

The  
**Boston  
Strategy**  
To Prevent  
Youth Violence

<http://www.BostonStrategy.com>

## **Boston Strategy - Frequently Asked Questions**

Following are some of the answers to questions most frequently asked of the partners when they are speaking to organizations across the country.

### **How Did You Get Started?**

We were all just adults-probation officers and police officers who happen to get along-working with kids who were most active and most visible in the community. It was just people working, after hours, stepping outside of their roles a little bit, being creative, being a little enthusiastic, working with the kids that were coming before the court.

### **What Can We Do?**

If what you're doing isn't working, realize that it can be done better. Decide you want to work harder, and you want to step outside your role a little bit. Stop doing what you're doing and do it a different way. Just do it in a different way, different location, with different clothes on and with different people. Think outside of your job requirements a little bit. These kids are alive all the time, so are you. They need work all the time, you need to be there. Reduce it to the basic bottom line: You're adults working with kids. You commit to the community, you commit to the kids.

### **Can You Give Me An Example Of A Way To Get Started?**

Pick up the phone and call someone in another agency with whom you have a connection of some sort but don't really know. Reach out to them. Then, after you call them, get up from behind your desk, get in your car, go over to their office and stick out your hand and say, "Hi, I am -- we just talked, can we talk now face to face?" So now there's a face connected to the name. So now they can put a face with a name, with the telephone message that they got. It's really simple.

### **What Are The Elements It Takes To Begin A Partnership?**

Credibility, experience, knowledge, commitment. You have to bring something to the table. To make the thing go, you have to be a viable agency. You have to have some juice and be able to do something to effectuate immediate change. That HAS to happen.

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### **How Did You Learn To Trust Each Other And Work Together?**

What's crucial to bringing a group together is to understand that you talk the talk, but can you walk the walk? And have you walked the walk? When you looked around the table, there wasn't anyone there that hadn't actually been deeply involved on the front lines with hard core juvenile justice issues. So there was no one you could criticize for just wanting to talk and not do anything after that. Everyone at that table had the respect of the others because of the work that they had done in the past, even if some were wearing jeans and tee shirts at one point and were now wearing suits and ties. All of us had done it before and still do it now, so we know the street level things, as well as the administrative pieces. And there really weren't any problems with having all those individuals together. Everybody respects everyone else's opinion because whether you've been on it from the street level, from the court level, or from the juvenile lock up level, everybody there had paid their dues.

### **How Do You Stay Focused?**

It's not that hard to accomplish if you come to the table with a very simple goal: let's make this better than it is. Let's focus on saving kids' lives. If you're not happy with the way things are going, come to the table with the idea that we have to collaborate to make things better and save kids' lives.

And don't come to the table in your role. Come to the table as a human being first who happens to be in whatever role you are in.

### **What Have You Learned About Collaboration?**

Like anything else, whether it's business or teaching school or whatever you happen to be doing, part of being successful, part of getting to where you think something ought to end up, involves a certain amount of personal trust and personal chemistry. Anybody who thinks that what happens in Boston is an off-the-shelf strategy which then can be adopted for any community, without the human capital investment, is wrong. That is a critical component. And it's time-consuming, and you make mistakes. And sometimes the honesty and trust that is needed to make this work means you hear things at time you don't like to hear. Such as "Why are you doing this?" or "Why aren't you listening?" or "Why aren't you doing this better?" And unless you're prepared to hear that, and not just hear it but pay attention to it and maybe adjust your activities accordingly, then it just isn't going to work.

### **What Was The Role Of The Leadership?**

The leaders of the organizations agreed to partner and then they stayed out of the way of the people that were closest to the problem and let them do some creative problem-solving. It's the people at the ground level who are really getting the work done. If we've done anything as the leaders, it's to create a climate where people are encouraged to develop those relationships. They don't have to look upstairs, or look over their shoulder, wondering whether this is OK. We've sent a message to all of them; not only is it OK, but we expect that's the way the business is going to be.

### **How Do You Begin In The Community?**

Go talk to them, seek them out where they are, find out where they hang around. Half of what a policeman does is prevention by presence. Then, while you're out being present, stick your hand out and say, "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm from \_\_\_\_\_. I'm here to \_\_\_\_\_, and what is your name? What is your role in this community?"

We all get caught up in the idea that people don't do that, people don't talk. We have to wait for the community to come and see us, we have to be desk-bound. At some point we metamorphosed ourselves out of human contact, which is vital, and just started analyzing statistics and numbers, rather than working closely with human beings. So to get the human aspect back into it, you have to have people who are proactive and personable and committed, and who like people.

Go out and find out what's going on in the neighborhood. Don't try to effectuate change if you haven't seen what the kids are trying to change, what they're trying to change from, or what they have to change in the neighborhood they have to survive in.

Ultimately, part of the prescription for our success was that the community was willing to give us time to show success. They didn't demand overnight success. They didn't demand the turnabout in a week or a month or even 6 months. So many of the strategies that we've used have really shown success after a year or more. And once you have success, then it's easier to get other people to buy into it.

### **How Do You Begin With The Kids?**

Face to face, eyeball to eyeball, in the community, on the street corner, under the streetlight, in the house, in the living room, in the bedroom, on the beach -- wherever they are, we have to be. We have to be following up what we say. If we tell a kid not to be there on the corner of Walk and Don't Walk, you have to be at that corner to make sure he's not there, or else you're nothing but a suit. You're an empty suit.

Kids are kids. What they'd say on the street and what they'd say in the office were two different things. Peer pressure talks for them out on the street, so they have to live up to that image that they set for themselves because there's really nothing else at home. So they come out on the streets. Where the real kid is, he's in his house, with you there, where he can't hide. Talking to a kid in his house, in his setting, where you've removed him from all the street trappings is where you see the true kid.

### **How Did You Create Interest In Community Policing?**

Looking back at the way we tried to sell community policing was by asking: "What type of job satisfaction do you get going from Point A to Point B just answering radio calls?" Now when you're assigned to a neighborhood, you're about solving problems and there's a lot of tremendous satisfaction in going home at the end of the day or week, and knowing that you're making a difference in the life of a neighborhood. When you talk to cops, they become cops because they want to make a difference in people's lives. What happens is that along the way, we destroy that idealism by the way we manage our police officers. So you get back to basics. Why do most people go into police work? To help people. That's what cops want to be about-helping people.

### **What's Possible For The Kids?**

What happens is, as we so often do, we classify people. There are good young people and there are bad young people, you know? And maybe they're bad for social and economic reasons, but they're problems, they are difficult, they are not assets to the community. However, that line between what we call good and bad is very fluid and that it may not take a whole lot to bring a number of people who are caught up in bad or negative behavior into a different place.

### **How Do You Measure Success?**

The traditional statistical measurements are one measure of success. The homicide rate has dramatically gone down. That's a measure which criminologists will often look at because unlike other crimes, every homicide will get reported. So it's a constant. And you can take a look at the early '90s when there were over 150 homicides in Boston and then look at last year and there were 35 homicides in Boston -- dramatic drop, among the biggest drops of any major city in the country. So some of it is the statistical measure.

But one can take a lot of comfort in the non-statistical measurements -- the conversations with police officers who are out there every day. If you ask a police officer, "How's it going? Are things quiet?", the response is, "You're not going to believe how quiet it is. I used to be on patrol and there'd be shots fired almost every night, and now we don't hear it."

Or go to a community meeting and hear people talk about the new stores that are opening in their community, or the economic development, or the fact that people feel comfortable being outside at night. Now, that's not all law enforcement's doing. There's a lot of reasons for that, which include economic opportunity, and a strong economy, and actions by the Mayor's office and the Mayor. But part of it is the law enforcement, together with community people, stabilizing those neighborhoods. And it gave people the confidence and the comfort for the other things to happen.

### **What Do You Consider A Job Well Done?**

When people say "Thank you for coming," as you're going out of their house, that's instant gratification. Or the kids who will go out of their way to shake your hand when you're leaving a classroom after giving a CeaseFire. Or the kids who hang around after CeaseFire meetings just to talk to you. That is a job well done.

One of the older people who used to be in the business said, "You're never going to get a lot of thanks. But if you get thanks from the people that you're working with, that means you've done all right." If you lock a kid up and they come back to talk to you because you were straight with them, then you've made an impression on them and you've got a good rep.

### **What Did It Take To Make Those Changes?**

It's a little investment. You have to invest. The bottom line is you have to invest. If you're going to affect change in the neighborhood, you have to invest in that neighborhood. You're investing your time and your effort. And what you're going to get paid back with is kids not dying, people not dying, and people saying "hello" to you. That's your payback. You're not going to get rich, but you'll feel pretty good about yourself.

### **Crime is down everywhere, what's so special about Boston?**

The secret to our success is the comprehensive approach. That we give equal emphasis to prevention, intervention, and enforcement. We do some cutting edge things in the area of intervention and enforcement, but our ability to do that is based on our commitment to prevention. For example, we might not have the community's support for police and probation officers going into people's homes in Operation Night Light if we weren't doing the alternative pieces like finding jobs for the kids. The message is, we're not in the business of locking you up, we're in the business of saving your lives.

### **What is the TenPoint philosophy?**

Members of the TenPoint talk about what we call the 'Three R's', as in the basics for kids when we say, academically, reading, writing, arithmetic. Well, the basis for redevelopment in some of our communities really is 'Renewal, Responsibility, and Reconnection.'

Renewal, from the vantage point that we have to believe that we really can make a difference. Our faith has to mean something substantive. Our optimism has to be something we really are willing to step out on and do something with. So the sense that however difficult it may be, that we can really make a difference and make a change, it's important. And that has to be shared so that we're not trying to mobilize the depressed and the despairing, but those who really think they can make a difference.

This issue of Responsibility also becomes important, that we think less about who to blame and more about what our respective responsibilities are. And of course, that always includes accountability. But again, we don't waste a whole lot of time trying to point fingers and blame people, but rather figure out who's going to be responsible for changing what's going on. And that's especially, we think, with young people. So everybody-police officers, probation, public sector, private sector, the church community, the community organizations, the faith traditions in general-all of us have to be asking, "What are our respective responsibilities here?"

And the last piece, Reconnection, is understanding that no one institution by itself, no one person, is going to make any difference in this program. Either we will come together, or as Ben Franklin said, "We'll either hang together or we'll hang separately." Now, if we hang together, we can get extraordinary things done. We can actually see miracles happen. So we keep working and those are the relationships that make it possible, straightening out the inevitable problems that arise, and always trying to keep our eyes on the real prize, which is a very positive and very exciting future for this city, and especially for its youth.

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For more information about The Boston Strategy To Prevent Youth Violence, please visit the website:

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