

# VIEWPOINT

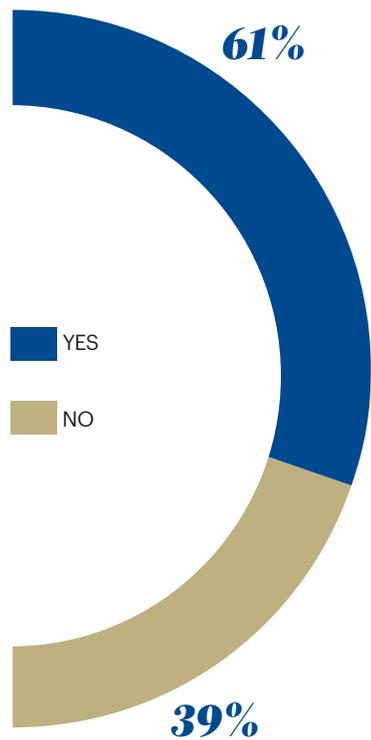
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## ► BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

### WE ASKED

Should N.C. offer a record incentives package for HQ2?



### THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Have recent sexual harassment scandals motivated you to re-evaluate your companies' practices?

## VIEWPOINT

# Police pursuits policy and the value of a statistical life

On the evening on Sept. 30, a sheriff's deputy started a high-speed pursuit of a stolen car on Battleground Avenue, north of Greensboro. The pursuit lasted less than two minutes, but the deputy's car reached speeds of over 100 miles per hour as it chased the car into Greensboro. At New Garden Road, the pursued car smashed into a third car with such force that the two young women inside the third car were killed instantly.

I knew one of the young women, the daughter of a good friend, for 20 years. But this column isn't about her. It's about the next high-speed pursuit. The Guilford County sheriff's department says it's reviewing its policy on pursuits, but comments in the media by Sheriff B.J. Barnes have indicated that the effective policy is: When in doubt, chase.

A few days after the crash, Barnes defended the decision to chase, saying, "We don't know if that stolen vehicle was just used in another crime like murder, rape, robbery or a kidnapping." In many departments, officers must have a reason to believe that a violent crime (not a property crime) has been or will be committed. Barnes' statements indicate that his criterion is a *lack* of reason to believe one *hasn't* been committed. That's a much looser standard.

A concept in economics called "the value of a statistical



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life," or VSL, can put this issue in perspective. VSL is used to inform policies that have life-and-death implications in environmental policy, workplace safety and product safety.

The life in question must be statistical, or hypothetical, because valuing an actual life is emotionally fraught. If you put a gun to my head and ask me how much I'll pay you not to pull the trigger, my answer won't be a useful guide to policy.

Suppose a team of workers in a power plant agrees to a \$3,000 raise to work a new detail with an annual risk of death of one in 2,000. For every 2,000 workers on this detail, one is expected to die each year. But the workers don't know which one of them might die, so it's a statistical life. For them, the implied VSL is 2,000 times \$3,000, or \$6 million.

Recent estimates of VSL are about \$9 million. Spending \$50 million to save one life isn't worth it, but the benefit outweighs the cost if 10 lives are saved.

Studies indicate that about 1 percent of high-speed pursuits result in a fatality. Therefore, at the time the deputy started the pursuit on Sept. 30, the expected value of a lost life was 0.01 times the VSL of \$9 million, or \$90,000.

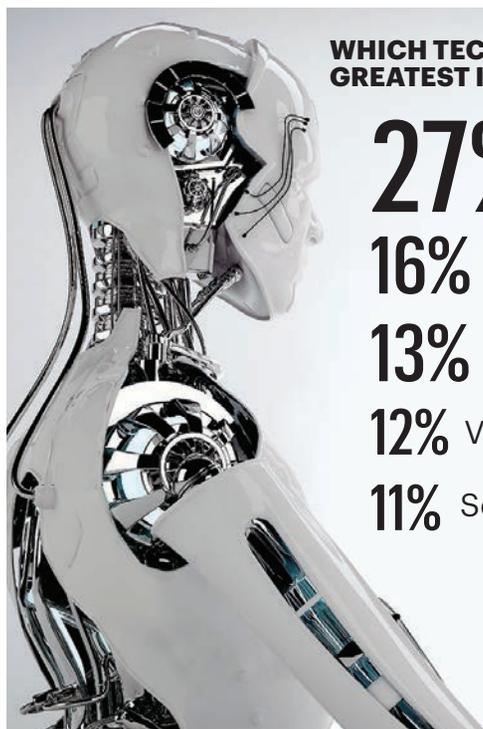
That number is much greater than the value of the stolen car, a 2003 Acura TL, which was likely worth less than \$5,000.

The gap between the high risk and low return would be even wider if we factored in the probabilities of injury and property loss, and the likelihood that the pursuit would damage and devalue the stolen car.

VSL isn't a perfect guide, because it implies that someone trying to get away with, say, a \$1 million work of art should be pursued regardless of the risks. That sounds like a judgment call rather than a calculation. In reality, pursuit policies require common-sense decision-making by officers and their supervisors.

What VSL does show is that the Sept. 30 chase can't be justified on rational grounds. The implementation of Guilford County's policy must be changed ... for the next high-speed pursuit.

## ► SURVEY SAYS



### WHICH TECHNOLOGY WILL HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT ON YOUR BUSINESS?

- 27%** Artificial intelligence
- 16%** Other
- 13%** Robotics
- 12%** Virtual/augmented reality
- 11%** Self-driving vehicles
- 6%** Wearables
- 6%** Drones

## ► SURVEY SAYS

### WHAT PERK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT IN RECRUITING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES

- 51%** Flexible schedule
- 1%** Free food
- 7%** Unlimited vacation time
- 3%** Tuition reimbursement
- 4%** Generous parental leave time
- 1%** A relaxed dress code
- 14%** Bonus or stock options
- 14%** Ability to work from home
- 0%** Unique office space