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Legendary police trainers Gordon Graham and Ed Nowicki talk before Gordon's presentation at the 2007 ILEETA training conference in Wheeling, IL. (Photo by Tim Dees)

Corps have been a part of me ever since and have influenced every corner of my professional and personal life. From tribal initiations to college graduations, societies and cultures have found ways to "pass the torch" from one generation to the next. In each case, the "pointy tip of the spear" is the instructor who shares knowledge and understanding with the uninitiated. Henry Adams once said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Nowhere is this more true than in the training of our law enforcement professionals. Why, then, as we pass the torch from one generation to the next, should we do so as if life and liberty does not depend on it? The fact of the matter is, the life and liberty of our citizens does depend on how well we guard the gates to our profession, and how well we guide each other through those hallowed gates.

In order to be worthy keepers of the badge, and the sacred trust that is affixed to anyone who is sworn to uphold our Constitution, we must turn our attentions to that gatekeeper who is the law enforcement instructor. First, we need to address the questions as to how we select and choose to retain the instructors. Second, we will look at what we are doing, and what we should be doing to develop our instructors. Finally, how can we evaluate our instructors in such a manner that we provide a foundation for both quality control and instructor development? As we look in the mirror together, we will take a moment to focus on the ethical issues we face as law enforcement instructors. Quite like those long marches in the Marines, our journey begins with the first step.

Instructor Selection and Retention

Passing the Torch

The selection, development, and evaluation of law enforcement instructors

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It was February of 1980. I found myself at Parris Island enduring the transformational experience that is marine boot camp. Over the coming three months, four drill instructors and many other marines would teach me through words and deeds, what it meant to earn the title United States Marine. The lessons I learned in the

In the current military model, only the best soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are selected to train incoming recruits or seasoned veterans alike. In law enforcement training, this is not always the case. Too many times, we have all seen instances where the officer chosen to teach at the academy was selected randomly by a chief executive or worse, as a way to get him or her off the street. Just as frequently, Joe the Instructor has been kept on the training staff because he has been there a long time and it is just easier to ignore the fact that Joe should not be teaching. In some cases, the problem is that Joe the adjunct instructor is only teaching because it was between teaching at the academy, and directing traffic for extra money and Joe never liked standing in the hot sun. The role and responsibilities of law enforcement training are just too important for such a cavalier attitude.

The first criterion that we need to apply is that of *training and education*. In most states, there is some requirement to complete a basic instructor certification. Here in Texas, this includes a 40-hour course that addresses lesson plan development, instructional techniques, and an introduction to adult learning theory. At a minimum, each training provider should require such a basic certification level. Furthermore, advanced certifications need to be achieved for those instructors who are charge with teaching high risk, high liability areas such as firearms, driving, defensive tactics, and anyone leading reality based training.

There has been a long running debate between law enforcement professionals about the value of *higher education*. When teaching new cadets, I always emphasized the importance of seeking to have as many "tools in the toolbox" as practical. The piece of paper that many consider the culmination of a college degree program does not make anyone a better peace officer. As in all great journeys, it is in the process of earning a college degree that the individual learns valuable lessons about the world, and about themselves. In the process of earning a college degree, the peace officer may gain greater understanding and abilities in such areas as communication skills, time management skills, conflict resolution, critical thinking and problem solving, and leadership. This, coupled with increased exposure to other people who are not law enforcement officers, can be invaluable if approached with an open "learner's mind." Every day, peace officers use these skills and abilities in the line of duty—if they have them. The completion of a degree of higher education from an accredited institution should be a criterion of consideration when we choose individuals who are intended to be role models for the law enforcement profession.

While we are considering the value of higher education, we need to take a look at something that is often overlooked in education and training environments. The question here is does the prospective instructor have the *ability* to teach. We have all experienced the teacher who skips steps in the math equation because it seems so easy to them. They may be the best mathematicians or chemists in the country, but that does not mean that they have the ability to teach. Teaching requires that the instructor be able to approach the course from the perspective of the learner. To this end, each instructor applicant should be required to demonstrate his or her teaching ability during the hiring process. A 15-minute presentation along with the accompanying lesson plan and PowerPoint or other audiovisual program will give the screening team a point of reference as to the abilities of the applicant. Future performance evaluations will provide on going feedback for the instructor and the training coordinator.

It is very important that the instructor applicant have the prerequisite *experience* for the position for which he or she is applying. At a minimum, they should be experienced peace officers with several years of working in the field. Additionally, each instructor needs to

have actual experience in the area they are intending to instruct. For example, peace officers who are teaching criminal investigations should have a recent background in this area of police work. Too often, it is believed that any peace officer who has completed a basic instructor course is therefore qualified to teach anything. This is simply not the case.

The final criterion that should be considered when screening or deciding to retain an instructor is that of *attitude and inclination*. We have all seen the signs up on office walls that proclaim, "Attitude is everything." Well, those signs are largely right on target. I just ran my first marathon. It was one of the most painful and rewarding experiences of my life. Let me tell you, no one could ever make me do that, I had to want to do it. The same holds true with the "calling" of teacher. It is important that each training coordinator ask and answer the question of what is the instructor's primary motivation. If the primary motivation is due to the instructor's love of teaching and respect for our profession, you have someone to hold onto and develop. If the primary goal of the peace officer is extra cash, they need to go direct traffic at the county fair.

Instructor development

Once we select and hire or assign the instructor, what do we do with them? The answer to this question should be, "we invest in them." The first part of this investment in our instructors should be the obvious step of providing valid, effective, and ongoing training opportunities. Training for instructors must hold true to the same guidelines as that which they are to provide to the cadets and in-service students. Primarily, the focus must be on learning that has real world value. Training contact hours mean very little except to bureaucrats and bean counters. Instructor development training must be based on an analysis of the job requirements.

One of the most neglected areas of instructor development is that of developing a greater variety of *instructional techniques*. Included in this training should be a on-going and in-depth look at *adult learning theory*. Understanding how adults learn can provide instructors with a greater ability to create a lesson and learning environment that will ultimately be more successful. Furthermore, a greater understanding of the socio-cultural factors that influence training effectiveness is a valuable tool for any serious teacher. For example, understanding the difference in the learning needs of young officers who have grown up in the age of computers, versus seasoned officers whose first duty weapon was a revolver. Generational gaps do exist and they affect how each group learns.

Instructor development should also include training on *current and emerging technologies*. In a very short time span, we have moved from chalkboard to white board to Smart Board. We have also progressed from typewriter to computer with PowerPoint to teleconferencing and on-line e-learning technologies. Each of these technologies is an important piece of the learning puzzle. Again, generational gaps can be addressed by providing training and experience for the instructors that is self paced and non-threatening.

The final instructor development function to be addressed is that of performance assessment. The kind of assessment that is being focused on in this instance is "formative evaluation." Formative evaluation is intended to help the instructor and the training coordinator to see where strengths and areas for growth exists. This type of evaluative, feedback process requires that high-trust; high-integrity relationships are developed between each instructor and the training coordinator.

Instructor Evaluation

Instructor effectiveness can be evaluated in several ways. Each process used in evaluating instructor effectiveness should be seen as a part of the whole picture, but not as the whole

picture unto itself. The first three methods of instructor evaluation consist of the subjective observations of the training participants, the instructor, and the training coordinator. Each evaluation document should as much as possible mirror the other two. In this way, they can be compared and contrasted in order to gain a more accurate picture of instructor performance.

Participant evaluations should be administered in a non-threatening, anonymous environment. In the best of worlds, participant evaluations are not given directly to the instructor, but rather are screened by the training coordinator and presented to the instructor as non-threatening, formative data. In this way, the student is more likely to provide honest feedback and the instructor is more likely to be open to learning and development.

The instructor self-evaluation allows each instructor to understand the expectations and goals of the training process. Furthermore, self-evaluation allows the instructor to make observations about the perceived effectiveness of their training efforts. Finally, it acts as the starting point for developmental communications between the instructor and the training coordinator.

Any supervisory evaluations must include actual classroom observations made by the training coordinator or his/her designee. In order to be effective, this process requires the development of an open, honest, non-threatening, and trusting professional relationship between the training coordinator and each instructor. This takes work and time. All three evaluations tools need to mirror each other. Each document should cover the five stages of lesson plan development, as well as the preparation process.

When evaluating the preparation process, several important criteria need to be addressed. The first of these criteria is lesson plan development. When evaluating lesson plan development, the evaluation tool or test used by the instructor must be considered. The lesson plan itself should address the introduction, presentation, application, summary, and evaluation phases of the training program. The evaluation tool or test must be reviewed for validity, clarity, and effectiveness. In this case, effectiveness means "how well do the results of the test reflect student understanding of the material?" In the case of skills testing, effectiveness is reflected by the degree of success students experience in the application of learned skills.

When evaluating the presentation, another set of criteria needs to be addressed. The first of these criteria should address the manner in which the instructor presents him/herself. Does the instructor, speak in a clear, distinct, and understandable manner, make eye contact, dress appropriately, maintain a professional, casual, learning environment that encourages participation, and demonstrate positive non-verbal behavior? Does the instructor manage time effectively and stay on topic? This same evaluative section should address the instructor's ability to use effective visual aids and examples, and provide emphasis of key points that reinforce learning. Does the instructor demonstrate the ability to motivate the learners and communicate the relevance of the topic to their real life work experience? Finally, does the instructor work effectively with co-instructors as applicable? This is an often overlooked but vital issue in instructor effectiveness. We have all seen the situation where one "superstar" on the team poisons the atmosphere and thus tears down organizational effectiveness.

In my experience, the most overlooked area of law enforcement training that is cognitive in nature is the application phase. In skills-based, psychomotor training such as defensive tactics, driving, or firearms, application is a great deal of the actual training. During live,

classroom or e-training, the application phase is often passed over. If the learner cannot apply the knowledge or skill, what is the point of the training? When evaluating the instructor's performance in the application phase of training, ask if the instructor:

- Demonstrates flexibility and adaptability in presentation style and course pacing.
- Uses participant expertise as a resource for learning.
- Encourages and responds appropriately to participant questions.
- Uses probing open ended questions to emphasize key points.
- Encourages team experiential assignments, role-play, fish-bowl exercises or other means to demonstrate the learner's ability to apply knowledge and skills.
- Intervenes appropriately, when participant dynamics become negative or exclusive.

The final area to be addressed as part of the evaluation of the instructor's presentation skills is the summary . It is important to note the instructor's ability to review the objectives and main points of the course. An atmosphere that promotes questions and answers as well as feedback should be evident during the summary phase. The passion that the instructor has for what is being taught should translate into some motivational interaction as the course concludes. Why should the student care? How does it apply to the "real world" of law enforcement?

"Adult education is a social and moral activity. By being involved in the provision of formal learning, we are engaged in bringing about change." -- Sharon Merriam

I remember driving through the West African rainforest back in 1984. As a Marine sergeant, I was a member of a diplomatic protection unit and as such often traveled with diplomats, military leaders, and the occasional spook. We often were made to travel unarmed, yet were charged with keeping people alive in parts of the world where life was cheap. As our embassy vehicle crested a hill, we suddenly found our path being blocked by the child soldiers that make up the "grunts" of the national police force. These encounters were always the same; you knew that everything could "go south" very quickly, and that it was your job to see that they did not. The solution to the problem was also always the same; "to whom do I give the *cadeaux* (gift, i.e. bribe)?" It was commonplace in that country for the police to use their duty firearms to commit robberies.

In the United States, the police are still more often the "good guys" than not. As in all cultures, leadership and training set the tone. American law enforcement officers are the only people in this country who can legally take away the life and liberty of its citizens. This, coupled with the inherent dangers of law enforcement, make it imperative that we ensure that law enforcement training is valid, consistent, effective, and ethical.

Steve Ramirez has served in the field of law enforcement for over 27 years. Steve began his career by serving five years in the United State Marine Corps in the occupation of law enforcement and the military specialty of dignitary and diplomatic security. During this time he protected dignitaries, heads of state, and military leaders in Europe and Africa. Steve is a certified peace officer in four states and a Master Texas Peace Officer. He has worked his way up the ranks from patrol officer, to investigator, investigator sergeant, patrol sergeant, commander, and chief of police, a position which he held for approximately ten years. Mr. Ramirez has also served five years as the Alamo Area Criminal Justice Director, leading the Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy. He holds a master's degree in human resource development/training, and has completed post graduate studies in adult education. Steve is a published author, and has presented nationally on the topics of:

leadership, organizational development and design, ethics and police culture, adult education and training, self-directed work team development, training responses to terrorism, and special events security operations. Mr. Ramirez is currently the senior consultant of Lighthouse Training & Consulting, which provides organizational and human resource development services to criminal justice agencies.

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