

Is anti-bias training effective?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police September 19, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Knowing that Bethlehem, like virtually every city in the country after the murder of George Floyd, is scrutinizing the policies and practices of its police department, and knowing that Gadfly has been trying to open himself up to all information relevant to such inquiry, a follower called Gadfly's attention to a pertinent August 10 anti-bias program by the **National Law Enforcement Museum** with a half-dozen experts on the subject, one of whom was Bethlehem's own Guillermo Lopez. Over a series of posts, Gadfly will isolate short sections of the program and share them with you so that we can more knowledgeably participate, if only from a distance, in the local discussion here.

Is anti-bias training effective? Now there's a key question. We may be putting a lot of stock in it here.

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Gadfly was impressed by the qualifications made in the early part of the discussion to this question. Nobody was saying that anti-bias training is a magic bullet. One-off training not effective. Training can have short-term positive effects but it can (will?) succumb to the outside forces that have formed an individual over a long period of time. Not all programs are good. Success is in the delivery. Science tells us that there are mixed results. Officers don't understand the need. Effectiveness depends on the officers "bringing something" to the table.

- the training needs to be more than a one-off
- there's short-time awareness and effectiveness but that is fragile
- need to talk about racism, it won't go away if we don't
- adult learners need to know why the training is relevant
- people tend to get offended at the need for discussion because it sounds as if we are saying that they are racist

- such training can be effective but it's all in the delivery, the approach
- the science tells us that the training gives mixed results
- effectiveness is not just about delivery, but each officer has to be self-reflective
- people are exhausted and tired trying to make people feel ok about this conversation
- where we get stuck is with people offended by the conversation
- the effectiveness of the training needs to be measured but we are reluctant to do that
- officers don't understand why this conversation is important and necessary
- the officers have to understand why
- effectiveness depends on what the officer brings to the training

The conversation took a bit brighter tone in the latter part of this section when Bethlehem's Guillermo Lopez described an anti-bias, police/community program he runs. Lopez co-directs the Law Enforcement Partnership Program for the **National Coalition Building Institute**. The key insight he conveyed from his experience is that we must understand that the police are working class people. If we don't understand that, we will never gain officer trust.



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- training works when all the parts are in place
- must assess the group, not one-fits-all
- department has to trust the facilitators
- need skills about relationships and listening
- needs assessment > trust > than can go to hard stuff
- has worked in this training 15 years, partnering with a police officer

- key thing he figured out: officers sound just like steel mill workers, they are working class people, must understand that if you want to gain their trust
- not every officer will respond to training but significant number will change the culture
- must recognize that police have a culture, and that must be appreciated
- you must listen to their stories, give sense they can trust you
- must separate being uncomfortable and being unsafe
- safety training must be primary
- but lean in to uncomfortable, where we learn the most