Several years ago, while attempting to "expand my consciousness," I read a book that contained the idea that "thoughts are things." As with many things we experience, I didn't immediately grasp what those words meant, but I have since learned to respect what they stand for. Once you accept this wisdom, you become more aware that you can make a difference. You develop a more positive attitude and feel more in control of and responsible for the quality of your life. You stop making excuses that you have used for years to explain why something will never happen or why things don't work out. You become more flexible and open to new ideas and change.

This relates in particular to what happened when I first saw problem-oriented Community Policing as a thought that could become a thing. When I was first introduced to this new way of thinking in September 1986, I didn't know what it was called. But I was inspired to write a proposal on how this abstract idea could be made real, which I called the "Beat Sergeant Proposal." It has always been part of each officer's mandate to reach out to the community, but without a formal structure to encourage such efforts, they often suffered relatively low priority. By affixing responsibility for specific beats to specified sergeants, it seemed we might be able to provide a structure that would help make these ideas become real. The initial proposal was discussed at the time, but it wasn't resurrected until September 1988.

After much discussion and with the support of an open and willing command staff, the "thought" began to take the form of a "thing." A three-month experiment in Operations Division South involved assigning a specific sergeant to work with officers to accept the responsibility for solving problems in particular beat areas. After initial meetings with everyone involved, each beat was divided into 20 smaller and more manageable "grids." Once these grids were assigned, the goal was to evaluate them intensively for junk motor vehicles, dilapidated houses, traffic problems, environmental issues, city code violations, etc.

In addition, all area businesses were to be contacted and assigned identifying numbers. These TPD (Tucson Police Department) numbers allow us to log information about the establishment into the department computer so that when someone calls with a problem and provides a TPD number, we can call up this basic information.
After we had compiled lists of problems in each grid, the next step was to develop solutions to "clean up" the beat areas, using whatever appropriate resources were available.

By the end of the evaluation period, 180 businesses were assigned TPD numbers and 60 of them also requested security surveys. More than 800 junk vehicles were located, 40 hazardous or abandoned houses had been identified, and 25 traffic or street signs that were missing or damaged had been replaced. Community Resources followed up on both the business security and the residential security survey and coordinated the clean up of problem houses.

At the end of the evaluation period, a meeting was held to discuss the results and what the next steps should be. The statistics showed the effort was successful, but many benefits were less tangible:

- Better communication among beat officers.
- More positive interaction with area residents and businesses.
- Increased job satisfaction.
- The realization that "community involvement" is not separate from "real" police duties but an important part of an effective officer's job.

Perhaps the most surprising result was that community-based, problem-oriented policing was no longer a "dirty" word. The concept took on new meaning to those involved in the process of making a thought into a thing, and those who participated went through a transformation of their own.

The enthusiasm with which the officers approached the program was impressive, and the results realized were both exciting and inspiring. The cooperation received from Community Resources, Communications, Traffic Engineers, Building Safety, City Parks and division personnel contributed greatly to the overall success of the program.

It also enabled officers to interact with other units and gain confidence in their ability to make a difference, which is why most of us became police officers in the first place.

Sgt. Harris reports that the enthusiasm continues. The Tucson Police Department is divided into four divisions and each commander has expressed interest in and support for finding ways to use what they have learned. Beginning in September 1989, some beats have also developed directed foot patrol as a way to maintain close contact with the community. According to Sgt. Harris, the concept is continuing to evolve and grow, tailored to the particular needs of various areas of the city.