

# MANAGING TRAINING: Recapturing Lost Opportunities

By

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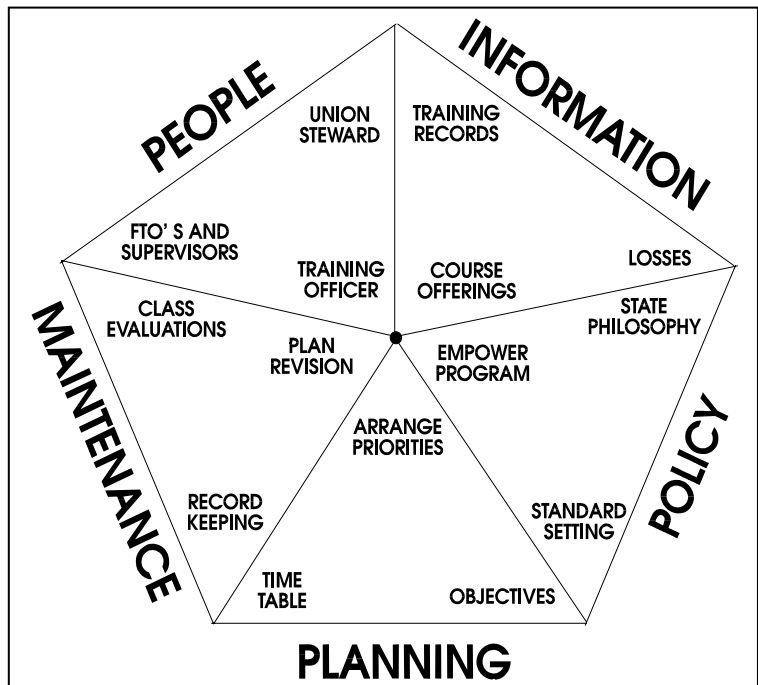
Quality in-service training is what allows most police officers to function safely and effectively. In short, training provides an opportunity for a department to grow and excel. It goes without saying that anything that will safely enhance effectiveness is a resource to be nurtured and exploited. Yet the law enforcement profession continues to lose training opportunities on an almost daily basis.

The training function has been routinely relegated to a secondary role in many police agencies. The daily press of more urgent matters tends to gobble resources and squander work hours until very little of anything is left to fulfill the need for training and human resource development.

Of course, police officers are employed to protect lives and property, not to sit in class—both the public and government officials (and therefore the Chief or Sheriff) see more cops on the street as the answer to society's security problems. When push comes to shove, resources have

to be allocated to covering patrol shifts and doing follow-up investigations, because police are expected to prevent and/or solve as much crime as possible in order to keep society and its citizens safe.

Historically, this has been the public's primary expectation regarding their police agencies, and, by and large, law enforcement officers have risen to the challenge. But



those expectations are changing, and professional law enforcement has to begin changing as well.

## THE COSTS OF CRISIS

While we may be holding the line on crime (an issue which many would choose to debate), we are losing the battle of the budget. We are spending huge amounts of both money and goodwill as a result of incidents involving alleged excessive force, improper motor vehicle operation and false arrest. It has been estimated that forty cents of every liability dollar paid out by communities goes to cover jury awards, settlements and legal fees related to police claims. Forty percent! And these are only the direct, liability related costs.

How does one calculate the value of eroded public confidence in law enforcement? When we make a big splash in the media through some inappropriate act or ill-conceived policy, the ripples are felt for years. Over time, reduced public confidence in and respect for the law enforcement profession leads to tighter budgets, reductions in resources, and unemployed Chiefs and Sheriffs. Our partnership with the community breaks down, and the crooks very ably take advantage of a bad situation.

Perhaps most importantly, our police officers and deputies suffer. They are subjected to ridicule and suspicion on the street, and in the press. This negative environment cannot help but have a significant impact on morale, and therefore performance. Over time, increased job-related stress can lead to serious chronic health problems, excessive sick leave, and early retirements, thus robbing us of our most experienced people.

Officers are frequently injured in motor vehicle and use of force incidents. Worker's compensation insurers report that the most common situation leading to officer injury is a resisted arrest. Additionally, many officers are injured annually as a result of motor vehicle accidents.

So, what can we do about it? We can start fighting the right battle. We can recognize that well trained, disciplined officers will cost us less in the long run than partially trained, directionless ones. **We can realign our priorities, with training at the very top of the list.**

## PLANNING CHANGE

We must get ahead of the curve, and reduce our tendency to think reactively. We must be strategic thinkers rather than crisis managers. The answer lies in strategic management of the training process and the pragmatic application of a training plan.

When a department outlines its approach to training management, five key aspects should be included:

- People - Delegation & involvement
- Information - Collection & analysis
- Policy Development
- Strategic Planning
- Program Maintenance

These key program aspects, and all of their incorporated elements, interact to form a training management system that will allow a Chief or Sheriff to think strategically while allocating resources to training.

### **People Power - Delegate, Don't Dictate**

One reason that police managers frequently find themselves shifting into "crisis management mode" is their tendency to try to do too much. The majority of police agencies in the United States have fewer than fifteen officers. In this environment, the Chief spends a great deal of time patrolling and answering calls, as well as managing daily business. There simply isn't time to devote to research and development of a training program.

Responsibility for the training program should be delegated to a designated training officer. With the limited opportunities for advancement in a small agency, most departments have at least one officer interested in assuming these duties. Ideally, the training assignment would be a full time job, but this will not normally be possible. Generally, the training officer will continue to perform other routine duties.

Another problem that frequently manifests itself where training is concerned is resistance from the ranks. Even the best training program can falter if officers are disinterested or hostile. One useful method for dealing with this possibility is the formation of a training committee, charged with the responsibility for development of new training ideas and plans. Union representatives and supervisory personnel should be invited to join this committee, as support from these individuals can greatly enhance acceptance of the training program. The rank and file of the department will feel some ownership of the training program

### **Information - From Here to There**

When getting directions to any destination, you have to know where you are to begin with. Many departments attempt to make decisions regarding training with little or no information.

There are at least three critical types of information that the police manager needs in order to plan for the best utilization of training resources:

- Any existing training records
- Officer injury and liability loss data
- Available training opportunities

TRAINING RECORDS - The first order of business for any department is to gather all existing training records. While some agencies have kept good records, many have not. Officers should be queried regarding any training records they have that the department does not have. Ideally, a computer database should be constructed, using a relational database program. This will enable the easiest and most efficient management of the information once it is collected.

Remember to collect information on all of each officer's training. Include any training that he or she completed before they joined your department. Emphasize specialized training, such as instructor certifications and supervisory/management training. Consider expanding your training records to include college degrees and other professional certifications.

LOSSES and INCIDENTS - In order for training to be truly useful to both the individual officer and to the department, it must be job-related and relevant. An informal review of past incidents will reveal elements of daily operations that have a high potential for officer injury and/or civil liability. These areas should receive a proportionate amount of training resources. Generally, the three areas where police agencies suffer the greatest number of and most costly losses are use of force, operation of motor vehicles, and false arrest.

Remember to track those incidents that don't result in a loss; i.e. successful pursuits, arrests completed without injury, etc. While these incidents didn't lead to injuries or lawsuits, they do indicate activity levels, and such information is critically important to any department's risk management effort.

COURSE OFFERINGS - Because so many agencies are located some distance from training facilities, the police manager must review course offerings several months in advance. This will enable the selection of less costly or more geographically suitable options when selecting training sessions. When a department fails to anticipate its training needs, it is likely to spend more than necessary in travel and accommodation expense, as well as overtime.

In-house training is frequently the most cost-effective strategy for courses that must be taken by all officers on a regular basis, such as defensive tactics or precision driving. This type of training usually requires instructor training and recertification, however, and

instructor courses tend to be longer and more infrequently offered. Advance planning is a must when securing instructor training.

### **Policy Development - Setting Standards**

A department's training policy is arguably the most important document in its policy manual. It is through the functional implementation of the training policy that all other aspects of the department's critical operations are controlled.

While each department's policy will differ, there are three essential elements that should be incorporated into all training policies:

**TRAINING PHILOSOPHY** - The training policy should begin with a statement of the department's position on such issues as professionalism through training, career development and personal growth. This philosophy statement will form the rational basis for the entire program, so it should be thoughtfully developed and carefully written.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARDS** - In the process of administering the program, the police manager will encounter situations where fair and equitable standards are needed. These standards can be developed for such areas as instructor selection, pass/fail criteria, remedial training, FTO program completion, recertification in skill areas, and many others.

The training policy should delineate the process by which these various standards will be developed and maintained.

**PROGRAM EMPOWERMENT** - The training policy will serve as "enabling legislation" for the daily operation of the training program. Such issues as mandatory class attendance, disciplinary procedures and instructor authority should be addressed.

### **The Plan - Thinking Strategically**

The written training plan serves as the program's roadmap, guiding the police manager's allocation of resources toward realization of the department's goals. Everything that we have discussed so far has been geared to one objective—the functional implementation of this written plan.

Development of the plan should begin with the formulation of specific objectives. The police manager will identify the areas of training deemed essential and consistent with the long term goal of safe enhancement of effectiveness.

Once these objectives are defined, training needs should be prioritized. Many factors impact on the priority order of training, and many other training needs will be perceived at this point. The police manager should make every effort to remain focused on the established objectives, especially if resources are scarce.

Lastly, the plan should include a timetable for implementation. The overwhelming shortage of training in many departments (due to department size, limited budgets, or poor training history) indicates a need to plan strategically over a three to five year period. In this manner, portions of the workforce can be platooned annually, lessening the financial burden somewhat.

A final note on planning. Once the plan is developed and implemented, it's likely that situations will arise that necessitate occasional deviations. These should be resisted if possible, and documented when they must occur. An attachment to the plan (in memo form) should indicate the reason for the deviation. In this way, the integrity of the plan can be maintained, and its usefulness as evidence of good faith retained.

### **Maintenance - Avoiding "GIGO"**

Ongoing maintenance of the training program should focus on three central activities: evaluation of classes attended, documentation of training attended, and the periodic adjustment or revision of the training plan.

**CLASS EVALUATIONS** - Because officers attend classes at different locations, it's not possible for the training officer or police manager to personally attend each session for the purpose of evaluating training content, appropriateness or scope. The department should utilize an evaluation form, to be completed by class attendees and returned to the training officer. This will give officers an opportunity to make their feelings known to the department's administration, and will provide a means of checking on the thoroughness and appropriateness of both program content and style. One method of implementation that many departments use successfully is to provide a combination notice of training assignment and evaluation form.

**TRAINING RECORDS** - Once the department's training database is constructed, it should be maintained in as complete and timely a manner as possible. The database should at least include the following:

- Training title
- Training dates
- Number of training hours
- Training location
- Training vendor (if different)

**PLAN REVISION** - Any long-range plan will have to be modified from time to time, based on pressing demands or on new concerns (e.g. the recent push for domestic violence training). As time passes, it will be tempting to deviate farther from the original course laid out in the plan.

It is vitally important that deviations from the original plan be valid, job related, and relevant—and that they be documented. Without this control, the usefulness of the training plan as a management tool and as an evidentiary document becomes highly questionable.

While no plan can be cast in stone, all members of the department should understand the necessity for careful planning accompanied by a commitment to avoid deviation.

Of course, any revisions made should be reviewed by the department's training committee, and by senior management.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Having come full circle in our systems approach to training management, it's time to make a commitment. If we are truly serious about improving the relationship between ourselves and the communities that we serve, and if we really do want to enhance professionalism, then we must act now.

We have an absolute obligation to make every reasonable effort to reduce the number of officer and citizen injuries that result from our activities. As police managers and trainers, the responsibility to think strategically so as to best utilize limited resources falls to no one else.

We can't "make" officers be safe and less liability prone, they must decide to do that on their own. We can, however, manage our training resources and efforts in such a way as to provide them with the information they need, in a positive, reinforcing manner. Most officers will respond favorably to such training, and will identify the personal benefit to be gained by professional application of training information. Those who do not can be dealt with through the agency's normal disciplinary process, with less strife and frustration—due to labor's participation in the management of the training process.

Although implementing a well-rounded training management system from scratch can be time consuming, the initial work is well worth the effort, as ongoing maintenance of the program will be much simpler. When a training management program has been fully implemented, many other administrative tasks are more easily handled, with corresponding savings in time and resources.

Today's police managers and trainers are charged with tremendous responsibility. The safety of society and the financial and professional wellbeing of officers and other employees can be a heavy burden, especially when viewed from the perspective of daily crisis management.

Those managers and trainers that are able to think strategically can lighten their load and, at the same time, create a smoother running, safer, more efficient department, with less liability exposure, increased community support, and enhanced officer morale.



# **SAMPLE POLICY AND PROCEDURES IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

## **PURPOSE**

This policy establishes guidelines, but not limitations for in-service training of the department employees. Employees are continually afforded opportunities to learn, develop and become educated. This is accomplished, in part, by reviewing and discussing the rules, policies, procedures, philosophy, practices of the department and current case law applicable to their performance as employees. The purpose is to assist employees in performing their essential job functions. As an example, employees may be provided briefings, videos, periodicals, magazines, bulletins, newsletters, books or lectures. Training may also include discussion of current events, incident debriefing and public policy issues and performing mechanical and motor skills important to the job.

## **POLICY**

1. Employees of the department will attend training as assigned by (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee.
2. Employees are encouraged to make requests to the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee to attend training that is offered by the various training facilities.
3. Training other than core requirements may be assigned by the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee
4. Employees are required to notify the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee should they be unable to attend training due to a subpoena or hearing notice.
5. Employees who are absent from assigned training shall immediately notify the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee, of the reason for the absence. Employees that are absent without approval are subject to disciplinary action.
6. When possible, employees that are absent from training shall be scheduled for makeup training as soon as possible.
7. Employees who fail to pass required training are subject to further remedial training and possible suspension from duty until the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee is satisfied that a competency skill has been demonstrated.
8. Employees who consistently demonstrate a lack of skill, knowledge or ability in job task performance based on observed behavior or evaluation may be required to enter into a Performance Improvement Plan. Failure to comply with the Performance Improvement Plan may result in disciplinary action.
9. While attending training employees are responsible to adhere to the rules and regulations of the department and shall conduct themselves in an appropriate manner.

10. The rules and procedures of the training facility and directions received by instructors shall be adhered to while in training or at the training facility. Should a conflict arise the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee should be notified as soon as it is practical.
11. Employees attending training while off duty and not assigned by this department shall do so at their own risk and expense. Unless specifically authorized by the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee, department issued equipment or materials shall not be utilized during unassigned, off-duty training.

## **CORE TRAINING**

The following are considered core training areas in which employees must demonstrate the required skills and abilities as outlined by the department for their position. Training in the core areas will be provided on a yearly basis.

The core training areas will be outlined in an annual training plan published before the beginning of each budget year. The plan will outline core training issues and those that are designated by the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee as additional training needs.

- Bloodborne Pathogens
- Defensive Tactics
- Domestic Violence
- Employee Right to Know
- Fire Extinguisher
- First Aid/CPR
- Hazardous Materials Response
- Infectious Diseases
- LEIN Update
- Legal Update
- Use of Force Issues (decision making, restraints, post force monitoring)
- Vehicle Operations
- Weapons (firearms, impact, aerosol and others authorized)

Employees requiring specialized training to meet the knowledge skills and abilities of their job classification shall be provided opportunities to meet those needs.

## **DOCUMENTATION OF TRAINING**

Employees who attend training, attain a designation or license, or earn a degree diploma, shall complete the departments Report of Training form prior to the end of the next scheduled on-duty shift. The report shall be forwarded to the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee through normal channels. A copy of any training certificates license or diplomas shall be attached to the Report of Training form. As soon as possible after the receipt of any certificates, license or diplomas, copies shall be provided to the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee.

Employees may review their own training file by sending a written request to the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee. The file will be kept separated from employee's personnel files. Employees may review their training file during normal department business hours, unless otherwise agreed upon by the (Chief, Director, Sheriff) or his designee.

***While compliance to the loss prevention techniques suggested herein may reduce the likelihood of an incident, it will not eliminate all possibility of an incident.***

***Further, as always, the reader is encouraged to consult with an attorney for specific legal advice.***