Using the T.A.G. Team Approach to Improve the Quality of Life in the Community

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Preface: The "Broken Window" Theory

"If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge."[1]

The "broken window" theory was developed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling seeking to explain the signaling function of certain characteristics that lead to the deterioration of neighborhoods. The thesis suggests that when evidence of decay (accumulated trash, broken windows, deteriorated building exteriors) remains in the neighborhood for a reasonably long period of time, people who live and work in the area feel more vulnerable and begin to withdraw. Further, as the community become less willing to intervene to maintain public order (for example, to attempt to break up groups of rowdy teens loitering on street corners) or to address physical signs of deterioration, residents become yet more fearful and withdraw further from community involvement and upkeep. This atmosphere then attracts offenders from outside the area, who sense that it has become a vulnerable and less risky site for criminal acts to be performed.

Community Stabilization and Change

The Tipping Point.: In epidemiology, the concept that small changes will have little or no effect on a system until a critical mass is reached. Then a further small change "tips" the system and a large effect is observed.[2]

Community stabilization and revitalization are important elements for many senior communities' vitality and continued growth. Particularly in communities where changing demographics are evident, transitional areas may be prone to de-stabling forces of urban decay due to vacant properties that have fallen into disrepair, leftover or dumped trash and debris, graffiti, and rodent/vermin and crime infestation. Traditional singular agency enforcement usually fails to be effective in combating the issue on a long-term basis.

The "Target Area Goals" (TAG) approach seeks to define the areas that may have urban decay precursors and target the areas for special support and enforcement

1 Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown & Company, 2000
2 Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown & Company, 2000

prior to community conditions degrading into conditions of public ruin, disorder and crime. The TAG concept seeks to remove precursor elements of trash, disrepair and debris to ensure that the criminal elements do not use these places for concealment, refuge, or direct criminal activity.

Using this basic concept, the TAG approach uses a variety of data and information gathered and derived from crime statistics, citizen calls for routine public works department repairs, as well as community surveys, to identify specific areas within the community that may be targeted for resolution.

Sharing Information and Results

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." --Andrew Carnegie

TAG efforts accomplish long-term results by the selection and composition of team members to focus on resolution. Most often resolution teams are comprised of not only the standard government elements (police, public works, code), but also include community based youth organizations, local businesses, churches, and most importantly local residents. Team members are not only selected for their actual enforcement ability, but also for their influence upon the perceived set of concerns or problems faced. Once team members come on board, weekly (or frequent calendared) meetings are conducted where all members of the working group share results and information.

All team members review previously gathered data to seek "trends" and determine the strategy of "the key items" that need to be addressed in order for the location to have a "turn-around" or resolution effect. Short term and long term goals, along with timelines of the expectancy of the outcome of events and actions, are fashioned into a plan by the team members. A most critical element of the strategy is that is it is viewed as a *long term effort* rather than a short term clean-up. Results are photographically documented where possible to aid in the "before" and "after" demonstration of progress. This most vital component as well as the sharing of "what is working" and "what is not" often spurs further discussion and insight about currently faced obstacles and how they may be overcome. The collegial input of ideas and information is essential as it allows for alternative strategies to be successfully discussed and employed.

The Quality of Life and the TAG Approach

"It is quality rather than quantity that matters."[3]

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3 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, c. 4 BCE-CE 65, Epistles, 45, http://www.calresco.org/lucas/qol.htm

TAG focus on strategies that support the quality and vibrancy of the community by using several identifiable themes found in the "broken window" addressing the items most frequently identified with neighborhood in deterioration. Such simple strategies include but are not limited to:

- Quick replacement of broken windows
- Prompt removal of abandoned vehicles
- Fast clean up of illegally dumped items, litter and spilled garbage
- Quick paint out of graffiti
- Finding (or building) better places for teens to gather than street corners
- Fresh paint on buildings
- Clean sidewalks and street gutters

These strategies form the core action oriented process of the Target Area Goals (TAG) team concept.

Community Education and Support

"The goal is to transform data into information, and information into insight"[4]

The final step to the process is to share the data that has been collected as well as the area maintenance information or process with the community to solicit their support so that the area does not slip back to an unacceptable condition. Efforts for community education include pamphlets and informational meetings. However, the community must be informed exactly what they can do to maintain the area and *especially whom to call* for follow-up.

The Evaluation Process

"To change and to change for the better are two different things."[5]

No process is complete without a comprehensive evaluation. An After Action Review (AAR) or evaluation is a structured review or de-brief process for analyzing *what* happened, *why* it happened, and more specifically *how* it can be done better. The evaluation must include the following critical metrics such as:

- Number of work orders performed
- Number of abandoned autos removed
- Number of code violations discovered and resolved
- Present and post crime rates/trends

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[4] *Carly Fiorina, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_goal_is_to_transform_data_into_information/346980.html*
[5] *German proverb, http://www.quoteland.com/topic.asp?CATEGORY_ID=19*

Additionally, effort must be made to determine the overall cost value of the services provided so that budget projections can be put in place for similar issues in the future that may occur in the next budget cycle.

The TAG Process

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has." [6]

TAG offers more than a clean-up initiative. It is a multiphase approach to community involvement and maintenance through commitment of multi-level and multi-dimensional governmental resources, community educational initiatives, and community support. The TAG concept envisions going several steps further by becoming a bridge through which other governmental and quasi-governmental services are rendered. The synergistic and multi-level efforts, along with community support, shall raise the quality of life for community residents.

6Margaret Mead, http://humanresources.about.com/od/inspirationalquotations/a/quotes_team.htm