

**The Bill Blackwood
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Assignment Pay for Field Training Officers

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ABSTRACT

Field training officers are a law enforcement agency's greatest asset. Generally, they are the top performers in the agency. They take on extra duties as mentors, instructors, and organizers of community programs. Field training officers have a tremendous amount of responsibility based on the amount of influence they exert over the new recruits coming into a law enforcement agency. When talking about the bond created between a recruit and a field training officer, Blackwell (2014) stated "To this day, I have not forgotten the many lessons I learned from my FTO's back in the day, the ones who took me under their wings and taught me a lesson or two about being a good cop" (para. 1). Field training officers' mold the character and work ethic of the recruits assigned to them, which, in turn, shapes the culture of a law enforcement agency for years to come.

Field training officers must continually maintain proficiency in the tactics associated with andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn. They must be an effective communicator, understand the barriers to communication, and be able to mitigate such effects. They must stay abreast of the latest training trends, academy curriculums, and teaching tactics. Furthermore, they must be an expert on agency policy and procedure.

Yet, with all these responsibilities, field training officers are only compensated for their time when they actually have a recruit in their patrol units. On a yearly basis, there is a plethora of uncompensated time that is basically donated to the law enforcement agency and city they serve. Law enforcement agencies should continue to maintain assignment pay for those individuals identified as field training officers.

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INTRODUCTION

Police personnel, sometimes referred to as human capital, are a law enforcement agency's greatest asset. Improving the human capital of an agency takes time; it takes patience; it takes money; and most importantly, it takes a commitment by the agency.

Law enforcement in the twenty-first century is constantly evolving, and retention of employees is paramount to an agency's future success and development. Dunham and Alpert (1997) indicated that recruitment of new personnel, along with their selection and training, constitute the most significant investment for police departments.

Unfortunately, in today's litigious society, police personnel can also be a law enforcement agency's biggest liability. By taking a mediocre approach to the training of personnel, the law enforcement agency's administrator is gambling against a lawsuit.

A very specific case law involving this gamble involves *Canton v. Harris* (1989). According to the United States highest court's opinion, when a city provides armed law enforcement services to the public, with the understanding that one of the duties of such personnel will be to capture fleeing felons, without providing the law enforcement personnel the requisite training in the constitutional limitation associated with the use of deadly force, that failure to train could constitute deliberate indifference to the highly predictable civil rights violations that are bound to occur (*Canton v. Harris*, 1989). The U.S. Supreme Court further stated that the appropriateness of police training can lend a law enforcement agency to liability only if the failure to train police personnel "amounts to deliberate indifference" concerning the rights of citizens in which the police encounter (*Canton v. Harris*, 1989, para.5). One way a law enforcement agency can limit their

liability is by having a well-defined, structured, and legally defensible field training program, staffed by certified field training officers.

Law enforcement professionals who have been appropriately screened and carefully selected for assignment as a field training officer should have a strong working knowledge of the agency's policies and procedures, an understanding of human behavior, a personal belief in the agency's mission and vision statements, a desire to help others, strong leadership skills, and most importantly, a commitment to the field training program. These aforementioned qualities are why the majority of field training officers are subsequently assigned to extra duty assignments within a professional police agency. Field training officers are assigned as mentors for a recruit at the beginning of their academy training.

Field training officers are commonly assigned to organize and promote agency programs, like Coffee with a Cop and Police Explorers. They are assigned as instructors for Citizen's Police Academies and the Youth Police Academies. Consequently, field training officers also serve as the face of the department for police station tours and other speaking engagements. Furthermore, they are often called upon to perform supervisory duties in the absence of supervisory personnel due to their performance and capabilities. All of these additional tasks tap into the knowledge, skills, and abilities that personnel in the field training officer program demonstrate on a daily basis. A field training officer is the initial law enforcement professional who instills the culture, attitude, and work ethic of a recruit officer. This task is not something that should be overlooked by administrators (Green, 2014). Field training officers have the greatest effect on the socialization of new recruits within the agency and culture of law

enforcement. Even after a probationary police officer is certified for solo patrol duties, they continue to look to their field training officers as an example of what to do and how to behave.

Field training officers are expected to acquire and maintain a strong understanding of the teaching aspects specifically associated with adult learning. This is not information that a field training officer is only required to learn once; adult learning concepts are ever evolving and require the field training officer to continuously evaluate their style, seek alternatives, and look for ways of honing their skills as a teacher. However, field training officers only receive assignment pay for the time they are officially assigned as a teacher of probationary police officers. Law enforcement agencies should continue to maintain assignment pay for those individuals identified as field training officers.

POSITION

The socialization of new recruits into the culture of a law enforcement agency is going to happen. This socialization into the law enforcement agency should be the result of carefully planned and thought out series of events. Unfortunately, socialization into the law enforcement agency can also be the result of spontaneous inaction. Law enforcement agency administrators should make every reasonable attempt possible to ensure the proper socialization of recruits into their agencies. As in other professions, the police go through a rigorous socialization process that results in the development of distinct attitudes and beliefs among officers (Dunham & Alpert, 1997). By tailoring the socialization applied toward new recruits, an agency administrator can ensure that the vision and values of the organization passed on from socialization can have an

overwhelmingly positive influence on a new recruit as well as an agency as a whole. Socialization is a way of promoting an agency's desired police culture while slowly weeding out undesired beliefs.

The recruit's behavior, thought processes, and organizational beliefs can also have disastrous effects on their career, as well as on the organization as a whole, if applied in a less than positive manner by a whining, sniveling, "malcontent cop" within the agency (Gilmartin, 2002, p. 95-96). Improper socialization can have a cancerous effect on a law enforcement agency; it can slowly erode the cultural values of the agency. Field training officers are a vital key to the proper socialization of new recruits into a law enforcement agency. When talking about the socialization of police recruits, Gilmartin (2002) also stated, "they have so much to learn to become competent officers, most of which they learn from the older cops, the ones that have been there and done that" (p. 2). Gilmartin (2002) further indicated that veteran officers, ones with longer tenure at an agency, have already paid their dues and are in a position to assist the new recruits in obtaining membership in the police culture. Appointing appropriate personnel as field training officers, the people who truly believe in and share the mission and vision of the agency, ensures that the probationary police officer's transition into the police culture is in the best interest of the law enforcement agency.

Even after the probationary police officer has completed field training, they will still look toward their field training officer as a mentor, a person to emulate, and as an example of what to do on and off duty. The field training officer becomes an informal leader amongst their peers and the community. Socialization is too important to the

long-term health and wellbeing of a law enforcement agency for police administrators to not plan for it. If it can be predicted, it can be prevented.

Furthermore, field training officers must acquire and maintain a good working knowledge of the teaching aspects that are specific to adult learning. Adult learning is not simply learning. Not all people learn the same way or at the same speed. According to Laufersweiler-Dwyer and Dwyer (2004), numerous references have advocated for a change from a more lecture based learning style that involves a large amount of memorization to a move towards teaching methods that incorporate discretionary decision making that involve interpersonal relationships with individuals from different demographic backgrounds, social status areas, as well as strategies that emphasize conflict resolution in situations that range from casual in nature to lethal. This teaching model, sometimes referred to as andragogy, is based on six principals of adult learning centered around training that takes into effect life lessons and the motivation and responsibility of the adult learner. Laufersweiler-Dwyer (2004) further stated the andragogic model is perfectly suited for teaching the theories associated with community-oriented policing.

According to Zemke and Zemke (2007), the key to the field training officer's role as an instructor is control. An example of this control is having an instructor who can not only present new material, but also be able to discuss and debate that material, relate it to information previously learned by the student, all the while controlling the amount of time spent on the topic. Field training officers are expected to not only understand these concepts associated with adult learning, but also be able to effectively deploy them. Field training officers are also tasked with developing and implementing new and

ingenious ways of maintaining the motivation levels of adult learners during the training process (Massoni, 2009). Fortunately, adult learners have a greater degree of motivation, bring different life experiences to the learning process, are more engaged as a learner, and differ in the manner in which learning is applied when compared to school aged learners.

Notwithstanding, Russell (2006) implied that each adult involved as a participant in the learning process brings preconceived ideas and motions to the learning experience, as well as emotions that will influence these factors. Whether or not this cognitive dissonance actually effects the learning process, it is the field training officer's duty to mitigate or overcome its effects. This example greatly demonstrates the importance for the field training officer to control the learning environment.

According to Zemke and Zemke (2007), "Adults need to be able to integrate new ideas with what they already know if they are going to keep—and use—the new information" (p. 1). It is the responsibility of the field training officer to facilitate learning by creating this type of learning environment. However, difference in age is not the only aspect of adult learning that field training officers must recognize and overcome. Consequently, an effective field training officer must also be aware of the teaching aspects associated with adult learners from other backgrounds and cultures. Starting around age three, everyone begins to be culturally programmed. This cultural programming is going to impact the way an adult learner will view, interpret, and react to the world around them. Field training officers need to be aware of this fact and that, in some adults; this cultural programing can sometimes hinder the learning of new concepts. This is especially true when the new material is in contrast to beliefs the adult

learner formulated early in life. Information that conflicts with what is already held to be true by the recruit forces a reevaluation of the old material, resulting in the new information being acquired at a slower pace (Zemke & Zemke, 2007). Maintaining a working knowledge of these topics over time can be difficult.

COUNTER POSITION

Many law enforcement agencies do not continue to give assignment pay to field training officer because they feel that it is not fiscally responsible. Law enforcement agencies have budgets they must abide by and, in this day and age, budget constraints are a real concern. When finances get tight, training is one of the first line items to be considered nonessential—a luxury that is cost effective in good times but something that will not be missed when the dollars get tight (Rutledge, 2009). When referring to how organizations should manage fiscal resources, Hale (2009) stated, “As publicly funded organizations, they are charged with being good stewards of the tax dollars that fund every aspect of their operations” (p. 6). Law enforcement administrators have to balance the needs of the department with the needs of the city, county, or state they support. As a result of operating a lean budget, some incentives can be removed or not even considered at all. For many cities, field training officer pay would fall into this category.

Although this may occur, law enforcement agencies should consider the money paid to field training officers, who are not currently training a recruit, as an investment in a training resource. Effective field training officers have an understanding of the dynamics of human behavior, a good working knowledge of the aspects specific to teaching adult learners, and effective communication skills. Creating a self-reliant

officer occurs when a field training officer embraces different learning styles that promote mutual involvement of the recruit and the field training officer in the learning process. These skills are assets to the law enforcement agency, and, unfortunately, are perishable in nature. According to Sokolove (2006), the law of recency is a natural effect that dictates a person will more easily remember information that was learned recently. However, the more time that passes between the time the individual learned a theory or task the less information about the specific topic can be recalled. By not using the learned skills necessary to be an effective field training officer on a daily basis, it can be argued the field training office could become less effective as an instructor. Field training officers are responsible for maintaining that proficiency throughout the year, even when they are not in a training capacity.

A reasonable and frequently argued comment is that officers will only want to be in the field training program because of the additional annual pay. This argument is supported by the opinion that field training officers will not put in the requisite time and determination to maintain their teaching skills. This situation would result in lower effectiveness as a trainer and lower performance by the recruits assigned to him or her for training. This is a conceded point, but with proper selection and effective supervision, it can be monitored and mitigated.

While it is true that some officers would only want inclusion in the field training program because of the additional assignment pay, it is a situation that can be monitored and corrected by a stringent selection process and effective program supervision. The field training program supervisor has operational oversight and management of the field training program and is responsible for the supervision of the

officers assigned to the program, as well as the recruits in training, all while ensuring program expectations are met. A proficient field training program supervisor, who monitors the actions and attitudes of their field training officers, will be able to identify deficiencies in training activity and implement mitigation techniques. As a function of proper supervision, an effective supervisor not only assigns relevant tasks, but follows-up on those tasks to ensure they have been completed in a manner consistent with the goals of the law enforcement agency and standards set by the field training program. It is the responsibility of the field training program supervisor to inspect what they expect.

Furthermore, proper selection of field training personnel will also mitigate this type of situation. Being included in the field training program is a privilege that should be afforded to officers after a stringent selection process. A review of the officer's past behavior could be used to predict future performance. Sokolove (2006) indicated that poor performance, which does not meet the expectations of the agency, looks as shabby on a five-year officer as it does on a five-month or five-day officer. If the field training officer candidate does not consistently perform their duties in a professional manner before selection, there is no reason to believe they will correct this course of action upon selection into the program.

RECOMMENDATION

An officer's assignment to the position of field training officer represents an enormous entrustment of responsibilities. It is the first step in the leadership process, whereas the field training officer is now responsible for the actions of someone other than themselves. Being assigned to the field training program is an opportunity to mold the thoughts and actions of a recruit so they are consistent with agency policy and

procedures and mirror the mission and values of the law enforcement agency. It is an opportunity to help the recruit see the world as a law enforcement officer must and not as a civilian would look at it.

Field training officers are the first officers charged with properly socializing new recruits into the police culture. They become mentors, trusted coaches, and informal leaders amongst their peers. This socialization should occur as a result of deliberate, planned coordination of field training program supervisors and field training officers and not as a result of blind luck. Socialization is too important to the long-term success of a law enforcement agency to leave it to chance. The importance of the field training officer's ability to effectively communicate information from person to person, relate how the information is important, and connect it to aspects of the real world are invaluable. This ability needs honing, needs updating, and needs to be maintained. Field training officers are responsible for keeping their teaching skills up to date and ready. Consequently, field training officers must stay abreast of changes to academy curriculum and adapt new ways of relating the information recruits learn in the academy into lessons that can be learned on the streets. The field training officer must understand barriers to learning and communication, such as age, cultural programming, and personality conflict resolution.

Finally, field training officers not only know and understand these barriers to learning and communication but improvise and adapt specific strategies to overcome each. The strategies used will vary from recruit to recruit and will not be effective on all recruits. For this reason, field training officers must continually evaluate all aspects of learning. Being fiscally responsible is a fundamental requirement of those charged with

spending tax dollars. As budgets get tight, the first incentives to be cut are usually the ones that can be interpreted as frivolous or unneeded. For many cities, field training officer pay falls into this category. However, money spent on human capital should be considered an investment in the long-term future success of the law enforcement agency.

Anytime monetary incentives are offered to members of a program, there will always be people who want inclusion solely to receive the money. This is not a new concept. The lack of motivation in training, attitude toward training responsibilities, as well as poor performance of recruits, will be a definite result of such a mentality. Proper selection and supervision will mitigate this occurrence. For these reasons, law enforcement agencies should maintain assignment pay for personnel assigned as field training officers, even when they are not assigned a recruit or actively training.

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