

Workshop Report: Police Constables/Head Constables/ASI Workshop on “Improving Police’s Public Image”

Background:

Elements Akademia was asked to deliver a one day “soft skill” workshop module to the lower levels of the UP and Haryana Police. The workshop was conducted on April 8/9/10, 2010 at the Police Commissioner’s office. Each day was attended by 25-30 Constables/Head Constables/ASIs from various police stations (including some traffic constables). The entire workshop was conducted in Hindi. Elements has experience of conducting similar workshop in Uttar Pradesh which was received very highly.

National Award winning Elements Akademia, set up by 15 IIM alumni, is India’s first chain of finishing schools. It was recently profiled by Outlook Business (Sep 5, 2009) as One of “50 Social Entrepreneurs... Making India Better”. Its clients include marquee public and private sector enterprises like Cadbury, Aircel, Johnson & Johnson, Sumitomo Motherson group, Uttar Pradesh Government, Madhya Pradesh Government, Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, Institute of Company Secretaries of India etc.

Objective of the Workshop:

To train the UP and Haryana Police on -

- a) Attitude: Being self driven, being more positive, understanding our freedom to choose, being punctual etc.
- b) Customer Service: How to greet, be more courteous, listening with empathy, showing genuine concern etc.
- c) Grooming: How to wear uniform, physical fitness, overall grooming etc.
- d) Removing cultural barriers: Avoiding moral policing.
- e) Health Tips: Taking care of their health (stress management, eating habits, sleep patterns) etc.

Workshop Plan:

The broad plan included the points below. This plan was executed using audio-visuals (showing police grooming, typical police station behavior etc.), role-plays (what to do when the person being 'challenged' tries to act smart), games (balloon game, find the fault game), ice-breakers, music, jokes, quizzes (where they could win chocolates) etc.

1. Clarifying why they were there and what they can realistically expect.
2. Understanding their grievances and suggestions. This also helped them in opening up.
3. Freedom to Choose: Irrespective of what happens to us, we have the freedom to choose. We can decide whether to be angry or not angry, courteous or not courteous, positive or not positive. We are responsible for our reaction. There will often be actions done on us that will tempt us to immediately react. However, effective people use the space between action and reaction to reaffirm what they stand for.
4. Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence: In life, there are a lot of things that are wrong that concern and frustrate us. However, amongst those, there will only be a handful of things that we can actually influence where we can make a positive difference. Effective people focus on the latter – where they can change things.
5. Customer Service: Everyone agreed that the public is like a customer to them and they should present the same customer service as any other organization. Greeting, being assertive but not aggressive, keeping your cool, etc.
6. Balance between Courage and Compassion. There are times when we need to show courage and there are times when we need to show compassion.
7. Meditation and Stretching: Including basic health tips, basic breathing exercises, simple stretching.

8. Listening Skills: Listening with empathy, paraphrasing what the customer is saying, avoiding replying.
9. Grooming Tips: Dress, Posture, Smile, Body Language, Tone of Voice, Telephone Etiquette.
10. Cultural Sensitivity: No moral policing. Okay to do verification/prevention but do not enforce your personal sense of right or wrong.
11. Life is only 50% fair. For all of us, at all levels, life is never 100% good or ideal. There are parts of life that we dislike but then that is life. We can't change the unfair parts but can change what we do with it.
12. Circle of Goodness: Counting all the things in life we are grateful for.

Action Planning:

Trainees were encouraged to now identify specific action plans – things that they can do to improve the image of police force and that lies within their Circle of Influence, that is, they can actually implement it. The following emerged from their own handwritten notes:

1. Talking politely to public. While there is pressure from the system which may test the patience of the constables/head constables, they resolved to not show it on the public.
Concentrate on mannerisms. Simple things like not yawning without covering your mouth, saying sorry if you burp, speaking softly, offering a 'namaste' etc.
2. Make public comfortable. When they come to write an FIR, make them feel important. Offer them a chair, give them attention, let them vent their anger, frustration and sorrow. Listen well.
3. Take action as soon as possible, at least in cases where practical.
4. Take care of your health. We taught basic stress busting yoga like 'anulom vilom', eyes relaxing exercises etc. We also recommended spending 10 minutes watching TV, playing with kids or spending relaxing time with family.

5. Community activation. Proactively going to public, especially the youth and elderly of their areas, and showing them that they care. Spending some time playing with the community kids and trying to be a part of the community.
6. Escalating to superiors (ASP above) wherever their immediate bosses are crossing the line. While it may be practical to ignore minor omissions, do not go against your conscience.
7. Every single person wrote down Start-Stop-Continue: 3 specific action areas that they will Start Doing as a result of this training, that they will Stop doing and good actions that they will Continue doing.
8. Reco: We need to establish an effective monitoring system to ensure these learnings are not lost in the daily rigamorable of their jobs. Ideally a person should call them after 1 month and after 3 months to have a 5 minute discussion if all was well and the challenges they were facing.

Overall Feedback:

The feedback from the participants has been extremely positive (please refer to the handwritten feedback that they were asked to write confidentially... every single trainee had very high words of praise to say for this workshop). Participants mentioned how this was their very first training in their 20 years of service, how they felt like being back to school again, how they learnt some managerial lessons, how they could open up and speak out their views, how they felt inspired and motivated, how they have resolved to be more courteous and positive etc. Each participant also committed to a Personal Improvement Action Plan (Start-Stop-Continue... what new behavior will they start showing, what bad behavior will they Stop etc.).

However, the trainees also mentioned some very genuine challenges at their end which reduces their ability to provide the best services to the public. Those are mentioned in this report along-with actionable remedial plans. In our view, unless we take action on some/most of these below, the effectiveness of training (what they continue to do after 3 months) will be severely compromised.

We sincerely believe that by taking some of these actions in the right spirit, the police leadership has a once-in- a-lifetime opportunity to bring about a massive positive change in the organization, and for posterity be known for the impact made. The UP and Haryana police Police can emerge as a role model for others to follow.

Concerns Raised by the Trainees: Challenges and Recommendations

The trainees were encouraged to be fully open and share their issues transparently. The following key reasons emerged, many beyond the control of the Constables/Head Constables/ASIs. We have promised them that these views will be shared with the higher authorities with the recommendation to take action wherever realistically possible:

1. Serious Communication gap between Senior Officers and Junior Officers:

Almost all the trainees (Constables/HC/ASI) felt they could not voice their genuine problems to their senior officers in the HQ. The culture and the opportunity to transparently share issues and seek help are just not there. This communication gap results in pent up frustration and low morale.

80%+ of trainees said they were unhappy to be in the police force and would not recommend their kids to take up this profession. They felt no one listened to them or cared for them. Even accounting for some exaggeration, the absence of a standardized system of listening and redressal is an alarming situation.

Reco: Have regular 'sammelans' where junior officers can present their views to senior officers in a confidential manner (e.g. they can write their questions on a piece of paper). The senior officers will then respond transparently without beating around the bush or trying to be diplomatic. A strict follow-up process where every concern raised is answered (yes, no, clarification... but a clear answer with reasons). There could also be informal lunch/dinner sessions where the hierarchy can interact freely with the constabulary. A quarterly meet can also be arranged between the wives of senior officers and the families of the constables. Apart from listening, this can also serve as a forum for education and counseling.

2. Basic Resources/Employee Welfare woefully inadequate: Some very fundamental facilities required to keep the workforce motivated are missing –

1. Barracks in Police Station are in pathetic shape. There are 15 beds for 30 constables. Cleanliness and Hygiene are compromised. Clean water is also

missing.

2. **Duty Timings:** Most constables work for 14-16 hours a day without any rest or break. While this is acceptable in emergency situations, this has become a norm on most days. VIP duty is especially painful without any information of how many hours they just have to stand.
3. **Leaves:** Leaves are just not granted leading the junior officers to give fake excuse if they have to take a leave. The leave policy exists only on paper.
4. **Stationery/Photocopying:** Almost everyone complained that there was not enough paper in the police station and often photocopying the challan needed to be done at their own expense.
5. **Reservations for emergency trips:** The investigating officers mentioned how if they had to go on urgent criminal tipoff to a different city, they had to do it in unreserved class and sometimes even bring back the criminal in the same unreserved class.
6. **Inadequate police force:** We asked how many people felt that the police force in their thana was less than sufficient. 90%+ raised their hands. Some also mentioned how there are certain squads (e.g. chain snatching) which have a lot of people but with limited work.
7. **Differing HRA even within the city:** Some parts of the city get 10% HRA, and some others get 20% HRA while they are physically very near. This creates discontentment.

Reco: Some of these are low hanging fruits, in that remedial actions can be realistically taken at the UP and Haryana Police Commissioner's level. And this will help us get their confidence (that we genuinely are interested in solving their woes). However, some others may require structural interventions (e.g. staffing to full capacity... everyone felt the force strength was inadequate given the multifaceted nature of their work).

We can explore the local public sector organizations, reputed large business houses or resident committees (not for profit ventures) 'adopting' the local police station, and taking care of at least the basic amenities in that thana.

3. No recognition or appreciation, but public criticism even on small mistakes:

No positive reinforcement. Minor mistakes may invoke disciplinary action but a good job does not earn praise from superiors. We asked the force how many times in the last 3 years they remembered being publicly praised by their superiors. Most did not remember even a single incident. We also asked how many times they have been chided in front of others. Everyone had some incidence to share. A Head Constable mentioned how he was manning a PCR van and helped nab a culprit but there was no recognition given to him. Another mentioned

Reco: Follow the time tested management rule of “Appreciate in Public, Scold in Private.” Another rule is: “Praise 3 times before you criticize once”. Good managers actually spend a lot of time trying to find their subordinates doing something right before they find a fault with them. This develops trust and a feeling that superiors care for them. This can be given as a guideline to the SHO/SOs and higher officers – find your force doing something right and praise them in public. A small session can be done with reporting officers on “Coaching Skills”: How a Leader needs to focus both on People and Results, not just either.

4. Minimal emphasis on Training:

None of the 85 people recalled undergoing even a single day of training in their 10-20 year career (excluding technical training on traffic rules or policing etc.). They also did not recall any opportunity like this where their views were heard by senior people. Most trainees have recommended that similar sessions need to happen regularly at all levels. Apart from teaching some softer aspects, these workshops also help as a catharsis and give a platform for people to come together and bond as police force.

Reco: Good organizations – public or private – ensure at least 7 days of training every year. Perhaps we can start with 2-4 days of sessions like this for this level of police force. There MUST be a Leadership session (how to build trust with your subordinates) for all reporting officers. Training with junior officers may cover

Grooming (Haircut, Oral Hygiene, Posture, Being slim, How to wear uniform), Basic Communication Skills (Basic English), Etiquette (including telephone manners), Behavioural Skills (Listening with empathy, Stress Management), Attitude (Freedom to choose your attitude, positivity) and Health Tips. The initial 6 months of training can also include some of these, especially basic English language training. Some fundamental technical skills (knowledge of traffic signs, putting first aid etc.) may also be included.

5. Community Image is already down, and police becomes every one's whipping boy : Trainees recalled how media goes after them for everything negative and reinforces the image that police force is bad. Good incidents are very rarely reported. Plus their job itself is negative: they have to punish people doing the wrong things. But no one wants to accept he/she was wrong. Those they punish anyway feel negatively about the force and those they are trying to help are indifferent or turn hostile because of the paperwork/bureaucracy involved.

Reco: Take community building steps where thanas can get involved in initiatives that will require the policemen to come out and meet the public in a good light. Partnering with some NGOs, working in the poor neighbourhood, providing some training to youth etc. will help boost the image of police. These can be done once every month at all thana.

We can also cautiously explore the option of publicizing the other point of view above (“challenges faced by the police”) so at least some people in public know of, understand, and perhaps appreciate that the police force has its own side of story too. But this needs to be done cautiously lest this becomes a publicity generating exercise (our own view till before this workshop was to avoid any media).

6. Public Behaviour is often unjustified but still supported by seniors: A Constable recalled how he caught a person driving on the wrong side. But the driver started shouting and saying “Tum jaante ho mein kiska aadmi hoon”. He

even misbehaved with the constable in full public view. The constable called his senior at that crossing and both challaned this guy. However, the driver then called the local SHO, who promptly came to the venue and instead of siding with his own police force started shouting at them and saying, “Jab isne bataya tha ki yeh kiska aadmi hai to tumne challan kyon kiya.” This was done in full public view while the constables pleaded that they will reverse the challan but at least not to shout in front of others. The SHO continued to shout, cancelled the challan, and made the constables apologize to the driver. This one incident spread with word-of-mouth amongst the lower levels of police in nearby areas and everyone started feeling demoralized. Similar issues have been reported about media people (seniors will almost always side with media without even conducting an inquiry). The Constables are also worried about stopping “big cars” because they fear those people are very well connected. They feel “agar naukri karni hai to har ek kadam bohat dar dar ke rakhna padta hai”. Who knows who is connected to whom and the entire pressure then comes to the junior officers.

Reco: This is a tricky issue, because some of the public will often behave in questionable manner. While we have coached the trainees that they should not let the behavior of 5% of public affect their own behavior to remaining 95%, we need a sensitization amongst the officers too. If there is a differing view between the constable and public, they should at least do a basic inquiry before they start siding with the public. Currently the lower level feels that if anyone casts an allegation against the junior force – very clearly out of mala fide reasons – still the higher officers will always side with the public and promptly suspend/take action against the constable without any inquiry. This perception itself erodes trust. Justice should not only be done, but also seen to be done.

Next Steps:

a) Confidential feedback from each trainee – in their own handwriting - is attached with this email. This can help you assess what they truly felt about the workshop. The feedback has been highly positive.

- b) Presenting these recommendations to the senior most officer (Police Commissioner) and agreeing on specific changes. An office memo to that extent shared with all the thanas.
- c) Establish a telephonic monitoring system to see the stickability of these changes. Hire 1-2 junior resources (at Rs. 12k per month) who can regularly call them and understand how much of this is being implemented. Also discussion implementation challenges. This can also serve as a confidential help line.
- d) A similar discussion workshop for 1000 more police force. We will need to deploy 2 senior trainers and provide some minimal support to ensure scalability without losing quality.