

Reversing the Lucifer Effect to make 2010 the safest World Cup ever

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#)

1 Oct 2009

In a recent contribution to the 2010 Nation Branding Debate, titled *A branding bridge too far for a demoralized nation*, a senior *Business Day* analyst argued that South Africa is “a country in crisis”, faces “a political, institutional and social crisis of unprecedented proportions” where “retributive justice has become the norm ... local government has become ineffective ... and crime is rampant and getting worse”, concluding that “a branding exercise similar to Germany's, with its concomitant successes, is simply not possible in SA”.



Whilst correct in pointing out South Africa's current brand gap in delivering the national brand promise of being 'Alive with Possibility' (borne out by the fact that SA has dropped from 22nd to 37th place in the Nation Brand Index), the conclusion of dismissing 2010 as an opportunity to rebrand the country is missing the second dimension of nation branding, that is fostering social cohesion, which is a critical component in validating a country's external reputation.

The social dimension of crime

At the recent seminar "Policing in South Africa: Key Issues and Developments", Temba Mathe of the National Secretariat for Safety and Security told delegates the fact that more than 70% of rapes and about 80% of murders happened among people who knew each other reinforced the importance of social crime-prevention initiatives: **"Because crime is a social problem, [there] has to be a social solution involving more players than just the police."**

Institute for Security Studies senior researcher Johan Burger concurred with Mathe, saying that the police were often expected to deliver on unrealistic expectations: **"Something is clearly wrong in how we deal with our crime and the fact that we expect the police to deal with crime on our behalf."**

It is becoming increasingly clear that a social cohesion deficit lies at the root of our current crime epidemic and that it is many times the low levels of self-esteem that compel ordinary people to resort to violence in an effort to assert themselves.

Reversing the Lucifer Effect

In his recent publication on *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding how Good People turn Evil*, Professor Zimbardo from Stanford University, having analysed the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Graib in 2003, asks the question 'Who is responsible for creating and maintaining the conditions (that led to the horrific levels of abuse)?' Zimbardo, who conducted an official investigation into the Abu Graib incidents, concludes that of the seven factors leading to the abuse of prisoners, only one was dispositional, i.e. personal failure, whilst the other six were situational, i.e. systemic problems that resulted in creating the volatile environment experienced. He recommends that rather than singling out the “bad apples”, as then US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, did, we should ask “What is to blame?” and analyze the behavioural context that resulted in producing “bad apples”, in other words the “bad barrel”.

Fixing broken windows

This is the question that drove the newly appointed New York City Police Commissioner, Bill Bratton, in 1994 to turn New York from the worst into the safest large city in the US - in just over two years and without an increase in his budget. Within his tenure, murders dropped 64.3% and total crimes fell by almost half. Gallup polls reported that public confidence in the NYPD jumped from 37% to 73%, whilst internal surveys showed job satisfaction in the police department reaching an all-time high.

The approach adopted by Bill Bratton in reversing New York's crime epidemic, was based upon a social phenomenon known as Fixing Broken Windows. Broken Windows was the brainchild of criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling who argued that crime is the inevitable result of disorder. If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes. In a city, relatively minor problems like graffiti, public disorder, and aggressive panhandling, are all the equivalent of broken windows... invitations to more serious crimes.

Kelling was hired by the New York Transit Authority to put the Broken Windows theory into practice for the subway fleet, at a time when every one of the 6000 cars was covered with graffiti - top to bottom, inside and out. Fare-beating was so commonplace that it was costing the city as much as US\$150 million in lost revenue annually, and there were about 15 000 felonies on the subway a year.

Many subway advocates, at the time, told Kelling not to worry about graffiti, to focus on the larger questions of crime and subway reliability, and it seemed like reasonable advice. Worrying about graffiti at a time when the entire system was close to collapse seemed as pointless as scrubbing the decks of the Titanic as it headed toward the icebergs.

Kelling insisted, however: "**The graffiti was symbolic of the collapse of the system,**" he says. "When you looked at the process of rebuilding the organization and morale, you had to win the battle against graffiti. Without winning that battle, all the management reforms and physical changes just weren't going to happen. We were about to put out new trains that were worth about ten million bucks apiece, and unless we did something to protect them, we knew just what would happen. They would last one day and then they would be vandalized." He made it a rule that there should be no retreat, that once a car was "reclaimed" it should never be allowed to be vandalized again. "We were religious about it."

By restoring order train by train and enabling the community to reclaim a public space that was part of their daily lives, Kelling and Bratton managed to reduce subway crime dramatically and restore civic pride in this vital means of public transportation.

Civic pride key to crime prevention

What are the broken windows in South Africa that need fixing in order to reclaim our public spaces and restore personal safety and security? According to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), civic pride alone is capable of reducing key crime indices by up to 40% - if we are to afford each other the opportunity of depositing rather than withdrawing our personal significance accounts, whether it is the next time you are interacting with the petrol attendant or addressing your

employees.

As the great Russian writer Alexandre Solzhenitsyn, a long-time prisoner under Stalin himself, put it, **"the line between good and evil cuts through every human heart."** Maybe we are all responsible for creating the conditions that have led to the current crime levels in South Africa, and maybe we are all capable of reversing these same conditions - one person at a time. Doing so, will certainly go a long way towards making 2010 the best world cup ever and delivering the country's internal brand promise of ensuring "A Better Life for All".

ABOUT DR NIKOLAUS EBERL

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