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HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING FOR POLICE

GEORGE McMANUS

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A city as large and as complex as New York presents, of course, a vast diversity of police problems in terms not only of the activities of people but also of their attitudes. Preventing crime, preserving the peace, enforcing the laws have come to imply a great deal more than the mere rigid regulation of people which more or less adequately describes the police function of even half a century ago. The modern, progressive policeman in a dynamic society must be equipped not only with the routine tools of his profession—a knowledge of laws and procedures and an ability to apply that knowledge—but he must also have a profound comprehension of his relationship to society generally, of the responsibilities inherent in the use of his authority, and of some of the basic sociological factors that may affect the police-public relationship.

Obviously a police training program that failed to encompass these considerations would be short-changing the young policeman about to enter upon a career, the demands of which are infinitely more complex than administrators of the past could have comprehended. It is scarcely necessary to note that such a short-sighted program equally short-changes the public we serve. It is with these considerations in mind that an emphasis has been placed upon Human Relations education at the New York City Police Academy. We do not pretend to have found the answers to all of the police-public relations problems; nor do we present this program as something startlingly new on the police training scene. We have combined the best features of other training programs, both police and industrial, and we have added features that we feel are demanded by problems that are perhaps peculiar to our City. We have consulted with civic and community relations representatives and have borrowed freely of their advice. We have sought to avoid the error of believing that these are police problems and therefore not the business of the public; but rather we have used, and will continue to use, the tremendous resources of the community in the common task of educating our police. The public consequently is coming to realize that there is no "wall" behind which their police carry on their affairs in private. Finally, we have attempted to incorporate into our training program the wealth of practical knowledge which experienced police officials possess as a result of their years of contact with the public and the police organization.

These then have been the primary considerations, the raw material, and the re-

sources which have formed the basis for our current recruit and in-service training courses in human relations for police. Our scope is large and growing, and it will change as the community changes adapting itself to any new problems that such change implies. Our purpose is to provide the most efficient police force that human limitations will allow by inculcating sound democratic principles as a guide to modern police performance.

To impress the significance of such a course of instruction on young policemen we need only point out that the eyes of the world are on our country today. Our country, as the leader of the free world, is engaged in a fierce struggle for the minds of men. We should be aware that our enemies, both foreign and domestic are awaiting the opportunity to seize upon every unfortunate incident which can be described as being at variance with our political doctrines of freedom and equality and justice. Every evidence of a violation of the democratic principles of law enforcement will be used to discredit our police in the eyes of millions of Americans, and our country in the eyes of the world. Undermining the police organization is a favorite tactic of those who would subvert our national institutions. Their aim is to destroy the public's confidence in and respect for its police, and to substitute fear and hatred.

Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we manifest in our every police activity a deep conviction that we represent the authority of our state and the majesty of the law, and that what we do, even on the local precinct scene, can have world-wide implications for our country. The young man who only yesterday was an office clerk, or a student, or a truck driver, takes upon himself a heavy responsibility when he enters the police service today. His career will equip him to be a tremendous force for good, or will provide him with unfortunate opportunities to bring shame and discredit upon his profession, his city, and conceivably upon his country. His police education must train him to avoid the pitfalls, to recognize the human relations problems, and to develop the professional attitude that will help him to solve them.

Is it easy to acquire and maintain such a professional attitude? Certainly not! And for a great many reasons. First, the very nature of our work, involving as it does so often the regulating of the coming and going of people, restricting, when it becomes necessary, their liberty of action, "interfering" with their activities in one way or another, constitutes a serious handicap. Americans traditionally resent regulation even when they see the necessity for it, and the "rookie cop" must understand that he has this obstacle to overcome even when he is doing his job in an intelligent and fair manner. How much greater the obstacle when he performs his duties in an arbitrary or antagonistic way! He must be prepared to be firm and fair in his judgment and performance of duty, and he must discipline himself to be courteous even in the face of discourtesy and patient in the face of impatience. He must however recognize the danger-point when his courtesy and patience may be interpreted as weakness and servility. An air of positive self-assurance and firmness will usually convince those who have misinterpreted his attitude and will obviate any resort to "tough-guy" tactics. Thus, his first lesson must be that even under the best circumstances, his job is a delicate one and will require much self-discipline and the development of a mature attitude to do it well.

The new policeman must be taught something about his employer--the public.

As he will spend the rest of his life serving the people of our city, he should begin his career by studying them in terms of their background, culture, national origin, and religion. What minority groups are there in our community, and where do they live? What is their general attitude toward law and law enforcement? Can we expect cooperation from the public? Is there conflict or harmony between the groups that go to make up a heterogeneous society? There will of course be differences in the answers to some of these questions depending upon the community under study; but most communities are like New York in that they are made up preponderantly of peaceful, hardworking, and law-abiding citizens. Most of their violations of law are of a minor nature and grow out of thoughtlessness or preoccupation with business or personal matters. A brief explanation to indicate how their action interferes with the rights of others coupled with a request for cooperation will usually suffice to correct a condition. The recruit is taught that the bulk of his law enforcement duties will be along these lines, and the chief violator will be the ordinarily respectable citizen who breaks minor but necessary rules of community welfare. Criminal activities, he will find, are confined to a small segment of the population, and his best weapons against this element are courage, knowledge, and public cooperation. The public will manifest some short-comings too. They may tend to generalize about the entire police department based on an unfortunate contact with one or more policemen. Perhaps there will be evidence of a lack of knowledge on their part as to our problems and legal limitations, and they may stereotype us in the time-worn and unfunny detective-fiction-story-writer style. But once again, the truly professional attitude and manner of a modern policeman will "debunk" the stereotype and win the confidence and respect of the people.

The police trainee must be given an opportunity to examine his own short-comings and personality deficiencies before he takes his place in the ranks of the department. He must understand that his chosen career involves a completely new relationship to the community. If he is an average New Yorker, he has probably been apathetic or indifferent to the activities, the aspirations, and even perhaps the needs and misfortunes of those outside his own family and social group. As a policeman he will necessarily be involved in these activities and misfortunes. He will find himself in the homes of strangers rendering police service in every kind of situation; he will be counselling the neighbors' children, helping the mentally and physically distressed, risking his limb and perhaps giving his life where that becomes necessary, in carrying out his sworn duty to protect the lives and property of the people of our city. There is no room here for indifference or apathy. Here is a job for a man with a comprehensive view of his terrible responsibility to every member of the community.

There is no room here either for personal prejudices of a religious or ethnic nature. A course in human relations for police cannot neglect a study of prejudice with all its implications and consequences. The student must recognize that as a minimum, he must bring under control his personal sentiments and prejudices, and subordinate them in the truly professional spirit. He may have such private views as to make almost impossible his performing a duty in an impartial manner, but the fact remains that as an officer of the law, his private views must never be permitted to compromise the discharge of his public duty. He must be able to distinguish between his own rights

as a private citizen to his private convictions, and his enormous responsibilities as a police officer. Examining his attitudes, he will find he prefers certain styles of clothing, his tastes run to certain kinds of food, and his preference is for one or another baseball team or motor car. Perhaps he will have a healthy prejudice for or against a political party or some public figure or other. But perchance too he will discover that he entertains harmful prejudices against ethnic or religious groups in the community, and the difficulty of performing his duty will be in direct proportion to the degree of prejudice of which he is guilty. He will find the origin of these prejudices in "old world" fears and suspicions transplanted in New York society. He will discover that his prejudices are learned—from his parents or perhaps his teachers, from his schoolmates or the adolescent gang. He will discover that he has never put these ideas to the test of reason but has accepted them at face value. Somewhere along the line he found it simple to categorize people in neat little stereotyped slots, and if there were many of this race or that nationality or the other religion who did not fit into those slots, well perhaps it was easier not to try to find out why they did not. And possibly he could bumble along through life without challenging the poor logic of his situation—if he had not become a policeman whose duty it will be to serve those very people fairly and courageously. At the Police Academy he will be given an opportunity to examine these prejudices in the light of scientific fact. He will learn what anthropologists and biologists have to say concerning some of his favorite myths. He will discover that anatomically and physiologically there is a basic unity between men and that there is no scientific evidence to support the belief that there is a great deal of anything but skin-deep or superficial differences between races and nationalities. If he reflects on the teachings of his own religion, he will find that it teaches the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. He should become aware that he feels and believes as he does chiefly because of his social and economic experiences, and his unquestioning acceptance of stock prejudices based upon superstition, ignorance, fear, selfishness, and distorted logic which leads him to generalize about whole groups as a result of his experience with a few members of these groups.

Having viewed the false pictures of the different racial and religious groups in the community, the neophyte policeman should be given an opportunity to study the true picture. He must learn something of the distinctive behavior traits which are evident in different minority groups, and, more importantly, he must correctly understand the reasons for these behavior patterns. He has already discovered that characteristics such as strength and intelligence are not racial; he will now see that differences in group behavior are due not to race, but to differences in environment. Where prejudice and discrimination are found in the environment, minority group members will be inclined to be sensitive and defensive, apprehensive, and continually fearful of insult. Without making of it a course in psychology, the instructor should be able to show why certain minority group members tend to react violently against society while others have generally withdrawn from contacts with majority members. Each reaction can be shown to be a result of unfavorable environment, the one being an aggressive reaction to discrimination, the other a desire to retreat from an environment which would expose the subject to acts of discrimination. In any event, a vicious circle is formed; some of these traits, the outgrowth of discrimination, often become the basis for further discrimination. Rudeness and arrogance, the tendency to form

pressure groups, the inclination to find prejudice and discrimination even where it does not exist, all add up to an unfortunate obstacle to unity and peaceful harmony in the community.

Especially difficult is it for a group to adjust to an entirely new way of life, but when this adjustment involves also a new language there is bound to be great personal uncertainty and insecurity as well. Thus, in studying the behavior of minority groups, we must consider them in their historical and cultural setting, or we cannot hope to measure their problems let alone help to solve them. When we as policemen make a genuine effort to understand that there is usually a good reason for the fears and insecurities and aggressiveness of people, and that these traits are a result of environment, of lack of opportunity and lack of education; and when the public understands the incredible difficulty of the policeman's role, then perhaps out of mutual understanding there may evolve a meeting of minds to the ultimate benefit of the entire community.

One of the most serious problems confronting the police organization is the prevention and control of violence by mobs. Consequently we seek to equip the officer in training with an understanding of the elementary facts in crowd formation and mob psychology. Beginning with the end-product of mob violence and destruction, we trace the inevitable course of racial and religious bigotry, false rumor, unemployment, overcrowding, segregation, and agitation that result in the tensions so often found in heterogeneous populations. Many of the factors involved are of course beyond our control as policemen, and only as citizens of an enlightened community can we participate in the attempt to solve them. However, the trainee should understand that every assemblage of people is a potential mob. The experienced policeman well knows that even the most casual crowd without any unity of purpose, can become a dangerous mob under certain circumstances. The officer himself may be the immediate cause of mob violence by his tactlessness or unnecessary handling or abuse. In making an insulting reference to his prisoner's race or nationality, he might even transform an admiring group gathered to watch him effect a good arrest, into a sullen and unfriendly crowd—or worse.

What is it that makes it possible for violence to erupt so suddenly? What are the ingredients that go into the explosive situation and reduce men in a flash from cheering football fans, or boardwalk strollers, to the level of irrational animals? The policeman who has probed the answer to such a question, who knows what the fundamental needs of people are, who understands how they hope to achieve their goals and how they are likely to react under frustration, is the policeman who is equipped to make a start at least in the prevention of mob violence. He must be able to recognize the danger signs—rumors for example—and take immediate and intelligent action to forestall violence. He should be able to detect the circumstances under which racial or religious disorders are likely to flare up. Such circumstances are found in situations such as:

1. Crowds assembled to protest, petition or parade, picket or demonstrate because of some grievance or in opposition to some other group.
2. An unfavorable incident having a racial or religious aspect where mixed crowds are assembled whether for business or pleasure.
3. A series of minor racial or religious incidents culminating in disorderly mobs.

He should be able to recognize the pattern of development of the mob from the initial "exciting incident", through the "milling process" and the subsequent communication of the collective excitement. He must know that a *show* of force rather than the *use* of force until necessary is the correct police strategy. He must avoid anger or personal comment, as well as evidences of fear or indecision. He will learn to report rather than repeat rumors, where he is fortunate enough to hear these symptoms of unrest before disorder becomes immediately imminent. His commanding officer has already gained the confidence and cooperation of community leaders who will be able to bring the facts to the group or groups involved and debunk the rumor before it has had an opportunity to create disorder. This kind of police alertness joined with a spirit of cooperation and civic-mindedness on the part of minority group leaders will serve as the most effective kind of weapon against those whose every effort is calculated to create strife and disunity amongst us.

Finally, no course in human relations for police could be complete without a consideration of civil rights laws and guarantees as we find them in our national and state law. It must be emphasized that civil rights are even more important to us today in our highly complex society than they were in the comparatively simple society of our nation's founders. The development of American thinking along these lines should be traced from our Declaration of Independence and the political philosophy out of which it grew, right down to the most recent Supreme Court decision in the "separate but equal" school cases. Special stress is placed on the original Bill of Rights, as well as the subsequent 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and the national legislation that grew out of these Constitutional guarantees. So too, the many laws of our own state as these laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or national origin are studied, and their significance in the area of personal freedom and justice is emphasized. Especially familiar should the officer be with that section of the Executive Law of our state which creates the State Commission Against Discrimination and provides for the procedures to be followed by that body in the investigation of alleged violations of civil rights. The patrolman should know what courses of action are open to a complainant and should be able intelligently to direct the offended party to seek a redress of the wrongs he protests.

Possibly no section of our law is more important in the training of recruits, and in the in-service training courses for police, than Section 246 of the Penal Law of New York State which outlines the Lawful Use of Force. The police recruit begins to hear of this law as soon as he has received his shield, and he is incessantly reminded of its import throughout his course of instruction at the Academy—and afterwards. He must be aware that he must always have a regard for the safety not only of law-abiding citizens, but that he is bound also to protect even the lawless. His relationship to the law is clear on this point—it is not within his jurisdiction to punish offenders, but merely to bring them before a court of justice. He must be ready to use whatever force is necessary to carry out this duty, but he must beware of using any more force than the situation demands. We must be conscious of the fact that it is a criminal offense for a police officer to lose his temper and use force unnecessarily even against one who has committed a most reprehensible crime.

It becomes obvious then to the aspiring patrolman that there is great and continu-

ing need for self-discipline, that he cannot afford to permit himself to slip into habits of slovenly thinking and arbitrary action. He will be aware at once of both his impelling obligation to his nation and state, and his even more sacred duty toward his fellow man. His should be a career of dedication, involving his whole being, his private and public conduct, and his innermost thoughts and attitudes. Preparing a man to be the guardian of the lives and property and the defender of the civil rights of all people is a challenging trust which will demand one of the highest priorities in any police training program. We are aware that more modern training devices and techniques may make their appearance, but human relations education will never be more important than it is today at the New York City Police Academy.