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Law Enforcement Bulletin

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THE COVER

Pictured are New York City police officers assisting hostages from a rooftop to which they had escaped from armed felons during "The Siege of Williamsburg." See article beginning page 10 and related comments in Mr. Kelley's Message, beginning on facing page, and in article beginning page 19.



17/80

Determining Police Effectiveness



By
JAMES M. ROCHFORD
Superintendent
Police Department
Chicago, Ill.

The motto of the Chicago Police Department is "To Serve and Protect." How well these objectives are accomplished are matters of serious concern to command personnel and, most significantly, to its superintendent.

No police department can accomplish effectively the task of service and protection to the public without the public's support, and this support is given by the public in direct proportion to its opinion of how well the police are performing their duties.

Survey Initiated

In December 1973, the Chicago Police Department Service Survey program was initiated. Each victim and complainant who received police service that resulted in the preparation of a case report was mailed a prepaid postcard asking for his comments. The survey postcard was computer produced as a byproduct

of an existing computerized case reporting system. The return portion of the postcard bore an identifying case report number, permitting the department to identify the incident to which the respondent referred his comments.

Comments received thus far show that approximately 94 percent of those responding to the survey stated they were satisfied with the service received from the Chicago Police Department. These responses indicate that an overwhelming number of persons thought they had received proper service. Six percent of the responses, however, were from Chicago citizens who said they had not received satisfactory service. The ultimate standard in the quality of police service is, of course, 100-percent satisfaction from the people. In pursuit of this optimum goal, I directed that an investigation be made into the circumstances that prompted a person to judge the police service he received as unsatisfactory.

Findings

An intensive examination was made of 500 cases where citizens had reported receiving unacceptable police service. Some of the findings are very enlightening and may cause changes in the traditional attitudes of police administrators concerning the training and the conduct of their men.

For example, police officers who responded promptly, acted courteously, and conducted a thorough preliminary investigation often were accused of providing unsatisfactory service. Actually, some of the most efficient police officers were among those who were the objects of more than one dissatisfied complaint. A followup interview with the complaining citizen revealed that the police officer may have been too impersonal. The citizen interpreted this as indifference on the part of the policeman to the victim's plight.

It also was learned from the survey that police contacts with elderly victims must be especially tactful since a proportionately large number of the dissatisfied respondents were 60 years old or older, and the majority were women. A geographic plotting of the elderly complainants indicated their residences were located in areas with a high density of convalescent and old-people homes.

According to the survey, the type of incident being investigated will influence the citizen's perception of whether he received adequate police service. The investigation of crimes against property led to 64 percent of the complaints, as opposed to crimes against the person. Burglary and theft investigations gave rise to the most complaints of unsatisfactory service. Failure to retrieve stolen property was the basis for most complaints in this category. Interviews revealed citizens expect the police to do more to recover property. This expectation is interwoven with many of the other survey findings.

The preliminary investigator must be cautious so as not to give the citizen an unreasonable expectation for the recovery of his property by the followup investigation. This will lessen the chance of a victim becoming disappointed and resentful when recovery of his possessions is not made. Rather, the preliminary investigator should be candid with a victim when, due to a complete lack of physical evidence and a description of the offender, the possibilities for solution of the crime and recovery of any stolen property are remote.

There was some criticism regarding the response of

evidence technicians who examine the crime scenes for clues. It was found that in the majority of cases, when the technician did respond for followup investigation, the victim either was not at home or was unavailable.

Perhaps because of the influence of movies and television programs, where police investigations are brought to a swift and neat conclusion, citizens expect each and every crime to be successfully concluded. In fact, the pat solution of most crimes is not possible. Further evidence of the influence entertainment programs generate was found in the vocabulary citizens chose to rate the quality of police service. Many of the returned survey cards contained such police jargon as "No Evidence Tech responded to scene," and "Beat man okay, but Patrol Sergeant discourteous," which evidently had been adapted from cinema and television productions.

Another finding was that both black and white citizens basically had identical complaints, but that the non-English-speaking persons reported unsatisfactory service at a considerably higher rate than others.

A geographical analysis showed that on the basis of population a disproportionate number of complaints emanated from 3 of the 21 police districts surveyed. While these three districts are near or in the lower half of all districts by population, they ranked first, third, and fifth in the number of complaints.

Census Bureau data confirms that high concentrations of Spanish-speaking citizens live in these three districts. Followup interviews with Spanish-speaking complainants disclosed that in most cases the police response was satisfactory, but language barriers prevented complete communication and understanding. This is not a new finding, but the survey did contribute further documentation of the seriousness of the problem.

Analysis

Analysis of followup interviews and case-report examinations performed in the survey led to the finding that only 1.5 percent of the respondents did in fact receive unsatisfactory service. This figure could be very misleading. Assuming that the 1.5 percent is representative of the rate of dissatisfaction of all Chicago residents affected by police service, it would appear that the police department has come very close to the optimum standard of 100-percent satisfaction. This, of course, is perfection and a level not likely to

ever be achieved by any organization having the complex and difficult responsibilities found in law enforcement. On the other hand, projecting this percentage to all calls (2,452,806) received in 1973 for police service suggests that annually an estimated 36,792 calls might not have been handled adequately. This number (approximately 100 per day) is not an acceptable level of police performance, and steps are being taken to insure a higher rate of satisfactory service.

The survey covered a 6-month period and was concluded on June 12, 1974. A total of 176,361 cards were mailed; 46,879 were returned with:

- 44,083 (94 percent) reporting satisfactory service;
- 2,534 (5.4 percent) reporting unsatisfactory service;
- 262 (0.6 percent) other.

The "other" category represents cards returned to the department with comments irrelevant to police service or which were returned by the post office as undeliverable.

There is still one area to be explored. Although the number of respondents is sufficient to make certain projections and draw certain conclusions, an attempt should be made to determine the type of service the survey's nonrespondents received and why they failed to respond. This action is deemed necessary for two reasons. First, the police department is a service agency, and a service, as opposed to many tangible products, tends to have more degrees of relative satisfaction to a recipient than, for example, a brand of beverage, the taste of which a consumer may either like or dislike. Requiring respondents, therefore, to make a selection from among "poor, fair, satisfactory, or excellent" ratings of police service may have discouraged their participation and response. Second, the Chicago Police Department lacks information on existing police department surveys of this type which could serve as a basis for comparison.

The department's Human Relations Section, in an attempt to determine why only 26.6 percent of potential respondents replied, conducted a followup of 84 persons who had been mailed a survey questionnaire. Excluding 28 unlocated persons, plus 1 who was found to have returned his card, results showed:

- 78.2 percent nonrespondents were satisfied with police service rendered;
- 1.8 percent nonrespondents were not satisfied;
- 20 percent refused to comment.

However, the sampling method used for non-respondents does not meet accepted survey standards and would not provide an accurate base for projections.

With this exception, the survey methodology is valid according to consultation with professional marketing and statistical analysts. Currently, interviews are being planned with nonrespondents from as wide a sample as can be designed.

Insights

The cost incurred for the survey (total mailing, printing, and salary costs were an estimated \$75,000) was relatively expensive, but the insight gained into how the public judges police service was well worth the price. Definite steps now can be taken by the Chicago Police Department to:

1. Inform officers that, while efficiency is at all times necessary, its dispassionate appearance can be misinterpreted by overwrought victims as disinterest in the loss or injury;
2. Provide officers with preservice and in-service training in dealing with the elderly;
3. Instruct preliminary investigators not to give victims false hopes of recovering their property;
4. Accelerate the recruitment of Spanish-speaking officers and the Spanish-language training of present officers;
5. Review present methods of response and investigation of theft and burglary calls to insure timely and meaningful followup investigations;
6. Design public education programs to deal with some of the realities of police investigative processes as opposed to the entertainment media's romanticized versions; and
7. Provide evidence technicians with a notice of appearance form, similar to those used by public utility employers to advise customers, to notify persons not at home of their visit.

Based on the mail-back survey, this preliminary analysis and report has highlighted some helpful insights into public opinion regarding the quality of police service rendered in Chicago. These observations will facilitate modification of training programs and operational procedures to make them more responsive to citizen concepts of superior police service. While it may be a completely unobtainable goal, we must never strive for anything less than 100-percent satisfactory police service. ®

END