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Cover: Processing the millions of travelers who use this Nation's airports requires accurate information and interagency cooperation. See article p. 1. Cover photo and all photos used with this article are courtesy of Regina Kosicki.

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Police Recruits

Training Tomorrow's Workforce

By
GARY M. POST



In the decade of the 90s, two broad, recurring themes will impact on the way police agencies "do business." One theme relates to how departments will manage an ever-increasing volume of information; the other reflects the accelerating rate of change that will become the trademark of the 1990s. While these projected trends have obvious implications for law enforcement agencies in general, nowhere will law enforcement's response to them be more crucial than in the area of police training.

The training function is vital to the effectiveness of every police agency. The primary reason for this

is that training is the vehicle used to impart knowledge and develop skills. In the future, as the increasing volume of information and the accelerated rate of change make police work more complex, the training function will become even more important.

An equally significant, though less obvious, contribution of the training function to organizational effectiveness involves the socialization of new members into the police subculture. Socialization is the process by which new members are introduced to the underlying values and belief systems of the agency.¹ Over the next decade, the socializa-

tion process will grow in importance as police agencies explore innovative ways to interact with the communities they serve.

Therefore, today's police trainers need to reevaluate recruit training programs and instructional techniques to ensure that they provide what recruits need to be effective police officers. However, to understand the strategies required to train tomorrow's officers, it is first necessary to look at traditional police recruit training.

Traditional Recruit Training

Police recruit training for most agencies evolved quite naturally



“**The most effective training will be conducted in an environment that fosters high self-esteem, motivation, and performance.**”

Lieutenant Post is assigned to the Training Division of the Michigan State Police, Lansing, Michigan.

from a military model. Some agencies even trace their beginnings to a “home guard” or “State militia” staffed mainly by military men. In fact, over the years, police agencies actively recruited former military personnel because of the perception that they would “fit” more readily into paramilitary police agencies. Therefore, it is no surprise that police recruit training perpetuated the military training model.

The classic military training model for police recruits is easily recognized by the high levels of nonspecific stress deliberately induced into the program by training officers. Stress in this case is defined as “...the application of pressure on recruits, singularly or in groups, for the sole purpose of generating a response to that pressure.”²

In classic stress training, verbal harassment, criticism, and physical activity used as punishment are commonplace. To a detached observer, an instructor’s interaction with a recruit might be interpreted as negative, intimidating, and demeaning.

The widely accepted theory behind this type of training for police recruits is that application of a high level of stress develops discipline and group cohesiveness. Many would argue that operating under a high level of stress prepares recruits for the situations they will encounter in the “real world” of policing. But, does it?

Training in Transition

Within the past 15 years, many agencies began to question the value of classic stress training. These agencies evaluated their current programs by comparing stress-trained recruits with those who were nonstress trained. As a result, they determined that recruits trained in a nonstress environment “...displayed a higher level of performance proficiency in the field, a higher level of job satisfaction and a higher level of performance acceptability by persons served.”³ In other words, these departments determined that there are numerous adverse consequences associated with stress training.

Consequences of Stress Training

Classic stress training, by design and definition, deliberately undermines the police recruits’ self-esteem through instructor-applied nonspecific stress. A diminished level of self-esteem inevitably results in lower motivation which, in turn, leads to poorer performance. Classic stress training masks this temporarily by using fear as a motivator to improve performance. But, this is a short-term strategy. Once the threat, or fear, is removed, performance deteriorates because the recruits’ self-esteem and motivation remain low.

The stress training model also tends to develop dependent recruits.⁴ Stress training develops recruits who can take orders and who do what they are told. It also tends to produce police officers who are afraid to make decisions, show no initiative, cannot act independently, and who may only perform when they are being watched.

In light of this, departments need to base their police recruit training on sound job analysis to ensure that training strategies and practices produce police officers who can function effectively. Police executives must realize that today’s recruits no longer accept the “just-do-as-I-say” way of thinking as their counterparts did 30 years ago. They have different expectations of their role in the workplace. Those agencies that take a more developmental approach to police training, one which incorporates the principles of adult learning theory, report “...fewer incidents of citizen complaints, fewer internal discipline complaints, and significantly

better academic and proficiency performance levels while in the academy.”⁵

Adult Learning Principles

If the primary objectives of recruit training are to transfer knowledge and skills and to socialize recruits into the police subculture, then it is important for police instructors to understand what adult learners bring to a learning situation. As one author noted: “Adults, by definition...are responsible people who seek to build their self-esteem through pragmatic learning activities in which their competence is enhanced.”⁶

Specific characteristics of adult learners are:

- Adults possess a rich resource of skill and experience
- Adults learn when the instruction provides a bridge between what they know and the information they want to master
- Adults learn best when they can immediately apply newly acquired knowledge and skill
- Adults prefer active learning experiences
- Adults prefer learning experiences that allow them to have some input into content and learning mode
- Adults prefer to set their own pace at which to learn
- Adults learn more easily in an atmosphere of mutual respect
- Adults learn not only to improve skill and competence but also to enhance their self-esteem.⁷

The fact is that adult learners learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. In other words, adults learn by doing. Along those same lines, learning retention from traditional lecture-based instruction is low, in the range of 10-15 percent. In spite of this fact, most police recruit training is still lecture based, and therefore, extremely inefficient.

Extensive research with adult learners also indicates that an adult’s motivation to learn is inextricably intertwined with self-esteem.⁸ In other words, a person with a high level of self-esteem tends to have a high expectation of success in a learning situation, which translates into high motivation and superior performance. On the other hand, those learners with low or damaged self-esteem have a lower expectation of success, lower motivation,

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”

and poorer performance in the learning situation. In fact, research indicates that low self-esteem is one of the primary reasons for attrition from adult learning situations.⁹

In light of modern adult learning principles, the potential for severe consequences resulting from classic police stress training becomes readily apparent. Therefore, trainers need to review techniques

currently used in recruit training, evaluate their effectiveness to transmit the knowledge and develop skills required for the job, and practice the training strategies that will best produce what the job requires.

Instructional Strategies

In terms of instructional strategies, the general and nonspecific application of stress in the training process is not only counterproductive but also potentially disruptive to the effective transfer of knowledge and skills to police recruits.¹⁰ This is not to say that the use of stress cannot be a legitimate training strategy. It can, if used appropriately.

If stress is introduced into a specific scenario in order to simulate a real-life situation, then the application of stress can be productive. For example, it would be appropriate to introduce stress into a simulated confrontation between a recruit and an irate motorist or an aggressive drunk. However, this should only be done after the recruit has been taught the appropriate skills to deal with such situations. The same holds true for firearms training. Only after recruits demonstrate a basic level of competence with firearms should instructors place them in a shoot/don’t shoot training environment.

Job Analysis

One question trainers should ask is, “Are recruits learning what they really need to know to function effectively?” Trainers must be thoroughly familiar with what police officers are required to do to perform their jobs so that they can

structure the learning experiences to transfer the skills and knowledge needed. In essence, they should complete a job task analysis and then structure the curricula so that the instruction given is relevant to the job.

The lack of job task analysis is a fundamental shortcoming of classic stress training. For the most part, the stress model overemphasizes knowledge and skills that are unrelated to those needed in day-to-day police work. Why should police officers be evaluated on military march formation, how they make their beds, or their ability to recite the organization's chain of command? Yet, in some recruit programs, these areas are emphasized to the neglect of critical skills that police officers use every day.

One author estimates that 90 percent of recruit training is dedicated to knowledge and skills that comprise no more than 10 percent of the police officer's job.¹¹ Certainly, firearms training, defensive tactics, and first-aid are important job-related skills that deserve training time. But, just as important are human relations and communications skills.

There is no single skill used as frequently in police work as the ability to communicate. Yet, the amount of training time invested in this area is negligible. Currently, human relations and communications skills training comprise, on the average, only 5 percent of recruit training curricula nationwide.¹² The obvious question then becomes, "If police officers spend 80-90 percent of their time communicating, why is only 5 percent of recruit training

spent teaching them to communicate?" This is surely an issue that police trainers should address.

Socialization

Every organization adheres to a system of values, beliefs, and practices that make up its organizational culture. Therefore, it is important for recruits to incorporate the organization's principles into their individual belief systems. This is accomplished through the process of socialization. As a dimension of police recruit training, socialization is extremely important because it determines, to a large degree, what kind of police officer recruits will become, how they will interact with members of the community, and ultimately, how they will help to shape the direction of the organization.

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The training academy is the primary avenue through which recruits make the transition into the police subculture. At the academy, recruits meet powerful role models at precisely the place where their readiness to learn is at an all-time high. When making a major life transition, adults experience a level of anxiety and anticipation that causes them to grasp at anything that will help them to make the transition

successfully. Who could be more powerful role models than police trainers?

Most officers can recall their days at the training academy and their instructors, even 20 years later. The power inherent in the role of recruit trainer carries with it an awesome responsibility, both for the individual trainer and for the organization.

Unfortunately, police trainers under the classic stress model, by design, may become officious, intimidating, rude, abrupt, negative, and demeaning. While the overall intentions of these trainers may be honorable, their negative impact on the socialization of new recruits cannot be denied.

In other words, the danger inherent in stress training is that recruits will emulate all the negative aspects of their role models as police officers on the street. Recruits want to be what trainers already are—police officers—and they eagerly emulate any model that will help them to reach that goal. If recruits have rude, abusive, demeaning role models, the odds are that they may become rude, demeaning, abusive police officers. However, recruits don't realize that the negative image portrayed by their instructors is not the way the department expects them to behave.

Future Implications

Futurists project a radical redefinition of the police officer's role over the next decade.¹³ Intelligently planned enforcement efforts will continue to be important, especially as criminals turn increasingly to high technology. But, in addition to

the traditional enforcement role, police officers will need to become more community oriented to work with citizens to address community problems and needs.

To accomplish this, police officers must be able to think critically about complex community problems and act independently to solve them. Police officers need to become master communicators and negotiators who understand and practice human relations skills to draw diverse citizen groups together.

Realizing this, the question then becomes, "Are we training tomorrow's police officers with yesterday's models?" The military model and its stress training approach served law enforcement well for many years, but the times have changed. Or, more to the point, people have changed.

In 1959, the National Opinion Research Corporation surveyed a cross-section of the American workforce. Regarding the question, "What is important to you about your job?" the top three responses, in order of importance, were salary, job security, and fringe benefits.

When the same question was asked of a similar cross-section of Americans 20 years later, the top three responses were self-expression, self-fulfillment, and personal growth.¹⁴ Salary, fringe benefits, and job security dropped to the 15th, 16th, and 17th place, respectively. Interestingly, although there was virtually no difference between the responses of police officers and those of employees in other professions, police officers did place job security before fringe benefits.¹⁵

Effective Instructional Strategies

Communicate Concepts of the Skill to be Learned
Certain basic information and concepts must be mastered by students as a tool to facilitate learning a skill. As a start, performance objectives must be defined to lay a foundation for later skill development.

Model the Skill
Modeling is an effective instructional technique that trainers can use to teach a wide variety of skills to students. Modeling accelerates the learning process by allowing recruits to see a skill demonstrated correctly.

Practice the Skill
Practice provides the student with the opportunity to refine and perfect the skill to be learned. Proficiency in a skill cannot be developed without practice.

Give and Receive Feedback
Feedback comes after trainers correctly model the skill and allow recruits the opportunity to practice it. Positive, constructive feedback helps recruits to refine and perfect their skills, thereby accelerating the learning process.

Test Skills
Skill tests should closely reflect the performance objective and allow the recruit to demonstrate the skill. Generally speaking, the more closely a skill test reflects the real-world circumstances in which the skill will be used, the more effectively the test will measure that skill. Too often, trainers test for information about perceived competency without testing for the competency itself.

The dramatic shift in responses should send a signal to police trainers that the attitudes, expectations, and desires of recruits entering the law enforcement profession are dramatically different than they were 30 years ago. People want challenging work, input into decisions and problems that affect them, true career development apart from just promotions, the opportunity to achieve something of importance,

and recognition for what they do. Trainers need to realize this and recognize that recruits are not unmanageable, as many complain, but that men and women joining police forces today simply have different career expectations than those of a generation ago.

Conclusion

In many cases, today's police recruits are being trained with

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yesterday's models. Therefore, police trainers need to review their instructional strategies and adapt them to the needs and expectations of adult learners. The most effective training will be conducted in an environment that fosters high self-esteem, motivation, and performance.

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Footnotes

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⁴ Supra note 2.

⁵ Supra note 2, p. 51.

⁶ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), p. 6.

⁷ K. Patricia Cross, *Adults as Learners* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981).

⁸ Ibid. p. 126.

⁹ Ibid. p. 120.

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¹¹ Robert J. Meadows, "Beliefs of Law Enforcement Administrators and Criminal Justice Educators Toward the Needed Skill Competencies in Entry-Level Police Training Curriculum," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 1987, p. 1.

¹² S.A. Cunningham, "Human Resource Management in the 21st Century," *The Police Chief*, April 1989, p. 102.

¹³ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, "The Future of Law Enforcement: Dangerous and Different," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 50, January 1990, p. 1.

¹⁴ William Tafoya, classroom presentation, FBI National Academy, Quantico, Virginia, July 18, 1990.

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Ft. Lauderdale's Code Enforcement Team

In 1987, the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, grappled with a rising drug-related murder rate, especially in the northwest quadrant. This drug-ridden, inner-city area was also plagued by poor living conditions and an accompanying low quality of life.

The obvious question confronting the city was how to solve these problems. After studying the issue, one significant idea that emerged was the formation of a Code Enforcement Team. What made this idea unique, and ultimately effective, was that it involved the integration of the police department, the building and zoning department, and the fire department.

Code Enforcement Team

A Code Enforcement Team is comprised of one member each from the police, fire, and building

and zoning departments. By combining the city's full regulatory and police powers with patrolling the area together, the team works to reduce and prevent criminal activity and to bring commercial and residential structures into compliance.

Also, by eliminating the locations where drugs are bought and used and revitalizing the surrounding neighborhood, a decrease of drug-related burglaries and robberies, as well as the violence associated with drug-infested neighborhoods, could possibly be realized. Ultimately, the objective was to improve the quality of life within the community.

Results

The results of the initial Code Enforcement Team were astonishing. During 1987-1990, the team: