

Responding to violence without deadly force

By [Steve Woolley](#)

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Even our small city has its share of violent incidents requiring a forceful response from police. Maybe we've been lucky, or maybe being in a small city makes a difference, or maybe our police and sheriff departments are well-trained and well-disciplined. Whatever the reason, we have not had to face questions about whether the police were justified in using deadly force.

Recently an armed man with a history of violence sent a text to another household that he was on the way to kill them. Members of that household prepared themselves with their own weapons. More information came in that the man had forced a relative at gunpoint to drive him to the house of his intended victims. You can see where this could lead.

From what I know, our police department convinced the members of the household to put their weapons away in a safe, secure place. They conducted a textbook felony stop of the car, secured the release of the driver, and, in over an hour of hard work, disarmed the man and took him into custody. No one got killed, no one got physically hurt.

Sadly, there are a few public voices who would rather see a shootout. I don't understand it very well. Part comes from the bellicose far right wing that fulminates over whoever they see as the bad guys, and proclaims a desire to shoot first and ask questions later. As trite as that sounds, that's what they bellow. I'm always surprised at what a cowardly noise they make. Part comes from their kin who proclaim no tolerance for criminal behavior (except for their own). In the old days they would have been the instigators of lynchings, but not the ones who actually did the deed.

It's a relief that they have so little influence on our local law enforcement departments. Why not? It may be that our local police and deputies are also coaches, scout leaders, church elders, and the like. In other words, they are active participants in the life of the community. They have kids in the local schools. Their spouses are teachers, nurses, lawyers, and such. Many have extended local families

who farm, ranch, and own small businesses. More than a few are bilingual. I think it makes a difference.

It's community policing applied not as a strategy but as a fact of life. When the police are of the community they have an investment in its well being and future because their own well-being and future are a part of it. In like manner, because they are of the community, they probably know the potentially violent perpetrator or suspect. They know his or her habits, history, family, and patterns of behavior. The bad guy may be very bad indeed, but he or she is probably not a stranger.

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