

# EXECUTIVE COACHING...FOR TRAFFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

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## ABSTRACT

Minister Omar in 2003 indicated that: "traffic enforcement is a main concern of traffic management due to a lack of and breakdown in discipline on South Africa roads." This statement was supported in the Road to Safety Strategy 2001-2005, where law enforcement featured in two of the four thematic areas.

In the future, one can expect more volumes of vehicles and pedestrians, more elderly drivers, a new generation of young drivers and more problems, frustrations and antisocial behaviour on South African roads. Traffic law enforcers are trained to enforce traffic law and legislation, as well as, to educate the public in terms of road safety. Due to a number of reasons, traffic (and other law enforcement agents) are not always viewed in a favourable light. Traffic law enforcement officials are victims of verbal and physical abuse, traumatised by scenes of violence on the road, understaffed with little resources to do their work. An additional approach to traditional traffic law enforcement training should be considered.

According to the White Paper on Transport Policy 1996, "enhancement of road user knowledge, skills and attitudes" is seen as a functional area of road traffic management" and enhancement of these qualities can only be improved if the "educators" understand their "learners". Law enforcement has in the last few years moved away from reactive to proactive activities. Despite the move to more proactive policing and deliberate efforts to enhance the public image of law enforcement officials, law enforcement is still seen as a paramilitary organisation, believed to operate with rigid control and command structures, offering little flexibility for change. Although this discipline is essential in addressing the lawlessness on the road, traffic law enforcement is still essentially a "people's business". People with all their flaws are what the law enforcement profession have to deal with and it is therefore critical that law enforcement officials should have the skills to deal fairly, effectively and objectively with road users in a changing South Africa. Although soft skills might form a small part of the traffic law enforcement curriculum, traffic law enforcement training should consider the value that subjects dedicated to understanding the self, emotions and behaviour could add to the law enforcement profession. It is therefore of paramount importance that law enforcement officials are encouraged to engage in personal and skill development activities that would address and enhance inter-and intra personal skills, stress management, the ability to cope with cultural, organisational and social change, as well as, to be able to live a balanced, happy life despite the taxing demands of their work.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traffic law enforcement forms part of the criminal justice system in South Africa. The South African Traffic Law Enforcement fraternity seems to be fragmented with traffic law enforcement functions executed at provincial and municipal or local level. No National Traffic Law Enforcement Agency exists. Human resources are scarce and deployment of traffic officers is done in priority areas for major concerns.

Minister Omar in 2003 indicated that: "traffic enforcement is a main concern of traffic management due to a lack of and breakdown in discipline on South African roads." This statement was supported in the Road to Safety Strategy 2001-2005, where law enforcement is featured in two of the four thematic areas. In future, one can expect more volumes of vehicles and pedestrians, more elderly drivers, a new generation of young drivers and more problems, frustrations and antisocial behaviour on South African roads.

Mofamere (2003) in a paper dedicated to the South African Police Force indicated that all components of the criminal justice system share common goals such as that they collectively exist to protect society, to maintain order and to prevent crime. In this regard, traffic law enforcers play a vital role in South African society. Traffic law enforcers are responsible for reducing traffic offences, to apprehend and prosecute traffic offenders, to protect the public where the road is concerned, as well as, to regulate traffic and execute administrative, law enforcement and educational duties with regard to traffic and the road.

Sub-culture refers to a pattern of acquired qualities and customs that are peculiar to given groups within an embracing culture. Sub-culture is often referred to as a culture that owes its existence to the fact that the members work and live, (or both), together (Mofamere: 2003). Due to a number of reasons the sub-culture of traffic (and other law enforcement agents) is not always viewed in a favourable light. Media reports and newspaper articles give evidence of a total disregard for law enforcement and a lack of respect for law enforcement officials. More importantly is the fact that traffic law enforcement officials are often victims of verbal and physical abuse, traumatised by scenes of violence on the road, understaffed with little resources to do their work.

Law enforcement has in the last few years moved away from reactive to proactive activities. Despite the move to more proactive policing and deliberate efforts to enhance the public image of law enforcement officials, law enforcement is still seen as a paramilitary organisation, believed to operate with rigid control and command structures, offering little flexibility for change. Although this discipline is essential in addressing the lawlessness on the road, traffic law enforcement is still essentially a "people's business". People with all their flaws are what the law enforcement profession have to deal with and it is therefore critical that law enforcement officials should have the skills to deal fairly, effectively and objectively with road users in a changing South Africa.

Law enforcement officials undergo training at various traffic colleges throughout the country. This training takes approximately 6-12 months and deals with various disciplines mostly concerned with road rules and regulations. Soft skills training such as fatigue and stress management might form a small part of the traffic law enforcement curriculum. Traffic law enforcement training providers should consider the value that subjects, courses and workshops dedicated to understanding the self, emotions and behaviour could add to the law enforcement profession.

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and enhancement of these qualities can only be improved if the “educators” understand their “learners”. It is therefore of paramount importance that law enforcement officials are encouraged to engage in personal and skill development activities that would address and enhance inter-and intra personal skills, stress management, the ability to cope with cultural, organisational and social change, as well as, to be able to live a balanced, happy life despite the taxing demands of their work.

## **2. FEELING AND THINKING MATTERS**

Ancient Egyptians believed the heart was the centre of intelligence. They thought so little of the brain that during mummification, they removed the brain entirely from the body (EQ quotations from around the world: 5 December 2005).

Classic intelligence or IQ refers in general to analytical skills, problem solving, spatial orientation and language skills (Merlevede, Bridoux, Van Damme: 2004). It is argued (Mehnert: 2004), that although IQ is important in all domains of life, it is not only a matter of developing the cognitive power to succeed. Emotions play a very distinct and important role in human performance that is distinct and separate from cognitive performance. What is more, IQ stays the same while Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a skill that any human being can develop.

Schutte and Malouff (1999) define intrapersonal intelligence as the ability to know one’s own emotions. The core of this ability entails that a person is able to recognise and detect his own emotions and make rational decisions based on these complex set of emotions and feelings. Understanding the self or mastering intrapersonal skills is important in understanding the emotions, feelings and needs of other people.

Interpersonal skills (Schutte and Malouff, 1999), refers to the ability to detect and recognize different emotions in other people, and deal effectively with them. This enables the person to productively do business, manage or educate the other person due to an understanding of what and how the other person is experiencing at a given moment and in specific situations. According to research three categories of adaptive abilities of emotional intelligence exists. Firstly, the appraisal and expression of emotion; secondly, the regulation of emotion; and thirdly the utilization of emotion in solving problems and making decisions. These skills are not reserved for business and corporate environments and I would like to argue that skills are a necessity within any career where you have to deal with people. Collectively these skills, together with adaptability, stress management and general mood are called Emotional Intelligence or EQ. Emotional intelligence and the related concepts can be applied in personal and professional settings. EQ enhances a person’s ability to see the whole instead of fragments of the whole.

Traffic officers acquire their law enforcement skills through training. Often it seems that the officer might not be able to apply his training in difficult or challenging situations. These results in a request for more training, more resources or a collapse in law enforcement service levels due to, for example, disputes between local and provincial traffic officials on issues such as jurisdiction. In other words, once a traffic official has received training, passed their exams/showed their law enforcement skills, it is unlikely that more “drill” and training exercises would make much of a difference. Once this behavioural set has been acquired, it is possible that the barriers to high performance reside in some other form of personal development. Most likely it would lie within the development of the emotional quotient of the official.

### **3. THE VALUE OF EQ WITHIN THE TRAFFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT DOMAIN**

Throughout the world more corporations, businesses and individuals are seeking to develop their EQ edge. The paradigm shift from individuals making decisions based on logic, facts and reasoning is changing to individuals balancing emotion and logic to make decision as executives, managers and employees. Previously emotions were excluded from important decisions and situations because “you think with your head and not your heart”. Emotions always influence actions and failure to notice the impact that these emotions have on actions is where the problem lies. Especially where there is failure to apply these skills and knowledge under stress provoking and challenging situations.

Traffic law enforcement officials duties include physical and verbal abuse by members of the public, they encounter and clean-up horrific accident scenes and stabilize life threatening situations, prevent road rage, accidents, speeding, overloading, public transport problems, crime, set up and man road blocks, work overtime with little resources, appear in court (just to have the case thrown out due to insufficient evidence) and probably little or no prospect of promotion, be a considerate colleague, and still go home to be a decent, considerate spouse and parent (Chapman and Clarke: 2003). It is very difficult to deal with this kind of taxing demands and stay positive if one does not have the skills to handle all the demands of the work. The opportunity for further development should be a part of and offered as a choice in each and every official’s career.

### **4. PLATFORM FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE LAW ENFORCEMENT DOMAIN**

#### 4.1 Personal competence or intrapersonal awareness

Emotional self-awareness requires being aware of one’s emotions and their effects at all times. Traffic officials need to know which emotions they are feeling, they need to realize the link between what they think, feel and do, as well as, know how their feelings affect their performance. Traffic officials for example have to uphold an image of justice and therefore by accepting bribes this only results in the traffic official causing the public to loose more faith in their ability to uphold law and order.

Accurate self-assessment entails the law enforcer knowing his own strengths and weaknesses, learning from experiences, giving objective feedback to superiors and showing a sense of humour and insight into themselves. By knowing one’s own strengths and weaknesses that person is then able to draw on things that he does well and to delegate or ask that tasks that he cannot do so well, be transferred to someone else. Resources and time will therefore be better allocated and used.

Self-confidence refers to doing your work well and being proud of what you do. Especially in the traffic law enforcement field, officials have to point out the mistakes and errors of road users. This corrective action needs to be done with self-confidence and the moral justification that the officer is upholding the law. With self-confidence the official will be able to make sound decisions despite uncertainties.

Self-control refers to managing impulsive feelings such as anger. Law enforcement work is probably one of the most stressful and emotionally charged working environments (Chapman and Clarke: 2003). By managing emotions and exercising self-control it is possible to stay focused and think clearly even in difficult circumstances.

Trustworthiness and conscientiousness is part of every law enforcement officials training. “Law enforcers have to have the moral high ground in order to uphold the law.”(John

Schnell, December 2005). Law enforcers have to act ethically, build and maintain the public's trust, be able to admit their own mistakes and take tough principled stands even if that means that they might become unpopular. They are accountable for their actions, work individually, as well as, collectively to reach a common goal such as reducing the carnage on South African Roads and changing road user behaviour.

Adaptability is a very important skill in a multi-cultural setting such as South Africa. It is therefore important that traffic officials are skilled in adapting to new circumstances and working environments. Adaptability not only makes it easier to understand other people who work with you, culture and view points, but also addresses the approach to enforcing law and educating the ever changing road user population.

Self-motivation is an important area for personal development. Traffic law enforcers are serving the public, upholding the law and need to constantly strive for excellence whether within their Province, Municipality or Department.

#### 4.2 Social competence or interpersonal skills

Leadership and development of others includes the ability to see what other employees need. Leadership would for example be the ability to raise the morale within a traffic department, articulate and arouse enthusiasm for official's work, leading by example and guiding performance of officials, whilst still holding them accountable for their actions.

Communication is a skill that enables a person to listen, to send clear messages and deal effectively with difficult situations because the official has the ability to understand the other person's point of view. This skill is especially important when dealing with accident victims, bereaved families, or the public in general.

Conflict management is needed along with empathy and self-control to deal with explosive tempers, and to diffuse situations that could erupt. Traffic officials should be able to detect and identify possible conflict and bring it out into the open to deal with the issues in a civilised and respectful manner.

Lastly, traffic officials need to build bonds and encourage collaboration and co-operation with other government departments. In view of the little resources that they have they should seek to cultivate and maintain relationships with departments and people who will be able to assist them when needed. These relationships should be mutually beneficial. By including other stakeholders in the planning and information sharing processes traffic officials will be able to plan more effectively, distribute their time and resources more productively.

Traffic law enforcement officers play a key role in encouraging improved road user behaviour. Training and education with regard to inter- and intra personal skills could assist law enforcement officials to better understand themselves as well as the general public whom they serve.

In order for traffic and other South African law enforcers to be prepared and ready for future personal as well as work-related challenges, education and training of these law enforcers should focus on developing multiple skills that will enable them to creatively deal with the issues such as the lack of equipment, human resources and difficult people on the road.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that traffic officials like medical practitioners and lawyers should engage on continuous personal development initiatives that include areas such as self-awareness, management of emotions, self-motivation and management of interpersonal relations. Not only will these personal development fields contribute to personal development but also to better decision-making, better use of already scarce human and financial resources, as well as, maintain a healthy public image.

Better self-management will contribute to a more balanced lifestyle and will address issues such as better time and stress management. It will contribute to being an optimistic, motivated and happy person not only at work but also at home. Management of interpersonal relationships is crucial within the multi-cultural setting in which law enforcers operate and maintaining good relationships and partnerships with other government department, as well as, between traffic law officials on local and provincial level, can only be beneficial.

***“Man’s most important task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality.”***

***-Erich Fromm-***

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