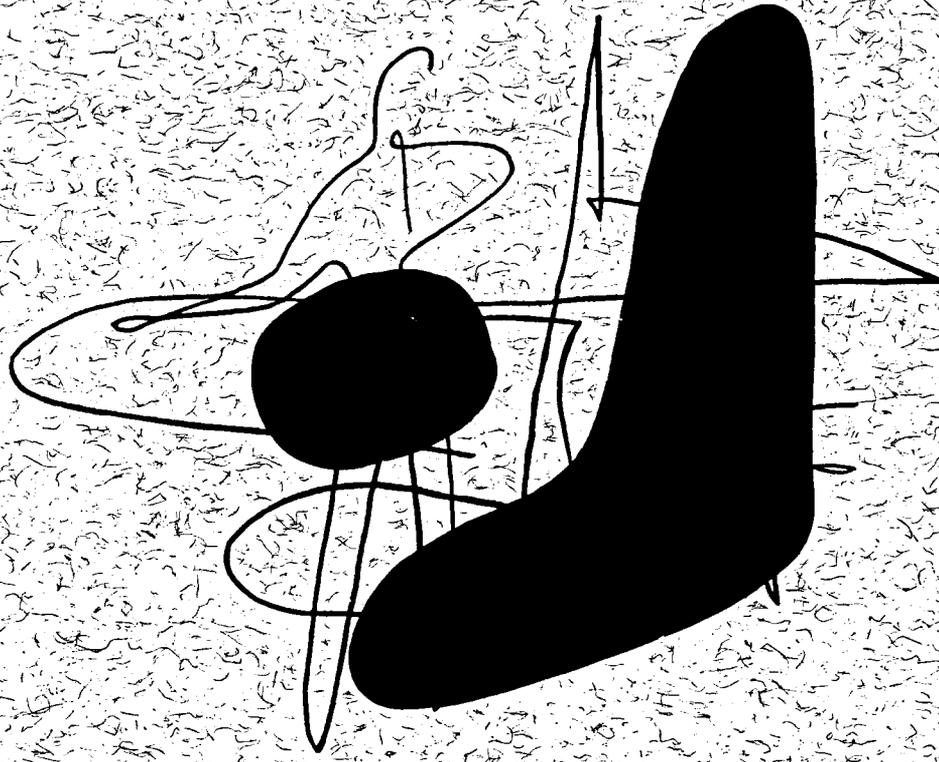


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NCJ001203



A training film
for parole agents'
on decision
making.

C R I S I S

by

Stephen White

A TRAINING FILM FOR PAROLE AGENTS

ON

DECISION MAKING

Produced in cooperation with the Parole and Community
Services Division, California Department of Corrections.

Under a Grant from the Office of Law Enforcement
Assistance, U. S. Department of Justice.

Production supervised by John W. Young, Head of the
Motion Picture Division, Theater Arts Department,
University of California at Los Angeles, California.

TO THE TRAINING OFFICER:

This is a film designed specifically for training and discussion. We are concerned here with attitudes and judgments, both of which are at the heart of parole agent and client relationships. We see what can happen when attitudes are not understood or handled properly, and how this can affect the vital business of making a good decision.

The film comes to grips with a series of typical, difficult problems. At the end of each dramatic episode, the film freezes. This is a signal to stop the film, turn up the lights, and start the discussion of what has just been seen. It means that an open discussion can take place immediately, while the problem is still fresh in the minds of the group.

The leading character in this film is a real-life parole agent. He portrays how an agent, though sincere and hardworking and believing he is doing a good job, can actually miss the boat very badly. In the film, his role is to help everyone realize how important an agent's own attitudes can be. In solving the problems of his parolees he must realize how his own feelings, his own hang-ups can powerfully affect the parolee's attitudes and chances of making it in the community.

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AFTER FIRST FILM STOP
(Initial Interview)

(NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

This is really an interview that doesn't "work." It sets a poor tone that will carry on into the future and make the agent's job harder.

The parolee has come to the office with the problem of having lost his job -- and he is apparently very hostile and accusing. But the agent shows a great lack of awareness. He is slow in picking up the indications of the parolee's attitudes. Most important of all, and most damaging, is the agent's own attitude. He came to work upset, dissatisfied, and underneath there lurks a feeling of hostility that affects his ability to act with compassion and intelligence.)

FOR DISCUSSION:

In stimulating discussion in the group, you may find it sufficient to offer a couple of questions like:

How do you feel about what you've just seen? Or --

What do you think about this interview -- what does it mean to you?

It is possible that you may want to throw a few questions into the hopper, as the discussion continues. They may or may not be necessary, depending on how aware any given group may be of the subtleties involved. But here are some suggestions:

How does the agent's attitude affect the parolee?

What is really the purpose of the initial interview? And what are some of the ways an agent can meet its main objective?

How do you feel about reading the conditions of parole right away?

Why is the parolee so angry? Is race an issue -- really the issue?

How would you handle the accusation of being prejudiced?

Was this agent really sensitive to the true attitude of the parolee? What did he do to increase or decrease the hostility? What should he have done?

AFTER SECOND STOP
(Mother's Tirade)

(NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

This is a pretty recognizable situation. We have an irate citizen, with a large investment, economic as well as emotional. But the key to the problem here is the agent's own emotional response. He's so busy handling his own emotional hang-ups -- he wants no conflicts, no emotions; he doesn't even want to see the woman. She threatens him, and he threatens her back. Never once does he concentrate on helping her.

Our chief concern, in showing this film, is to awaken the parole agent's own sense of awareness, his recognition of the part played by his own emotions and attitudes.)

FOR DISCUSSION:

You may find it sufficient to begin the discussion with the simple questions:

How do you feel about this scene?

Or, what's really going on here?

Other questions, leading into more specifics, may be:

How would you handle this kind of hostility?

How does the agent's own hostility affect the handling of the mother?

How would you change the focus of the mother's attitude?
How divert her hostility?

What is truly bothering this mother? How can you best help her as well as yourself in this rough situation?

AFTER THIRD STOP
(Confrontation between Policeman & Mother)

(NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

This agent has allowed himself to be caught in one of the worst kinds of dilemma. He has two people in his office who should not be there together. He has allowed the woman and the policeman to take over his role, when he should be the one who is handling the situation with full command.

The impact of the total film is beginning to grow, as we see the agent becoming more and more the victim of his own emotional problems and inability to cope with a difficult situation.)

FOR DISCUSSION:

Again, the first question is a general one of feeling:

How do you react to this scene?

How do you feel about the Parole Agent, in this situation?

Others, suggested:

How should the agent deal with this conflict?

How would you handle the situation?

In what way is this agent contributing to his own dilemma?

How do you feel about the way the agent allows the police officer to identify with him in a "common cause?" Does this add to or eliminate the conflict?

AFTER FOURTH STOP

(Addict's Cop-out)

(NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

Once again the agent is in a bad dilemma, through his own actions. Obviously, he has tried to play the good guy, the parent, right from the initial interview. Remember, in the film's initial interview, how the agent began by trying to be the "good guy?" By over-committing himself this time, he is unable to face the situation honestly. He really doesn't know what to do. This is an extremely sensitive area of a parole agent's work -- how to keep from getting trapped.)

FOR DISCUSSION:

Remember the scene in the coffee shop? It might be valuable to recall it to the group and wonder why the agent is so compulsive about being on the move, on getting to the next client's problem without taking time to relax like the other men . . .

Suggested questions:

Do you think this agent has a good relationship with the parolee?

How is he really relating to the man?

How do you think the agent sees himself?

How do you see him?

How would you handle this problem?

AFTER FIFTH STOP
(Husband-Wife Conflict)

NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

The film continues to add up. The agent is constantly contributing to his own problems. He creates his own dilemmas and is caught in them. It's true any agent might find himself in such a situation. But it becomes important to anticipate trouble and forestall it as much as possible. In this case, the agent could have been more alert to the husband's return; he should have handled it quickly and properly.)

FOR DISCUSSION:

The first important series of questions, then, is:

How do you feel the agent is handling this domestic "beef?"

Is he taking sides?

More important, why is he really taking sides?

As a matter of policy, how could he have avoided being physically caught in the middle?

AT CONCLUSION OF FILM

(NOTE TO TRAINING OFFICER:

The vignettes at the end, as the agent wends his way homeward, seem to indicate that all the people might have been using him to their own purposes. The unemployed parolee, the mother, the policeman, the addict, the wife -- each may have involved him in his dilemma. Because of the agent's lack of sensitivity and awareness, he failed to react and come to grips with the true problems. If he'd been more perceptive, he would have been able to seek out the underlying motives and handle the situations more skillfully.

An agent has to have an understanding of how people feel, how they operate in the light of their own inner needs, not always what they reveal to him.)