

Examining the Human Cost



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Since the murder of George Floyd, we have been writing about what companies can do to embrace #BlackLivesMatter and the new Civil Rights movement. We have hosted podcasts and webcasts, such as the one below with bestselling author Martin Lindstrom. Today, we take on the agony of being trapped in a prison reentry and probation system that clearly doesn't work well.

It's tragically clear that Rayshard Brooks shouldn't have died in the parking lot of a Wendy's in Atlanta. But what's not being discussed enough is that his encounter with police that

night in June should never have occurred at all.

Mr. Brooks had been incarcerated and was on probation. And he took his freedom seriously. He had a family, a job and was committed to doing better – not just for those in his own life, but for others trying to return to life after incarceration. In a brief Instagram video filmed four months before his untimely death that is both hopeful and ultimately heartbreaking to watch, he spoke out on the need for more guidance, more mentorship. It makes it that much more painful that he himself fell through the cracks.

Mr. Brooks was part of America's tremendously overburdened system for community supervision. According to Pew, in 2016, one in 55 American adults was on probation or parole. Sadly, the United States represents less than 5% of the world's population, yet has almost 25% of the world's incarcerated population. Our overcrowded jails are a big problem, but the paltry resources we dedicate for offenders' reentry into our communities may be an even bigger issue.

It's not even controversial to point out – community supervision and law enforcement leaders agree. They know that providing support around employment, housing, mental health and substance abuse is vital to rehabilitation and that we need to do better. Making it happen is the hard part.

But it's getting easier. Technology is evolving well beyond ankle bracelet monitors, toward platforms that deliver tools for helping offenders in each of these categories. Apps that use evidence-based rehabilitation methods such as cognitive behavioral therapy can reduce recidivism and create better outcomes for the individual. Solutions from companies like TRACKtech and Cisco can build an immediate bridge between the science and the street (in full transparency, we have a relationship with TRACKtech).

Whether a probation officer or a law enforcement officer,

community professionals should be equipped with the right tools and focused on appropriate missions to do their jobs properly. They need Congress and state legislatures to pass laws that add fresh budget lines focused on social services.

Enhancing public safety starts with focusing on the causes of criminality, which quite often come down to mental health, substance abuse and the effects of poverty. While tackling these challenges from an abstract perspective may seem daunting, Mr. Brooks' story reminds us that the opportunity comes one person at a time.