

Words of wisdom from former city cops

I'd listened for two hours on May 31 as 10 retired city cops discussed the structure and programs of their new Concerned Alliance for Professional Policing, when suddenly I realized that CAPP President Peter Mancuso was citing the 19th century French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Suddenly it occurred to me how valuable to the city these independent ex-cops are — and how difficult it may be for some in the NYPD to accept them.

"In his study of suicide," Mancuso said, "Durkheim found that a state of anomie overcomes a person who has goals but no way to reach them. And the sociologist Robert Merton found that people who are alienated have several choices: to innovate, to substitute new goals, to retreat completely or fall back on doing things by rote.

"What happened in the Three-Oh [Harlem's 30th Precinct] was that cops who'd given up on achieving effective policing tried to escape their anomie by substituting new goals: getting what they could for themselves through various kinds of corruption."

Mancuso noted that he and many of his friends around the table had chosen a mix of substitution and innovation: They'd left precincts to be Police Academy instructors, hoping to improve the system that way. But eventually many chose retreat — retirement from the department, followed by the pursuit of new goals in new careers. Other cops choose terminal retreat: Suicide.

"When you see so much substitution and retreat, you've got anomie [a breakdown in social values]," Mancuso said, as his colleagues nodded, brows furrowed. "If 1% of cops are corrupt, that tells you that 10% have given up, though they're still on the job. Corruption isn't the actual crimes, it's an attitude. To get the 1%, reach the 10%."

Fred Sasso agreed: "Most anti-corruption programs take off the top of the plant but leave the roots untouched." He added, as he would at CAPP's first press conference on July 21, that since the group's members have economic and political freedom from the system, ~~we understand it so well, they can be catalysts for deeper innovation.~~

That's what makes CAPP potentially so valuable to the NYPD: Instead of sub-



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stituting corrupt goals or retreating completely, its members got free of the system but kept caring about it.

Is the NYPD ready for that gift? Commissioner William Bratton's spokesman has made the right welcoming noises, but I've also heard from petty naysayers and detractors who feel threatened.

It's probably time for CAPP to define itself more clearly to Bratton in a direct meeting.

"If the department looks at [CAPP] properly, it can use it as a sounding board, a foil, a test place for ideas," says a veteran investigator. "Of course, the department hates those things, but it will have to respond if CAPP has information the NYPD doesn't have. CAPP will have that if it's willing to be a safe haven for cops who have not made up their minds about whether to come forward but who want to be counseled about what they've experienced."

A **NEXAMPLE:** William Feeley, a 23-year veteran who designed NYPD driver-education and now directs training for Starrett Protective Services, recalls that his own combination of caring and independence — he left the NYPD in 1987 — helped him support Sgt. Joseph Trimboli, who was called a "psycho" for pursuing rogue cop Michael Dowd and cracking the NYPD's shell of denial. Feeley's sessions with a wavering Trimboli show what CAPP can accomplish. The organization will have a hotline this fall; meanwhile, it can be reached at (718) 494-5811.

CAPP can also become a force to be reckoned with if it makes sound recommendations on police matters. For example, Council Speaker Peter Vallone might invite CAPP President Mancuso to testify in August on the merits of an outside monitor for police corruption. And CAPP members' deep experience and integrity should make them an invaluable resource to reporters. As I listened to Mancuso and his colleagues discuss Durkheim and describe police work as part of a larger web of neighborhood supports and obligations, I realized that these are the kinds of cops nobody thinks exist anymore. CAPP is a living reminder of what this city can produce if the NYPD is resourceful and innovative. Only a sick city would ignore what CAPP offers.