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[CRIME MAPPING](#)

[EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION](#)

[E-POLICING](#)

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[POLICE COMMISSION](#)

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[SOLVE A CRIME](#)

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[History of the LAPD](#)
[Metropolitan Division](#)
[LAPD Special Units](#)
[Unsolved Murders of LAPD Officers](#)

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COMPSTAT Plus

COMPSTAT Plus

By [George Gascón](#), Assistant Chief and Director of Operations, Los Angeles Police Department

Since the creation of COMPSTAT by Chief William J. Bratton and Jack Maple in 1994, when Bratton was the Commissioner of the New York Police Department, police and political leaders desiring to improve police performance and reduce crime have adopted it with enthusiasm. COMPSTAT revolutionized policing in the mid 1990s by adding generally unheard of levels of accountability to crime fighting and contributed to the national downward trends in crime during the last decade.

When implemented appropriately, COMPSTAT can assist political entities inspect police departments and hold managers accountable for performance, ensuring efficient use of policing resources. By using crime and arrest information, as well as other relevant performance indicators, COMPSTAT can drive police action with surgical precision to maximize organizational efforts, forecast needs and assess results with timely and accurate information. In New York, Bratton took a proud but underperforming giant and turned it around by using data to create a new sense of urgency and making crime fighting the focus. Careers rose or fell based on accurate and objective assessment of individual performance. This level of performance accountability better known in the for-profit world and has not been widely embraced by the public sector yet, even though public sector budgets continue to suffer and performance in many instances falls below what should be acceptable.

True to his reputation as a crime fighter, Bill Bratton arrived in Los Angeles with a personal commitment to turn the Los Angeles Police Department around and to do so quickly. Under Bratton's leadership, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) embarked on a new era of crime-fighting efficiency with a renewed sense of urgency. By embracing COMPSTAT, Los Angeles reduced Part 1 Crimes by 4.2 percent in 2003 (homicides were reduced by 21.6 percent during this period). But as the newly appointed Chief of Operations in 2004, I recognized that the venerable tradition of inspecting commands during large assemblies in a period of several hours and putting managers on the spot (even under the threat of severe personnel action) was not the most effective way to assist the most under-performing commands suffering from complex maladies. For these commands, I theorized, a more in depth analysis would be required to augment the traditional COMPSTAT process, and additional performance enhancers would be in order. Consequently, with the full support of Chief Bratton, we created and implemented COMPSTAT Plus. COMPSTAT Plus represents an enhanced application of the well-known COMPSTAT principles of inspection and accountability, as well as the use of more in-depth auditing methods, mentorship, and close collaboration.

To test this new concept, I selected our most under-performing command at the time, Newton Area. To lead the inspection team and map out the details of the plan, I selected Lieutenant Jorge Villegas, a thoughtful and intelligent young manager whom I trust. Nominations for the inspection team members came from

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Bureau Commanding Officers and others based on a simple criteria: (1) they must be recognized experts in their field; (2) they must be well respected by their peers; (3) they must have very contemporary knowledge of the area they are going to inspect (preferably they are currently doing the work); and (4) they must not be reporting to the impacted command. Accordingly, a team of incredibly motivated experts with a stellar record of top performance was assembled to implement COMPSTAT Plus.

Before explaining the process, I want to summarize the organizational structure for those who may not be familiar with the LAPD. Greater awareness of our command structure should facilitate a better understanding of COMPSTAT Plus and enhance its transferability to other police organizations. The operational side of the Los Angeles Police Department falls under the Office of Operations, which I currently command. The Office of Operations is comprised of four geographic and two specialized bureaus, Detective and Special Operations. Detective Bureau has primary responsibility for handling major cases with City-wide implications or those cases that either affect more than one region of the City or are beyond the ability of local commands to handle. Special Operations Bureau oversees Metropolitan Division (Special Weapons and Tactics, K-9 and other City-wide uniformed operations) and our aviation assets. Each bureau is headed by a Deputy Chief (a two-star chief). Four to five geographic areas (police stations) report to each of the four geographic bureaus. These four geographic bureaus are Central Bureau, which polices primarily the central and eastern portions of the City; South Bureau, which is responsible for policing South Los Angeles, San Pedro and the Port of Los Angeles;

West Bureau, responsible for policing the western end of the City, Hollywood, Los Angeles World Airport, Venice Beach and its vicinities; and Valley Bureau, which is responsible for policing the San Fernando Valley. Each geographic area (police station) is commanded by a senior captain. Areas are comprised of a patrol division, commanded by a junior captain, a detective division commanded by a senior lieutenant, and several other support functions including antigang, narcotics, vice and community relations units reporting directly to the senior captain (the area commanding officer). Our average station typically polices a population of approximately 200,000 people and is fairly self-contained. The City of Los Angeles has a population of nearly 4 million and covers approximately 470 square miles. Currently, the LAPD has approximately 9,000 sworn officers and 3,000 civilian employees. That is one officer for every 433 residents, giving Los Angeles one of the lowest ratios of police officers to residents of any major city in the country. Therefore, given the relatively large service areas of our stations, and the low ratio of officer to resident, an underperforming command can have a very pronounced impact in our ability to serve the community. COMPSTAT Plus was born out of this critical necessity to ensure every police station in Los Angeles was performing at optimum capacity.

Newton Area, the command I selected to test the new concept of COMPSTAT Plus, is located in the southern end of our Central Bureau. Newton Area is a 9.8 square mile area south of downtown Los Angeles. The area is densely populated and economically depressed. The north side of the division consists of commercial businesses and a garment district. The west and south sides of the division border other LAPD areas with very high rates of violent and Part I Crimes. The eastern portion of the division borders similar socio-economic areas patrolled by the Los Angeles County Sheriffs' Department and the City of Vernon. Newton Area also has a public housing area known as the Pueblo Del Rio Housing Project. Newton Area has approximately 52 street gangs, 5,003 documented gang members, more than 3,000 parolees, a high transient population, a methadone clinic, and several public social service providers with a high amount of pedestrian activity. At the time I made this selection, Newton was experiencing a 2.2 percent increase year-to-date in Part I Crimes compared to the rest of the City where we were showing a 9.8 percentage decrease. Also, Newton was experiencing a variety of other deficiencies including a substantial decrease in productivity, and a serious lack of focus on the crime-fighting mission. For instance, in one occasion during the early spring 2004, the Bureau Chief visited a roll call briefing for an oncoming watch (shift). During a brief discussion

he quizzed several officers about the status of Part I Crimes year-to-date in their Area. With some hesitation several officers and supervisors replied that crime was down, partly illustrating the command's lack of attention to the mission. Finally, to make matters worse, Newton had just suffered the loss of an officer in the line of duty, Officer Ricardo Lizarraga. Officer Lizarraga was the first Newton officer killed in the line of duty since 1946. He was brutally gunned down by a gang member on parole during a domestic violence call on February 20, 2004. His untimely death sent shock waves through the station and further diminished the command's ability to meet its mission. The bottom line was that due to a variety of circumstances including lack of clear focus, a traditionally proud command full of hard working cops and supervisors had been neglected to the breaking point. Given this scenario, Newton became the focus of my attention and COMPSTAT Plus was born.

To proceed with the inspection, I met the newly assembled inspection team composed of proven experts in the fields that were the subject of my focus, (patrol and detective operations, the crime analysis section, community-related crime prevention efforts, and management and supervision). I directed the group to develop a set of inspection protocols to help uncover performance inhibitors with a clear focus on helping the Area in reducing Part I Crimes. This goal would be achieved by implementing procedural efficiencies and creating an all encompassing crime fighting blue print designed to bring the various stake holders together with a clear mission. Based on these directions, under the leadership of Lieutenant Villegas, the group developed a plan.

The plan included a review of statistical information concerning performance for the various areas subject of the inspection: patrol, detectives, crime analysis, prevention efforts and management and supervision.

PATROL OPERATIONS

For patrol we looked at deployment schemes to assess whether assigned patrol personnel were being deployed to maximize their impact on crime. This review included an assessment of the number of patrol officers assigned to each watch (shift) on each day of the week to ensure resources were being allocated in clear proportion to evolving crime patterns and community needs. We also reviewed computer dispatching schemes to ensure efficient allocation of calls for service, including the order of secondary dispatching protocols to maximize automated dispatching efficiencies based on beat adjacencies, traffic patterns and work load. Additionally, we examined individual personnel performance indicators such as patterns of absenteeism, officer productivity and other signs of supervisory functionality. Finally, we looked at the mix between patrol units primarily dedicated to respond to calls for service and those uniformed assets primarily dedicated to deal with gangs, and other career criminals such as burglars, car thieves, illegal drug sales and use, etc.

This analysis yielded important findings in each of the fields examined. For instance we quickly learned that deployment and programmed computer aided dispatching protocols were not set up to maximize the use of existing patrol resources. We also uncovered leadership gaps that were affecting employee behavior in the areas of attendance and productivity. Finally, we determined the personnel mix and mission focus between first responders to calls for service and those primarily assigned to deal with more specifically targeted criminal behavior such as gang members and other career criminals, could be improved.

DETECTIVE OPERATIONS

In detective operations we focused on the number of detectives assigned to the various investigative functions, case assignments and disposition protocols. We also reviewed the frequency and quality of interaction and communication between detectives and patrol. Additionally, we looked at detective-initiated arrests and overall detective productivity; case clearance, the filing of criminal complaints by the various prosecuting agencies (District Attorney for felony cases, City Attorney for misdemeanors and when appropriate the US Attorney for federal cases), and conviction rates. Finally, we looked at leadership issues within

the detective operation.

This review of detective operations also produced significant opportunities for improvement. The inspection team learned that many of our established systems for case tracking and dispositions were not being used as designed, mainly due to a lack of understanding how these systems work. These failures were impacting the statistical picture of detective performance because dispositions and other detective activities were not being captured accurately. We also determined that there was a lack of consistency in detective interaction with patrol. Much was being left to the individual initiative of people reaching out to one another with mixed results. In addition, detective productivity indicators were providing inconsistent information partially due to the previously mentioned inappropriate reporting procedures. This was also affecting our ability to assess fully the effectiveness of the detectives' operational leadership.

CRIME ANALYSIS

In examining Newton's Crime Analysis Detail, we focused primarily on the frequency and quality of crime analysis information being provided to patrol and detective personnel. We wanted to ensure that Newton personnel were being provided the most accurate and up-to-date information available to do their jobs effectively.

As it was the case with the other functions examined, we found substantial opportunities for improvement in this area, including how information dissemination to both patrol and detectives took place. We determined that the means for disseminating the information, as well as the timeliness, and frequency information was being provided could be improved.

CRIME PREVENTION EFFORTS

Here our goal was to assess how well personnel were communicating with the various communities serviced by Newton Area. In general, we did not find any major deficiencies in this area. Although we detected room for improvement, as a whole we determined appropriate systems were in place and improvements could be obtained simply by placing greater emphasis on adherence to their established procedures.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

Frankly, this was probably one of the most challenging areas for me. Shortly after I was assigned to head Operations by Chief Bratton in late November '03, I conducted an assessment of the various operational commands City-wide to determine the strengths and weakness of our operational entities. During this assessment, I examined performance outcomes and as well as leadership issues, personalities, and so on, and concluded Newton Area was in desperate need of leadership attention. This process also led me to believe that the reassignment of captains would be a necessary precursor to any meaningful reform in Newton Area's performance.

Consequently, I started that process prior to the implementation COMPSTAT Plus. This reassignment at the top led to a second wave of strategic movement at the lieutenant and sergeant level to assist in creating a leadership environment conducive to change. Newton, not unlike many other organizations, was suffering from the maladies of stagnation and good well-meaning people becoming too comfortable with things as they were. The potential within for innovation and creativity was not being exploited and a very hard working potentially top performing group of cops and civilian employees were not being challenged to excel.

Therefore, as our COMPSTAT Plus inspection team moved in to assess systems and outcomes, it was important to recognize that ownership for past performance had to be raised carefully. On one hand, there was a need for everyone involved to recognize we had performance problems and the source of these problems. On the other hand, it was important to avoid mistaken or unnecessary attributions. I wanted to ensure COMPSTAT Plus was viewed as a problem-solving mechanism and not one looking to fix blame. Ownership for the future had to be skillfully built into our blueprint to maximize the capability for future

success. In my opinion, purposeless blames and scapegoating would work against this objective as those impacted negatively would be less likely to embrace the process and work to make it successful.

With those considerations in mind, the inspection team proceeded to follow their initial review of statistical reports with an on-site inspection, which included further systems' review and candid discussions with representative groups of patrol officers, detectives, civilian personnel and supervisors. Part of these discussions included the presentation of initial findings without personal attributions, and frank and open deliberations concerning solutions. Upon completion of this phase, the inspection team prepared an overview of its findings and recommendations for correcting perceived deficiencies. I immediately provided Newton's management team with a copy of this report for their review and feedback.

A few days later, we met for a strategic planning session attended by the inspection team and Newton's management personnel. In this meeting, inspection findings and recommendations were discussed and jointly we developed a preliminary road map for performance improvement.

Based on the results of these discussions, I directed the Newton team to assemble a work plan with a clear focus on lowering the numbers of Part I Crimes. As I indicated earlier, ownership by Newton personnel for this process was very high on my list of priorities. I wanted them to formulate their own solutions and achieve their own objectives, while maintaining full alignment with the Department's mission. Based on these guidelines, the Newton management team developed the following plan of action to reduce Part I Crimes.

Summary of Newton's COMPSTAT PLUS Plan of Action

PATROL OPERATIONS

- Patrol Watch Commander Daily Logs will be modified to include a heading of crime reduction strategies describing actions taken to impact a 20 percent reduction goal.
- The patrol crime board will be re-engineered into an operations board to include the deployment of resources and location of targeted areas on a daily basis.
- Each watch will have a scheduled "maximum" deployment day to allow the watch commander and supervisors to communicate their vision and expectations to the entire watch at one time.
- Additional training has been identified and will be provided to watch commanders and supervisors regarding the use of appropriate crime classifications to ensure an accurate representation of crime in the Area.
- Patrol supervisors will document officers' productivity in the areas of crime suppression and response in their supervisor's log.

DETECTIVE OPERATIONS

- Additional training will be provided to detectives in areas of case management and case clearance procedures.
- A Detective has been assigned to review all arrest and crime reports for the correct classification of the report. Detectives will also play a greater role in the initial classification of crime reports.
- Assign a Detective supervisor to review all arrest and crime reports for accuracy of crime classification.
- The deployment of night watch detectives will be evaluated so that they are accurately deployed.

With Newton personnel moving forward guided by their own performance plan of action, we set up two status performance evaluation meetings 30 and 60 days out. During these meetings we reviewed Newton's progress and where appropriate made

strategic adjustments to the plan. After the implementation of COMPSTAT Plus, Part I Crimes dropped 2 percent.

PEER MENTORSHIP

In addition to the strategies discussed earlier, an informal mentorship component was added to the process. The peer mentorship aspect of COMPSTAT Plus is based on the premise that both parties entering the relationship are mature and successful performers; otherwise, they would not have reached their current positions of responsibilities. Communications between the mentor and the one being mentored are strictly confidential, to maximize individual trust. The two leaders are simply being brought together to share experiences and skills with the objective of enhancing both parties' performance through mutual growth. In this process, inspection team members were encouraged to work with their counterparts to assist with their improvement efforts. Management personnel were urged to reach out to a pre-selected peer group for assistance and counsel.

The management mentorship portion has now been further formalized. In the case of the second command selected for COMPSTAT Plus, the commanding officer was required to select a peer mentor from among a pre-determined group of captains I established. Consistent with other aspects of the COMPSTAT Plus process, this element is designed to maximize performance by prompting thoughtful analysis, individual commitment, and focused action.

Further evidence that the COMPSTAT Plus holds promise as a catalyst for action can be gleaned from the early results coming from Southeast Area, the second command being put through the process. For the four-week period after implementation of the program in Southeast Area, violent crimes were down 11 percent.

Although it is early to claim victory, and some may argue that the initial successes of COMPSTAT Plus could be attributed to the simple process of paying attention to details and providing strong direction to an underperforming entities. But there is evidence to suggest that this process can do much more. Anecdotal accounts show evidence of a greater personal commitment to success being displayed by Newton and Southeast's leadership than in other comparable commands. With little doubt, this level of ownership can yield greater performance sustainability than improvements resulting from more directive methods where solutions are created and directed from the top down. This level of personal commitment to the mission leads to intrinsic motivated accountability for results- something that can hardly be matched when accountability is based on extrinsic forces.

To summarize, COMPSTAT Plus' effectiveness is based on three clear strategies. (1) Under COMPSTAT Plus we conducted a diagnostic exercise to identify accurately the causes for the underperformance. We avoided the temptation of wanting to provide easy and simple solutions to complex multilayered problems. (2) We established a clearly focused dialogue among the stakeholders to assess the results of the diagnostic inspection and create a universally accepted conclusion of what the findings meant. I theorized that for the next step, the solution step, to be successful key stakeholders had to come to an agreement about what the problems were. (3) The affected commands were given the task of creating their own plan of action. We created an environment where key stakeholders became full partners in the process. I made it really clear that the strategies and the results belonged to people doing the work. COMPSTAT Plus is simply a catalyst, a means to achieve an end. The credit for success lies squarely where it should- with the hardworking and dedicated men and women assigned to Newton and Southeast Areas.