

Human Relations Training

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Recently, in Syracuse, N.Y., about 350 police personnel and Model Cities residents participated in a series of week-long human relations training sessions. This report summarizes the activities of this highly successful effort which was designed to improve police/community relations.

Utilizing funds provided by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the sessions were conducted by the Community Action Training Institute (CATI), a private corporation headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey.

Project design called for 20 weeks of human relations training. Each week 10 police men and women and 10 Model Cities residents were scheduled to attend the sessions. Two trainers were assigned to conduct the training.

In an attempt to build local capability in human relations training, CATI also conducted a training workshop for a small number of police personnel and Model Cities residents. The purpose of the workshop was to prepare the participants to con-

duct additional police/community human relations programs in Syracuse.

Background

Syracuse is not unique. Poor relations between the police department and residents of low-income neighborhoods is a national phenomenon.

To many Negroes, police have come to symbolize white power, white racism and white repression. And the fact is that many police do reflect these attitudes. The atmosphere of hostility and cynicism is reinforced by a widespread perception among Negroes of the existence of police brutality and corruption and of a "double standard" of justice and protection — one for Negroes and one for whites.¹

In practically every city that has experienced racial disruption since the summer of 1964, abrasive relationships between police and Negroes and other minority

groups have been a major source of grievance, tension, and ultimately, disorder.²

Recent surveys by the Model City Agency and the Syracuse-Onondage County Planning Agency revealed a lack of trust and confidence in the police on the part of Model Neighborhood residents. The surveys pointed out that more than one-half of these residents felt that the police are prejudiced against them. It was also felt that the police are outsiders with little interest in the welfare of the neighborhood.³

Open Communication Lines

While the problems are similar, the response by the city of Syracuse was to challenge the notion that change is impossible. The city, in conjunction with the Police Department and Model Cities Agency, embarked on a bold experiment designed to decrease hostilities and open lines of communication. The result was a major program of human relations training geared to improving police/community relations.

Improving
Police/Community Relations

Syracuse is an industrial city of some 200,000 people located in the central part of New York. Blacks, most of whom reside in the small Model Neighborhood, account for about 10 per cent of the total population. Puerto Ricans and other minorities amount to less than one per cent.

The Syracuse Police Department employs more than 450 police men and women, with few living in the Model Neighborhood.

It was decided that impact on the problem could be attained only by a substantial effort involving large numbers of people. Past programs in Syracuse and other cities, which reached only a handful of police and residents, seemed to have no lasting effect. Therefore, this project, which was scheduled to reach 200 police men and women and 200 residents, was developed. At the same time the Law and Public Safety Task Force of Model Cities felt strongly that emphasis should be given to the relationship between the police and Model Neighborhood youth.

It is only in recent years that any significant amount of attention has been paid to training in police/community relations. In fact, a major study prepared by Michigan State University concluded that "there is simply not enough quality (police and community) relations training available."⁴

One-sided Affairs

Most of the training programs have been one-sided affairs. The Michigan State study reported that the only "civilians" who participated in police/community relations institutes and in in-service courses are human relations agency professionals, social workers, college professors and similar types.

It seems clear that very little has been done along the lines of the model developed in Syracuse.

That is, only a few programs involve extensive participation by community residents, especially low-income minorities.

A literature search by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency revealed two major experiments utilizing a similar model. In Grand Rapids, Mich., the design called for the training of a small cadre of police men and women and community leaders to be discussion group leaders. These leaders then went on to conduct sensitivity training laboratories for police and community residents of the city. Considerable attitude change on the part of both police and community residents was reported.⁵

Another sensitivity approach was implemented in Houston, Texas. Here, a series of human relations laboratories was devised, each lasting six weeks with about 200 police officers and 200 citizens attending. Groups of 12-14 police and citizens met for three hours, once a week, for the six-week period. Although scheduling was significantly different, the content of the training design was similar to the one used in Syracuse. The Houston evaluation showed an enthusiastic acceptance by the community and grudging to moderately good acceptance by police.⁶

It is, of course, understood that not all training programs find their way into the literature. In fact, other police/community human relations training programs are known to the authors. However, they are all short-term, often one-shot workshops developed in response to riot or potential riot conditions.

The Funding Process

When agreement on the general parameters of the program was obtained, the city sought and received a grant from the New York

State Office of Crime Control Planning. The grant came from Federal funds made available to the State by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the project was to improve police/community relations in Syracuse. Special attention was to be given to the relationship between the police and young residents of the Model Neighborhood. Specific training objectives were to:

- increase the police men and women's understanding of the sources of conflict situations involving Model Neighborhood residents
- increase the Model Neighborhood residents' understanding of the problems of law enforcement
- examine the barriers that exist between police and residents and develop mechanisms for resolving them
- develop communications and human relations skills that are applicable to the resolution of interpersonal and inter-group problems
- train a cadre of police and residents in principles and methods of human relations training that will encourage on-going progress in bettering police/community relations.

Steering Committee

The 20 weekly sessions were divided into four blocks of five weeks each. The week before each block a Steering Committee composed of five police men and women (each scheduled to participate in one week of that block) and five residents met with the project coordinator to:

- receive clarification on the content and methods of the training sessions
- make recommendations on the training curriculum

- suggest problems to be considered in the sessions

The Committee was also to carry information about the training back to the other participants in the group. This rarely happened as evidenced by the lack of knowledge on the first day of just about every session. The "grapevine," especially in the Police Department, was found to be the best communications mechanism.

The Committee was also not able to provide usable data for planning the training sessions. Views on police/community relations were so varied that a needs assessment had to be conducted with each training group.

Training Design

This was not a sensitivity training or encounter group program in which people took verbal "pot shots" at the police. The emphasis was on building human relations skills and responsibility for improving police/community relations was, at least, a two-sided issue.

On the other hand, the training format also avoided traditional educational methods such as formal lectures, tests and grades, relying instead on group participation and discussion.

The trainers helped participants to solve their problems and develop skills by setting up situations which enabled them to discuss or even act out the problem.

For example, in separate groups, police and residents were asked to prepare a list of things that "bugged" them about the other group. When the total group met again, the lists were presented, discussed, debated and clarified. In some cases a situation describing the problem was role-played (acted out) by the participants. The trainers helped the group to see that often stereotypes and prejudices create un-

necessary barriers to effective communications.

Toward the end of the week participants began to work together on mechanisms to improve police/community relations. In the latter stages of the project these mechanisms took the form of recommendations which were presented to city, police and Model Cities officials.

Participants

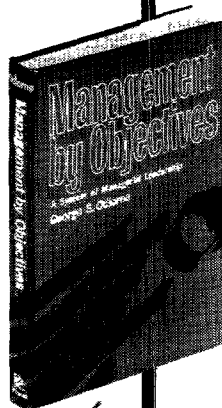
Recruitment of police men and women for the sessions was handled by the Department's training section and entailed an order for those selected to report to the training site. The sole criterion for selection was to get as large a cross section of platoons, ranks and duties as possible without disturbing the normal operation of the Department. Ranks

included patrol men and women, sergeants and lieutenants. Job titles included everything from records to investigations. Experience ran the gamut from rookies to those about to retire.

Resident recruitment was voluntary. Model Cities hired recruiters to enlist participants for the sessions. The criteria were:

- resident of the model neighborhood
- age 16 and above
- a ratio of three youths (under 25) to one adult

Recruiters sent letters and made contact with all agencies and schools in the model neighborhood. When responses to this approach diminished, they drew on friends, neighbors and, finally, the Model Cities-Public Safety Task Force.



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Motivation Required

Since resident participation was voluntary, a degree of motivation was required. Some people had direct experience with police actions and were concerned with improving community relations, while others may have been drawn by the payment of a stipend for participation.

Resident recruitment was a problem for the duration of the project, causing the cancellation of three weeks of training and a lack of balance in several other weeks. The main barrier to participation seems to have been a fear on the part of model neighborhood youth that honest criticism of the police in the sessions would be "answered" on the street in some form of retribution. Nevertheless, in spite of the substantial obstacles to a voluntary participation program, 145 model neighborhood residents attended the sessions. More than one-half of the participants were under 25 years of age.

Evaluation

Response to the program was excellent. Written reactions by the participants, in books submitted to CATI at the end of each week, were overwhelmingly positive. In addition, little or no negative feedback was received by the City Administration, Police Department or Model Cities Agency.

Formal independent evaluation of the training was the responsibility of the Institute for Community Development (ICD); a private, Syracuse-based agency. The ICD report indicates that: two basic methods were used in evaluating the effectiveness of the police/community human relations training program. One involved the direct systematic observation of the behaviors of the participants during various parts of the training program. The second method in-

involved the administration of attitudinal questionnaires to all participants at the beginning and end of each week of training to identify differences in and/or changes in attitudes and perceptions over the course of training. A modified form of the questionnaire was mailed to participants six weeks after the completion of training as a follow-up way of assessing the effects of the training program.

The major ICD findings were as follows:

- The analysis of the results of observations of a variety of sessions between police and community residents revealed that the transmissions of information rather than feeling-oriented behavior was predominant. When feelings were expressed both positive and negative feelings were exposed at similar levels

- In terms of immediate responses by participants to the training, the program was viewed as largely successful in accomplishing the anticipated purposes of bringing about desirable changes in perception of one's self and others

- On the follow-up questionnaire both police and community residents reported a greater change than police in their perceptions of their own human relations skills as result of the training

- Both police and residents appeared to be pessimistic that anything concrete would change in the community, or through city government, as a result of the training. However, residents reported more optimism and a greater personal willingness to develop community programs than did the police

- All participants were asked to indicate the most useful things that they got out of the human relations experience. Both police and community residents reported agreement on their top choices,

which were: (1) getting a better understanding of the reasons why police personnel or community people feel the way they do; (2) getting to know each other; and (3) working together on recommendations. It also appears that, as a result of the program, some of the residents have become more active in community affairs. Other residents and police reported having a more moderate attitude toward the other group.

Police Attitudes

A separate survey of about one-half of the police officers who participated in the program was conducted by the Syracuse Police Department. In this study, 94 police officers completed an attitude questionnaire composed of five questions. The data from this study further support the conclusion that the training produced positive results.

- 61 per cent . . . felt something was accomplished

- 73 per cent . . . said they were now able to understand the community's feelings

- 82 per cent . . . felt the community learned something about the police's point of view

- 73 per cent . . . believed the discussion leaders understood the officers' opinions

- 58 per cent . . . felt the sessions should be continued.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In an eight-month period this quiet, efficiently run project helped Syracuse take a major step forward in improving police/community relations. Evaluation data from a variety of sources indicate positive change as a result of the training. In addition, although this was a somewhat controversial project, there was little or no negative feedback received by the sponsoring organizations.

The main problem was insufficient resident participation which

caused the cancellation of three weeks of training and lack of balance in several other weeks. Although further study is necessary, this problem may be symptomatic of the existence of police/community hostilities and of the need for further effort.

In many ways the recommendations developed by the participants and the trainers reflect on the quality of the project. The following recommendations, designed to improve police/community relations in Syracuse, demonstrate a constructive, thoughtful approach to the problems:

1. Inclusion of similar human relations sessions in the police academy program utilizing the participants from the trainer's workshop

2. Similar human relations sessions for Syracuse police who did not participate in this project

3. Regular follow-up sessions for the participants in the project to discuss developments since the training and further action are needed

4. "Fear of police retaliation," cited as a barrier to resident participation in the training sessions, should be the subject of a collaborative study by the Police Department and Model Cities Agency.

5. Establishment of a police/community storefront in the model neighborhood to serve as a vehicle for reducing grievances and resolving conflicts. The storefront should be manned by both police personnel and community residents. In addition to conflict resolution, the storefront could be a focal point for social and recreational activities jointly sponsored by the Police Department and the Model Cities Agency

6. Establishment of a Police/Community Committee to continually review and present recommendations to the City Adminis-

tration, Police Department, and Model Cities for improving police/community relations

7. The Model Cities Agency should prepare some brief materials which describe the problems of the model neighborhood and how the Agency is attacking them. Police and other non-model neighborhood residents should find this type of information useful

8. All future sessions should be accompanied by widespread publicity to increase resident participation

9. All future sessions should include participants from the top leadership of the City Administration, Police Department, and Model Cities Agency

Training Implications

This final section is aimed at trainers, city and police administrators and community leaders in other cities who are considering a similar project. Significant learning from this project, which may be applicable elsewhere include:

1. *Training goals and methods:* The project deliberately eschewed sensitivity or "self-awareness" training in favor of human relations skills training. This is not mere semantics as the training design makes clear. Feelings about individual police men and women and residents were seen as irrelevant to the central concern of police/community relations. Barriers to good police/community relations and the skills to deal with them were main interests of most participants. In addition, this increased the police department's support for the effort because many past programs had been hardly more than name-calling events.

2. *Participants:* As in this project, it is important to obtain widespread participation in the sessions. If institutional as well as individual change is a goal, a large percentage of the Police Depart-

ment and an equal number of residents must attend. All levels of rank within the Department should also be represented.

3. *Recommendations:* It is also important that some mechanism for a "public airing" of recommendations for change in the system made by the participants be available. Without this mechanism, participants develop a sense of frustration and lose interest in the training. Therefore, the innovation of having representatives from the City Administration, Police Department and Model Cities attend the final session to hear and comment on the recommendations proved extremely effective.

4. *Steering Committee:* The Steering Committee concept does not appear to be viable. They were not able to either provide needs assessment data or transmit information to other members of their training group. Needs assessment should be coupled with the recruitment process outlined above. Trainers should meet with small groups of residents and police to both explain the project and get their views on police/community problems.

5. *Commitment from the Top:* This type of project can only succeed if it has the strong, public support from the top leadership of each participating organization. They must make it clear to all participants that all recommendations by the group will receive careful consideration.

6. *Publicity:* Given the conservative nature of the Syracuse area a conscious decision was made not to seek publicity for the project. This "worked" in the sense that there were no newspaper reporters or irate taxpayers looking over the shoulders of the trainers. However, it is not possible to assess how publicity might have aided the recruitment process. Favorable press and television coverage

might have increased interest in the program on the part of residents.

The author acknowledges the assistance of Captain Lawrence Lynch of the Syracuse Police Department in providing evaluation data included in this paper.

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