

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Public Servants in the Year 2000:
Humanity for a New Millennium**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Graduation from
The Leadership Command College**

**by
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Abstract

The effort to improve the police and public relations has been one of both success and failure in the past century. Individuals have studied techniques, programs, and philosophies on this subject for many years to come up with some magical answer to improving these relationships and still there is room for improvement. For this reason, the necessity for some type of mandatory and uniform training is so very important if police agencies are going to improve and maintain good public relations.

This research paper looks at various authors ideas and approaches to the issue of public relations and includes a survey of eighteen different agencies and officers to get their opinions on public relations and whether or not their departments would benefit from public relations training.

It is concluded that there is a possibility the relationships of the police and the public they serve would greatly improve if police officers were required to take a course on public relations on a regular basis like the other required courses. Those who have the most to gain from this training is the general public.

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Introduction

On January 1, 2000, society approached a new age. The possibilities are endless as far as what can be accomplished by individuals who choose to challenge themselves and others who take the road less traveled in the interest of progress. One of the major issues police administrators will be concerned with is public relations. Public relations as it relates to law enforcement mean the relationship that the police officers have with the people they serve. The key word in the previous sentence is serve.

While public relations have always been a concern for law enforcement administrators, how police officers approach this issue has changed very little. A century ago communities were patrolled and protected by police officers who were assigned a specific area to patrol and this was done on foot. These areas were small enough that the officer was able to make their rounds, and respond to calls in a timely and efficient manner. Because of this, an officer who stayed on the job for any length of time at all got to know the people in their beat area pretty well. With the invention of the automobile, law enforcement became more mobile, and this led to a breakdown in police/community relations.

In the past decade, some agencies have implemented programs geared toward improving public relations. Unfortunately, not all agencies are able to participate in these programs for one reason or another. Some departments do not have a budget for these programs. Other agencies may barely have enough manpower to patrol their area and designating a specific individual to serve, as a public relations officer is impossible. As with any profession, there are those individuals who are resistant to change and it is possible that this could also be a reason why their department does not participate in these programs. Public relations should be a concern of every police officer not just of those who have some type of public relations program implemented. The purpose of this research paper is to determine if a course on human relations or public relations would be beneficial and of interest to police officers and their departments while helping to improve the relationship between police officers and the public.

For many years now, the licensing agency for police officers in Texas, TCLEOSE, has made certain courses mandatory every two years. One of these courses is Cultural Diversity, which is the study of the differences that we share as a society. The course overview, as written by TCLEOSE has described the Cultural Diversity course as a means to help officers gain insight

into their work as police officers and to become more effective by understanding the complex influences affecting the people they serve. The purpose of this course is to help officers find solutions to problems and resolve conflicts by interacting with members of the public. While the course teaches some valuable information about the different cultures in society, there are officers that wonder why they don't receive instruction on what we have in common. If officers were required to take a course in Public Relations along with these other required courses, there is a possibility that the knowledge obtained would help officers become more meek, humble, and humane. These are qualities that society expects public servants to possess particularly police officers.

This research paper will look at such things as the different factors that influence the public's attitude toward police officers, ways to improve those attitudes, and why the position of police officer is even necessary in our society and in the interest of the public's welfare. This paper should help officers improve their relationships with the public and encourage them to take the time to make public relations as much a part of Police Academy training or continuing education as other courses such as cultural diversity, child abuse, or firearms training. As part of the research for this paper, a survey of eighteen departments from across the State of Texas will examine their attitudes and approaches towards improved relations between the department and the public, as well as the officers' opinion on whether or not it would be beneficial to offer some type of public relations training for police officers.

Review of Literature

The concern for good relations between law enforcement agencies and the public is not something that has just come around with the new millennium, it's an age old problem dating back as far as the beginning of this era of law enforcement. L. Radelet and H Reed (1977) state that the origin of our modern day police can be traced back to 1829, the year in which Sir Robert Peel secured approval by the English Parliament of his Bill for a Metropolitan Police. Approval from the English Parliament did not come easy as that the English were leery of such an organization because they believed that it could be used as a means to overthrow the government. The Bill finally became a Law and the first police officers hit the streets. This early police officer patrolled his assigned area on foot and soon became known to most everyone in the

community. This proved to be a valuable asset to the officer because it gave him a chance to build a special relationship with the law-abiding citizens and to gain a little insight into the conduct of the ones whom were not so law-abiding.

On the subject of laws, a large portion of the officer's job is to enforce the laws within the community. A. Coffey/ E. Eldefonso/ and W. Hartinger (1971) believe that laws must be enforced if civilized man is to survive, that society cannot depend completely on simple persuasion to induce law observance, and therefore it must require enforcement of laws. Coffey, Eldefonso and Hartinger go on to quote Theodore Roosevelt as saying, "No man is above the law and no man is below it; nor do we ask any mans' permission when we require him to obey it." This statement says a lot about what society's attitude is toward laws. There are those who abide by the laws and then there are those who blatantly disobey the laws. Most people fall somewhere in between these two categories. Where one fits has a lot to do with the individual attitude toward the officer. That attitude is an important factor in determining the relationship between the public and the officer and the department. There are many other factors that play a big part in the police/public relationship. R. Olmas, (1974), states that there are six key factors to consider that effect this relationship. These are:

1. Community Characteristics
2. The desires and expectations of the members of the community.
3. The desires and expectations of the members of the police department
4. Financial resources of the Community.
5. Skills and Manpower resources of the department.
6. Skills and knowledge of the police management staff.

All these factors are important in judging the performance of a police department by the public. These same factors affected the early form of police officers just as it does the modern day police officer. As a matter of fact, not a whole lot has changed in law enforcement except where technology comes into play. One of the biggest changes in the past century was the invention of the automobile. This invention, as miraculous as it was, really hurt the police/public relationship because it took the officers off the sidewalks and put them behind the wheel of a patrol car. Before long the officers only began to make contact with those citizens who had problems or broke the law. That valuable asset of one on one contact soon became a thing of the past and the distance between the officer and the citizen soon became broader and broader.

This breakdown in the police/public relationship would soon get worse before it got better. First there came the great depression and with it prohibition. Soon thereafter came World War II, and decade and a half later came the Civil Rights Movement and right on its tail was the war in Vietnam. All of these events have played a major role in how the public views the Police and government in general historically. B. Smith is quoted by Coffey/ Eldefonso, and Hartinger as saying "Relatively few citizens recall ever having seen a judge; fewer still, a prosecutor, coroner, sheriff, probation officer or prison warden. The patrolman is thoroughly familiar to all. His uniform picks him out of a crowd so distinctly that he becomes a living symbol of the law, not always of its majesty, but certainly of its power. Whether the police like it or not, they are forever marked men." Because of this, the police officer is usually the first position that comes to mind when we think of government, way in front of the second highest choice, the President of the United States. The historical events mentioned previously brought with them turmoil between the government and the public. The individuals with the duty to enforce some often-unfavorable laws and keep the peace during these trying times were the police officers on the streets.

The past couple of decades have brought around a little more peaceful times within our government. Many police agencies have implemented programs geared toward improving relationships between the police and the public. Community Oriented Policing Programs have worked hard to bring about a new philosophy on how we approach problems within our community. These new philosophies are based on good communication between the police and the public and a coordinated effort between both to achieve the same goals for the community.

Johnson (1984) did a study of a police department as it takes on a new Chief, and the changes he made within the department with the objective of improving relations between officers and the public. This study was called Police Community Relations: The Management Factor. The study is based on an actual police department, but calls itself the City of River Bend. During the River Bend study, the new Chief personally presented in practical terms some general precepts of police/community relations. These included the following:

- 1) Every member of the department has a police community responsibility.
- 2) Stopping to talk to the kids on the corner is good police work.
- 3) Any citizen complaint even if it is about garbage collection, is a police concern.
- 4) Citizens should look upon the police as helpers in dealing with city government.

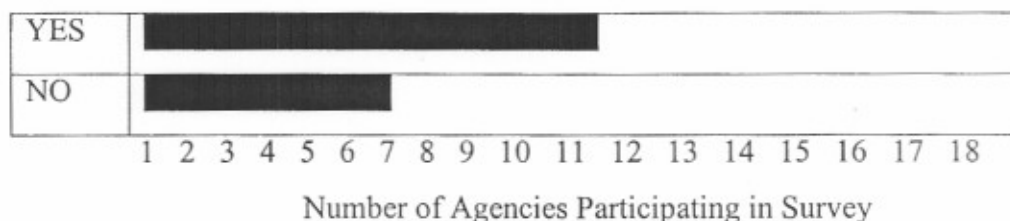
- 5) Citizens should look upon the police as helpers in dealing with interpersonal problems. (This, he explained, will pay off in the long run with information and good relations.)
- 6) No obviously racial terms or actions will be tolerated.
- 7) Regardless of pressures brought to bear upon an officer, everyone will receive the Chiefs backing if his/her actions were logical and done in good faith.

The Chief accompanied these precepts with appropriate awards. Recognition and promotions were rooted in large part in those community relations' efforts that formed the substance of everyday police work. In this manner the officers soon realized that good police community relations was a means to promotion and special merit pay. This proved to be an excellent way for the new Chief to improve relations and to get the officers to do this because it was something they wanted to accomplish not something they had to do as a duty. These precepts and reward procedures could be a model for any agency that is concerned about the relationship between the police and the public.

Methodology

As part of the research of this paper a survey of eighteen agencies was conducted to examine how they approached the issue of public relations. During Module II of the Leadership Command College held at Texas Women's University a survey was handed out to the participants. There were eighteen officers who completed the survey representing agencies from all across the State of Texas. These agencies included police departments of various sizes, several county sheriffs' offices and two Constable's offices. The findings concluded that few agencies have a person designated to serve as a public relations officer and hardly any of the agencies required any public relations training or provided such training. However, many of the officers surveyed felt that good public relations was an important issue for their department and even more agreed that training in public relations would help improve the relationship between the officers and the public. The first issue was how many of these agencies have a designated person assigned as the public relations officer for their department. This out come is examined in figure1.

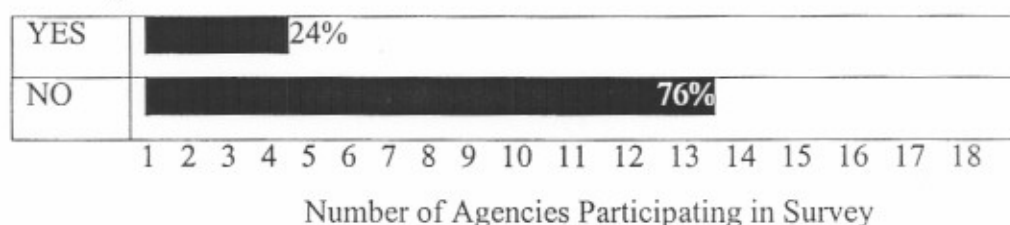
FIGURE 1. The number of agencies surveyed who have a specific person designated as Public Relations Officer.



This survey question indicated that there were eleven of the eighteen agencies studied that did have a designated person serving as Public Relations Officer. This officer is probably a member of several civic organizations, attends all City Council meeting, or any other meetings in the city that may have an impact on police/public relations. The officer then relays information back to the Chief and helps to solve issues raised by each of these groups.

The next question on the survey asked how many agencies required public relations training. The results are examined in figure 2.

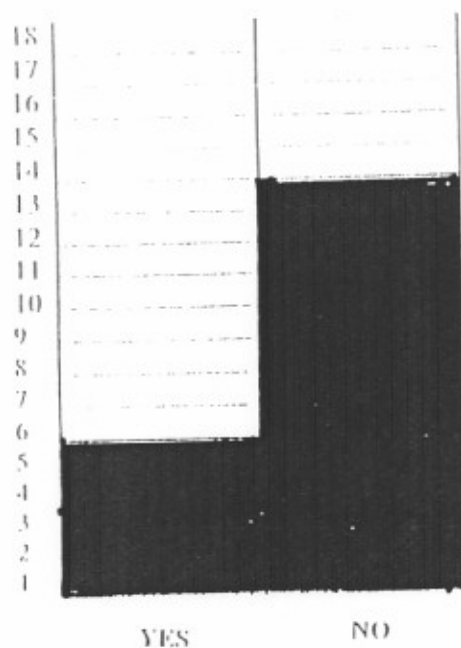
FIGURE 2. The number of agencies surveyed who require some type of Public Relations Training.



Out of eighteen agencies studied, there were only twenty four percent that required some type of Public Relations training for their officers. This left fourteen of the eighteen agencies with no training requirements on the subject of Public Relations.

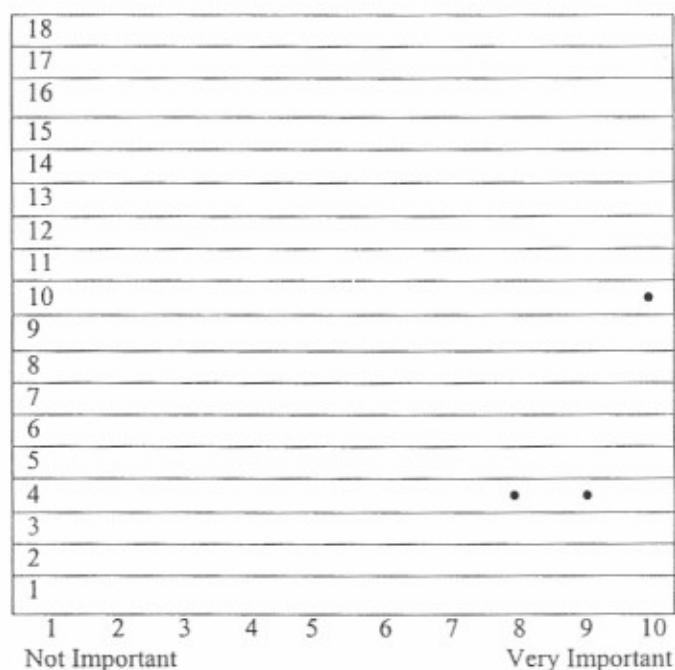
The next question was in reference to how many agencies offer training in public relations. These results are examined in figure 3.

FIGURE 3. How many of the eighteen agencies surveyed offer Public Relations training for their officers?



This indicated that only five of the eighteen agencies surveyed offer public relations training for their officers. This figure should seem alarming to those concerned with the importance of good public relations. This brings us to the next question of our survey. How important do officers surveyed feel good public relations were? Figure 4 shows the results of that survey.

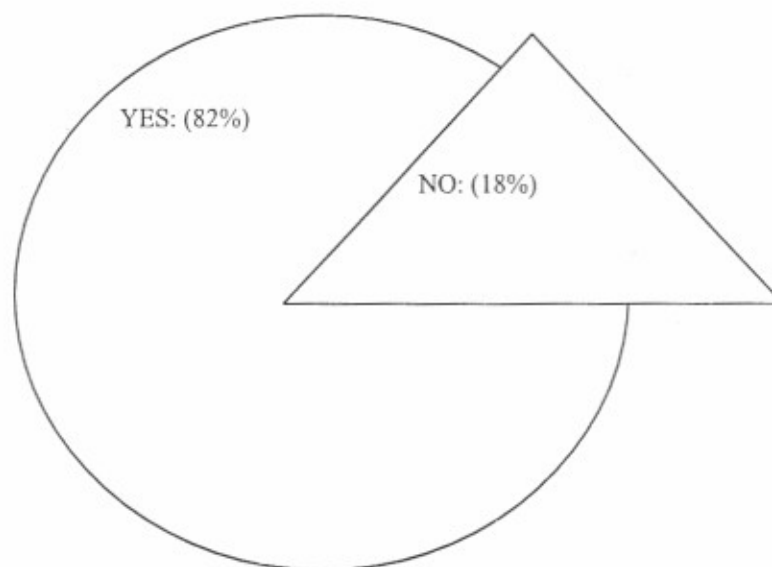
FIGURE 4. Rating of importance of Good Public Relations to the eighteen officers surveyed.



This survey question was based on a scale of one to ten, and was asked to determine the importance of good public relations, and the rating of ten being very important and the rating of one being not importance. Of the eighteen officers surveyed, there were ten officers who rated the importance at a level ten, or very important, there was four officers who gave it a rating of nine, and four who gave it an eight. This shows a real concern for good public relations between the agencies and the public, and shows a possible desire of these officers to work toward improving these relationships.

The main purpose of this research paper is to determine if police departments, the public, and society in general would benefit from officers taking a course of training on public relations. All evidence gathered through research and survey methods seem to point to the fact that it would be beneficial, including the information obtained from survey question number five. Whether or not officers felt that a course on public relations would help improve the public/police relationship in examined in figure 5.

FIGURE 5. Did the officers surveyed feel that a course or training in public relations would help improve the relationship between the public and the department?



There were eighty-two percent of the officers surveyed who felt that a course on, or some type of training would help improve the relationship between all law enforcement agencies and the public that they serve.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be clear that some type of training on the subject of public relations would interest and maybe prove beneficial to officers across the state. Albert N. Brown, the Commissioner of Police for the City of Philadelphia, wrote the forward for A. Siegl, P. Federmen, and D. Schultz's book entitled; Professional Police-Human Relations Training (1963). In that forward he wrote "The profession of law enforcement, like all professions, must undergo constant study so that its skills, techniques, and knowledge keep pace with society's progress. This, in turn, improves the professional status of every policeman."

Our professional status as police officers is primarily judged by those we are sworn to protect and to serve. What better way to improve this status that to be complimented and

appreciated by those we serve? What better way to learn how to serve them than to learn more about them?

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APPENDIX

The appendix included with this research is the survey given to the participants of LEMIT Module II, of which eighteen of the survey's were complete and returned.