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AN EXPERIMENT IN THE USE OF THE CONFERENCE METHOD FOR TRAINING POLICE SUPERVISORS

G. Douglas Gourley

Lieut. G. Douglas Gourley has for the last two years been assigned to the Personnel and Training Bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department. A graduate of the University of Southern California, Lieut. Gourley entered the Los Angeles Department in 1937 where he has served continuously, except for military leave as a naval officer assigned to Security duties during World War II, and rose to his present rank of Lieutenant in 1944. In addition to his police duties he is at present carrying on advance studies at Southern California in the field of Public Administration.—EDITOR.

No police department can be better than the quality of its supervision,¹ but in spite of this fact, very little has been done in the past to train police supervisors. Too often it has been assumed that a good patrolman would ipso-facto become a good sergeant. Many excellent policemen have been rewarded with promotion only to become poor supervisors.

Supervisory ability does not always go hand in hand with efficient performance as a policeman in the field,² for the skills and techniques of supervision differ greatly from those of so-called police work. These supervisory skills and techniques can be acquired in the same way that others are. As John M. Pfiffner points out supervision or leadership by those who are formally designated to coordinate and motivate work of others at the production level.³

Most police supervisors have been, and for that matter, still are, trained in the inefficient school of "hard knocks"; they must learn the hard way, through trial and error. A sergeant, at the time of his appointment, is seldom fully acquainted with the scope of his duties and responsibilities. He assumes his new position with much less preparatory training than he received as a recruit, because special training for police sergeants and other supervisors is practically unknown.⁴ A newly appointed sergeant or lieutenant is usually placed in the field where he learns from his supervisors and other associates over a period of time. Experience is a slow teacher, and too often one that teaches inaccurately and without uniformity. Men trained by this method learn many bad habits and techniques along with the good. In-

¹ C. B. Horrall, Chief of Police of Los Angeles in foreword to LAPD Conference Leader's Manual for Supervisory Conferences. (1947)

² For an excellent discussion of the relation of job skills to the art of supervision, see John M. Pfiffner, "Relation to Job Skills", Study Guide for Human Relations in Management. University Book Store (mimeographed). University of Southern California. 1948. pp. 25-26.

³ John M. Pfiffner, "A Pattern for Improved Supervisory Leadership". Personnel, 24, 277-278.

⁴ B. W. Goecke, Police Sergeants Manual, 2nd Ed. O. W. Smith, Los Angeles, 1947, p. 41.

efficient trial-and-error methods have been replaced in other fields, even the field of general police training, by planned scientific methods. Why should we not do the same for the field of police supervision?⁵

THE PROBLEM

The training problem in the Los Angeles Police Department is challenging. The Personnel and Training Bureau is faced with not only the continued in-service training of policemen and supervisors, but also the problem of training men to fill the 1170 new positions authorized by the 1947-48 budget, and the 1000 vacancies created by the replacement of war-emergency or temporary policemen. A large number of new supervisors are also to be trained to direct the activities of these recruits. The need for this increase of personnel is apparent by consideration of the geographical and social conditions involved.

Los Angeles is growing rapidly and changing from a rural, tourist community to an industrial community with the consequent growing pains. This rapid growth has brought about increased crime rates. History is full of concrete examples of aggressive attitudes and actions resulting from stresses in rapidly growing communities, where individuals who have not as yet established their roots in the community are more apt to engage in conduct which is not socially approved.

Since the war 2245 additional policemen have been assigned to duty in the City of Los Angeles. These recruits, after being appointed, were given a six weeks' training course at the Police Academy. It is realized that this period of training was inadequate, but there was a pressing need for policemen in the field.

Even if more adequate recruit training could have been given, it would only have scratched the surface of police training. The great body of police training is, and must be, done by supervisors in the field. A supervisor is responsible for the efficiency of his unit and of the individual employees in the unit. Almost every relationship between supervisor and employee is educational; employees are constantly learning from their supervisors and associates, on the one hand, and supervisors are constantly concerned with the evaluation of work, on the other hand.⁶ The mushrooming of the Los Angeles police force has made neces-

⁵ For a concise discussion of supervisory training, see John M. Pffner, *Public Administration* (rev. ed.), The Roland Press, New York, 1946, pp. 340-3. A more comprehensive treatment is found in Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1940.

⁶ Civil Service Assembly of the U. S. and Canada, *Committee on Employee Training in the Public Service, Employee Training in the Public Service*, Civil Service Assembly of the U. S. and Canada, Chicago, 1941, p. 92.

sary the appointment of many new supervisors, especially sergeants. These new supervisors were largely inexperienced and unfamiliar with management techniques. This further complicated the training program for supervisors and led the administrative officers to a realization of the need for an accelerated method of supervisory training.

THE PLAN

During the latter part of 1946, the Deputy Chief in charge of Personnel and Training, Richard Simon, came to the conclusion that the best method of solving this problem was the extensive use of the conference method, a method well described in the following paragraphs:

The conference is the collecting, classifying, and evaluating of facts or opinions secured from a group of people. While the lecture is used in cases where the learner knows nothing, the conference may be used only in cases where the group members have knowledge regarding the matter under discussion. . . . In conducting conferences, the intent may be an effort to secure information, or it may be used to stimulate thinking on the part of members of the group.

The conference method of instruction is exactly the reverse of the lecture method. The instructor talks only enough to stimulate and guide expressions from members of the learner's group. . . . Cases from situations may be cited to stimulate contributions to the discussion. Skill in questioning is one of the prime necessities for the instructor when he uses the conference method.⁷

The proposed program was discussed with C. B. Horrall, Chief of Police, who offered his enthusiastic approval and support. In order to obtain the whole-hearted support of top management, without which no training course can be successful,⁸ a conference was held with the Deputy Chiefs, Inspectors, and representatives of the Bureau of Trade and Industrial Education of the State Department of Education which was a cooperating agency.⁹ At this conference it was decided to train a selected group of supervisors in conference leading techniques, as well as the best methods of police supervision. It was felt that even if instructors from outside the department were available in sufficient number, to use them to a greater extent than was necessary would deprive the supervisors of real opportunities to develop

⁷ Charles R. Allen, George P. Hambrecht, and R. L. Welch, *The Instructor, the Man, and the Job*. Lippincott Co., Chicago, 1945, p. 8. Also see *Civil Serv. Assem. of U. S. and Canada*, pp. 74-7.

⁸ Harry K. Tootle, *Employees are People*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1947, p. 177, discusses the necessity of top management support of a training program.

⁹ In addition to the support of the State agency, funds for this training program were available through the Federal Vocational Education Law, commonly known as the George Deen Act. A summary of the grants under this law are found in *Municipal Police Administration, Inst. for Training in Municipal Adm. Publ. by the International City Managers' Assoc., Chicago, 1944*, p. 175.

their ability to meet their instructional responsibilities.¹⁰

One author clearly points out the need of developing line supervisors as conference leaders which is present in large scale organizations. He further states that while outside conference leaders can be brought into the training program initially, the sustained work must be based on leadership of those engaged in the work.¹¹ Conference leaders thus trained were to pass the information on in two ways: To the supervisors in the field, using the conference method; and to new supervisors in connection with two weeks' full-time training courses at the Police Academy.

It was decided to present the material under eight headings: (1) The police supervisor, an overview, (2) leadership, (3) morale, (4) cooperation, (5) discipline, (6) training, (7) administration, and (8) self-analysis.

THE ORIGINAL CONFERENCES

The original conferences were attended by twelve supervisors, most of whom were lieutenants. Knowledge of the field of work in which instruction is to be given, ability to teach what the person knows and can do in his field of work, and a well balanced personality were the essential qualifications looked for in this group.¹²

The group met twice a week for six weeks, each session being two hours in length. The material presented covered both police supervision and conference-leading techniques.¹³ The method used was for the conference leader to draw out the combined experience reported by the supervisors while he, himself, contributed as little factual information as possible. The material on supervision was obtained from the group in most cases by presenting conference problems or questions which could not be answered by "yes" or "no".¹⁴

It was, of course, necessary for the conference leader to introduce the subject matter for each session and to summarize the discussion at the conclusion. During the conference the leader recorded the suggestions of the supervisors on large sheets of

¹⁰ Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1940, p. 23.

¹¹ John M. Piffner, *Study Guide for Human Relations and Management*, p. 94.

¹² Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*, p. 93.

¹³ For an excellent outline of conference-leading techniques, see *Conference Leaders Manual*, Bureau of Business Practice, National Foreman's Institute, Inc., Chicago. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Earl S. Hannaford, *Conference Leadership in Business and Industry*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1945.

¹⁴ For a description of conference problems and questions, see Earle S. Hannaford, "Questions and their use in Conference Leading". *Conference Leadership in Business and Industry*, pp. 99-118.

blank newsprint paper tacked to the wall, using a black wax or "china marking" pencil.

Class members actively participated in and personally conducted part of the conferences. The material discussed was compiled by the conference leader, reviewed by the conference members, and a rough draft of a manual prepared.¹⁵

As an example of the introductory material presented by the conference leaders, the following is quoted from the report of the session on training:

Training is one of the basic responsibilities of a police supervisor. It is, in fact, one of the most important phases of his job and must not be overlooked in planning the work of his Division. It cannot be assumed that every detail a policeman must know during his entire career can be learned in the relatively short time spent in the Police Academy. In general, only the ground work can be given at the Academy and a basis established upon which a supervisor can build further training. Training is an endless procedure. New men come into the Police Department, new orders are received and procedures and techniques constantly change. Each change involves a new training job. Before training can be very effective, the supervisor must make a clear analysis of the work performed in his Division. Then he must devise some systematic procedure of presentation so that both new and old men will know the duties of the Division and obtain practical experience in the work.

Training is the responsibility of the police supervisor but that does not mean that he himself must actually conduct all of the training. He is, however, responsible for preparing the plans in such a way that subordinates do perform the necessary training. When a supervisor knows the extent and nature of his problem by making an analysis of it, he must plan instruction in terms of the elements of learning.

There are five senses involved in the learning process. They are—(1) seeing, (2) hearing, (3) feeling, (4) touch, (5) taste. The extent to which training may be successful depends to a large extent upon the supervisor's knowledge of the value of these various senses in the field of learning. Eighty-five percent of all human knowledge is obtained through the sense of sight. This means that a police supervisor in training men in his Division cannot depend on merely telling alone. He must demonstrate, give examples, and use other visual aids.¹⁶ The police supervisor, in addition to knowing how we learn, must know that learning follows a well-defined plan. Good teaching is not accidental but is a result of careful planning prepared in the following manner.

Introduction. The first step of teaching consists of getting the learner in a frame of mind where he wants to learn, and helping him to see the need for the knowledge to be gained. This involves putting the learner at ease, gaining his interest and many other factors.

Presentation. In step two the instructor actually gives the step-by-

¹⁵ The representative of the Bureau of Trade and Industrial Education, Mr. Mel Barlow, a layman in the police field, did an excellent job as a conference leader, and was very well received by the police conference members. He is a good example of a man with no police experience successfully leading conferences in that field.

¹⁶ For a thorough and interesting presentation of the subject of "Visual Aids", see Edgar Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*. The Dryden Press, New York, 1946.

step procedure required to perform the job in question. He is aided in this presentation by demonstration, experiments, discussion and the use of visual aids.

Application. Step three is concerned with the application of materials presented in step two. Here the learner has the opportunity to try out the materials presented to him in step two. This try-out period should take place in the presence of the instructor so that he can smooth over the difficult parts of the student's application.

Examination. Finally, it is necessary to check-up in one manner or another the results of teaching. A well-worn expression, "If the learner has not learned, the teacher has not taught," certainly applies at this point.¹⁷

The following is a hypothetical example demonstrating the steps in teaching a patrolman in the field.

Introduction. Sergeant Smith says to Rookie Policeman Jones, assigned to a foot-patrol beat, "Jones, you have been on this beat for four days now. On the whole, your work has been very satisfactory, but I have observed from your reports that you haven't made a single field interrogation. Is that right?"

Jones admits he has not, and says he is not sure how to go about it.

Presentation. Sergeant Smith then tells Jones that he will question the first likely-looking suspect they see, and that he, Jones, is to observe how it is done.

Soon they see such a suspect, and Sergeant Smith proceeds to question and search him while Jones observes. Sergeant Smith then tells Jones to make the next field interrogation while he, the Sergeant, observes.

Application. When the next suspect is encountered, Jones makes the field interrogation while the Sergeant observes. Afterwards, Sergeant Smith gives constructive criticism and recommends proper procedure, etc.

Examination. Sergeant Smith observes Jones' future reports for field interrogations made and later observes Jones make field interrogations.

Regardless of how much previous training a policeman may have had, it will be necessary for the police supervisor to give additional on-the-job training.

An authority on training procedure has recognized this in pointing out the importance of supervisory instruction in any in-service training program. Good job training is dependent on supervisors realizing their instructional responsibilities.¹⁸ The shortcomings of police instruction are pointed out in Municipal Police Administration.

No recruit school turns out a finished policeman. If this were possible the answer to effective police administration would long ago have been found. If the adequate police training school for entrants were the single answer to satisfactory police service, we would not now be groping

¹⁷ These steps in instruction are discussed by C. R. Allen, G. P. Hambrecht, and R. L. Welch, *The Instructor, the Man, and the Job*, pp. 132-64; by V. G. Schaefer, *Job Instruction*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1943, pp. 115-84; and more briefly by D. F. Jackey and M. L. Barlow, *The Craftsman Prepares to Teach*, MacMillan Co., New York, 1944, pp. 35-6.

¹⁸ Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*. p. 99.

toward improvement but would be on the highway toward success.¹⁹

It is the supervisor's responsibility to determine what training is necessary and then make provisions for it. He cannot "pass the buck" to someone else, although he can assign the job of actual instruction to subordinates. Some of the finest on-the-job training is done in the field under actual working conditions by police supervisors who know how one learns, the nature of the learning processes, and the four steps of teaching.

EXECUTIVE APPROVAL AND SUPPORT

Rough drafts of the manual summarizing results of the conferences were distributed to the Chief of Police, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chiefs, and Inspectors, for their review and comment regarding possible changes. After the suggested corrections were made the manual was published. The Chief of Police then called all members of the original conference group into his office and personally informed them of his whole-hearted approval and support of the Supervisors' Training Program. He confirmed his approval by written communication to all Division Commanders. Such executive support is essential to the success of a training program.

THE FIELD CONFERENCES

A decision was made to conduct these conferences first with the uniform field supervisors, that is, the sergeants in the patrol and traffic divisions. The greatest need was felt to be there, and as this was a pilot course, it was thought that conference leaders should gain experience and confidence before attempting to lead conferences with higher ranking supervisors. A training course for first line supervisors is much more easily conducted than one for higher ranking supervisors, as the young men are eager for every aid.²⁰

It was also decided to hold the conferences during the supervisors' regular tour of duty, that is, to inconvenience the conference leaders rather than the field supervisors. This meant that many of the conferences would have to be held on the morning watch, usually between the hours of 1:30 and 3:30 A.M. As this was the time when the field supervisors were accustomed to being on duty, and as it was in their own working environment, they would be in a more receptive mood.²¹ Where necessary, sergeants on preceding watches were required to work overtime to replace those attending the conferences.

¹⁹ Opus cited note 9 at pp. 186-7.

²⁰ Harry King Tootle, *Employees are People*, pp. 178-179.

²¹ Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*, p. 23.

The City was divided into zones so that each conference group would contain about twelve sergeants. Concerning the number to be included in the conference group the National Foremen's Institute writes.

The question of the number to be included in the group deserves careful consideration. Many individuals are self-conscious with a large group, particularly if there are present persons from other departments who are not well known to them. The large group is hard on the leader, because it is difficult for him to advance the theme of a given meeting, and it is often difficult to insure that each member of the group is brought into discussion at each meeting. On the other hand, a very small group has disadvantages because it may fail to bring to bear a well-rounded experience on the part of the members, and if a few members are absent from some meeting the discussion may degenerate to a conversation.

Experience has shown that the group should not be smaller than ten members, nor larger than twenty, provided regular attendance can be expected. A group within this range can be conducted on an informal basis, is sufficiently large to insure a variety of experience and sufficiently small to insure participation by all members.²²

Conference rooms were prepared and conference material supplied. Captains and lieutenants were invited by the Chief to remain away from these conferences for there is a natural reluctance of most people to speak freely in the presence of their bosses.²³ The subjects were presented to the conference groups in eight, two-hour sessions, meeting once each week, following the outline previously indicated, and using accepted conference techniques.²⁴

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Conference leaders reported in writing upon each conference held. These conference reports were condensed and additions were made to the original manual, including examples and illustrations as well as additional answers to conference problems. Written comments, suggestions, and grievances regarding departmental problems and procedures were also condensed, hectographed, and submitted to the Chief of Police and other supervisors down through the rank of Captain of Police.

The conference reports provided an effective method of short-circuiting the organizational hierarchy which so often stifles any unfavorable communication before it reaches the top.

RESULTS OF FIELD CONFERENCES

A total of 174 sergeants were in regular attendance at these

²² Conference Leaders Manual, p. 13.

²³ John M. Piffner, Study Guide for Human Relations and Management, p. 94.

²⁴ For a discussion of these techniques, see John M. Piffner, "Conferences and Committees", Study Guide for Human Relations in Management, pp. 94-97. Also, Harry King Tootle, *Employees are People*, pp. 173-178.

field conference sessions. The conference leaders and the sergeants who attended were very enthusiastic about the results. They felt that the conferences were of great value to them and would be of future value to the Department. Their only complaint was that the conferences had not first been given to the lieutenants and other supervisors of higher rank. One conference leader reported at the end of his third session, "I believe if there were no more conferences, that enough good has already been accomplished to justify this program. All of the men showed a keen interest and expressed a desire to be better sergeants". Another conference leader reported, "Conferences of sergeants such as these arouse interest and enthusiasm since they make the participants feel they are more important in the operation of the Police Department". Another quoted a sergeant as saying:

When I received my appointment and went into the field as a supervisor, I did not feel as though I had had any instructions whatsoever to equip me to do the work. I obtained what knowledge I did from older supervisors, and some of it did not appear to be quite correct, but I had to assume that it was the way it should be done. If new supervisors are started right and the older ones corrected, it will go a long way to make better supervisors and to lift the morale of all the department.

The conference leaders all felt that this Training Program had had an excellent effect upon cooperation between the divisions, as the sergeants were meeting with sergeants from other divisions and discussing mutual problems. The resultant uniformity of policies and work methods was stressed in their reports. A desire was generally expressed to continue the conferences on a periodical basis in order to maintain the cooperation and uniformity thus developed. Regarding the results to be expected from such conferences, one author points out.

Improved cooperation and teamwork is one of the tangible results to be expected from a successful training program. The other two results are—improved morale throughout the organization and definite and permanent improvement in the performance of work on all levels.²⁵

TRAINING NEW SERGEANTS

The large number of new supervisors appointed since the war's termination have been given supervisory training at the Police Academy in two weeks of full-time sessions before being assigned to the field. During these courses, the material on supervision was presented by the conference leaders, using the modified conference method. This method is a combination of the lecture and the pure conference methods. Since the students in these courses had very limited supervisory experience, it was necessary to avoid "a mutual exchange of ignorance".

²⁵ Frank Cushman, *Training Procedure*, p. 207.

The pure conference depends upon the knowledge and experience of participants for its text book and is not suitable when entirely new material is to be presented.²⁶

To date there have been six of these sergeants' classes totaling 157 sergeants, and two lieutenants' classes totaling 41 men. The reactions of the student supervisors as recorded in anonymous written critiques were excellent. One lieutenant stated:

This class has proven very valuable to me. It is the first time I have been shown concretely what the heads of the department expect from a lieutenant and what a lieutenant could reasonably expect from the heads of the department.

A sergeant said, "This training program should be kept going. All sergeants, regardless of length of service or assignment, should be required to attend". Other sergeants stated, "Don't let this program die. See that it goes on up so that all officers get it". Other comments were, "The course of subjects as presented in this class was, in my estimation, the finest step this department has ever taken. Thanks to the instructors and their methods of presentation I feel I have gained a new and better perspective of my job". "I appreciate the instruction. More particularly, I appreciate the administrative perspective such courses reflect".

CONCLUSION

The conference method of supervisory training has now been made available to all law enforcement agencies in California through Mr. John Peper, the newly appointed Director of Peace Officers' Training, Bureau of Trade and Industrial Education, State Department of Education, Sacramento.²⁷

No doubt, similar organizations or local universities will be anxious to cooperate with law enforcement agencies in sponsoring this type of supervisory training program in other states, for those who are familiar with it and its results frequently become enthusiastic advocates of it.

²⁶ Committee on Employee Training in the Public Service, *Employee Training in the Public Service*, pp. 76-77.

²⁷ For reports of later conferences of police supervisors see: *Conferences for the Training of Conference Leaders for Alameda County Peace Officers' Training School, Berkeley, Calif.*, and *Conferences for the Training of Conference Leaders for Berkeley Peace Officer Command Group, Berkeley, Calif.*, Bur. of Trade and Industrial Education of the Calif. State Dept. of Educ., Sacramento, Calif., 1947.