness to create something of public value by steering an agency toward a vision that energizes and a philosophy of management that empowers all staff. Ultimately, it demands that those who are entrusted with the mantle of leadership embrace accountability for producing outcomes that matter.