

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

ISSUES CONCERNING TRAINING OF
FIELD TRAINING OFFICERS

A LEARNING CONTRACT
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BY

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A recruit officer fresh from Police Academy training, one who has spent the last ten weeks in over four hundred hours of course work learning all the basic police requirements is usually exceptionally eager to get his chance to be a "Real Cop" and work the streets. He wants very keenly to show the others at the department that the time and money invested in him was not wasted. He is looking forward to his first Field Training Officer (FTO) and getting a chance to prove his newly acquired abilities.

After the formalities of introductions and a Roll Call briefing he is assigned to his first FTO, a patrol veteran with several years of experience. The recruit officer and his FTO check out the squad car and start patrol. The FTO almost invariably makes the following statement, or at least one similar to it:

"Forget everything they taught you in class. Just sit tight, hold on, and watch closely. I'll show you what real police work is all about."

Statements like this one, starting a new recruit officer with a veteran officer in the Field Training Program places a very negative emphasis on the previous formal training the recruit officer has received.

The previous formal training the recruit officer has received is not enough for him to be able to function as a working police officer immediately. Even with college, recruits have only gained the basic

knowledge of what skills are required in the field. This training only provides a strong foundation upon which to build a high quality law enforcement professional. It is at this point that the FTO either strengthens or weakens the recruits foundation and faith in both the FTO and the Field Training Program. The FTOs actions also indicate to the recruit officer the quality of the department and what will be expected of him. The first impression made by an FTO is likely to be long lasting and can affect the recruit officers overall performance.

The FTOs primary responsibility is to take a recruit officer and train him to apply the knowledge and skills he learned in the academy. For this reason most agencies require their officers to meet several important qualifications before acceptance for the Field Training Program. These include a minimum of two-to-three years of experience in patrol, a good service record, positive recommendations from a supervisor, and a demonstrated ability to perform with high moral and ethical standards. After meeting the qualifications for acceptance, a prospective FTO is sent to a forty-hour Field Training Officers Course.

During the forty-hours in the Field Training Officers Course, FTO candidates learn to evaluate the abilities of recruit officers and the accuracy of the records that must be maintained. The forty-hour course is primarily "program" rather than "training" oriented, and leaves the FTO candidate to develop his own teaching skills.

The evaluation and documentation of the recruit officers performance is important and necessary, but not as important as the training that he will be receiving from the FTO.

FTO training programs are designed to be an extension of the academy training that a recruit has received and should be maintained and updated in the same fashion. Academy instructors are constantly updated and change their methods of instructing to meet the ever-changing needs and requirements of the state and students. Instructors working for a Licensed Academy have access to new material, methods and techniques from several different sources. They are in constant contact with officers and representatives from other departments, and are receiving "feedback" from other instructors as well.

Most Field Training Officers Course, after attending the forty-hour Field Training Officers Course, generally never receive any other type of updated courses on Field Training. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommends at least one week (forty hours) of training for FTOs. Michael S. McCampbell, in his research on field training, stated:

"Generally the best way to improve these programs (field training) center around improving the quality of the FTO, primarily through better selection, training and compensation." (U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, Research Report, April, 1987.)

Similarly, Jack B. Molden, stated:

"The FTO is the most critical element of any FTO program. It is essential to get the right officers, then train and compensate them." (Field Training Quarterly, 4th quarter, 1989.)

Most agencies require the FTO to meet several strict evaluations to determine the FTO candidate's abilities prior to attending the Field Training Officer Course. The majority of the agencies, after selection of their FTO's, provide compensation to the FTO's in the form of a pay increase, and/or promotion to the rank of corporal. Some agencies provide an increase in pay only while the FTO is actually working with a recruit officer.

Generally, however, the selection and compensation process of the FTO's in FTO training programs is in most cases quite adequate. The weakest area of FTO training programs everywhere appears to be the amount of training the FTO has received prior to the offering of his knowledge to recruit officers fresh from the police academy. In this regard, Michael S. McCampbell in his research reports, stated:

"Generally, law enforcement agencies suggest that their programs could be enhanced by improving the quality of the field training officers." (U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, Research Report, April, 1987.)

To improve the quality of FTO's, other than by the selection and compensation, you must improve the quality of their training. To improve quality and ensure that the most critical element in the FTO training program (the FTO) is prepared to perform with proficiency, emphasis should be placed on maintaining the FTO's abilities. This can be accomplished by continual updating of the FTO's training experience annually, keeping them informed about recent changes in the laws and instruction methods, and by training FTO's to be responsible trainer/evaluators. In the medical field, the legal field, or any other professional field, some type of continued training is mandatory.

Continued FTO trainer education provided adequately by in-service training at the department or by permitting the FTO to attend courses that will assist him in the performance of required duties.

The FTO, in essence, is working as a short-term, first line supervisor and is responsible and held accountable for the actions and performance of the recruit officer he is training. The FTO as a trainer/evaluator must be able to instruct and guide the recruit officer from classroom-type controlled environment to the "Real World" street environment. To do this he must be able to perform as effectively as possible. Unless FTO's have been provided with the cognitive tools and skills needed to meet FTO training program requirements, they cannot be expected to perform their tasks efficiently. The FTO is responsible for

training and evaluating a new recruit officer. The evaluating of a recruit officer by the FTO results in the development of qualified police officers as well as providing for the elimination of the unqualified recruit officer. The FTO is responsible for recommending that the department retain or terminate the recruit officer. But proper evaluation and documentation of the recruit officers performance must be supported by the required reports. To be able to support the FTOs recommendation, the supervisors of the FTOs, program managers, and others involved in the FTO training program must be able to depend on the FTOs capabilities. This, coupled with the FTO's duties and responsibilities as a patrolman, places a large amount of responsibility and pressure on the FTO to perform.

One factor that contributes to the large number of liability suits that are filed against police departments is the lack of training, or failure to train officers properly. Ensuring that the FTO has been properly trained and is qualified to perform the duties that are required of an FTO is essential.

Terminated recruit officers now file suits against departments and have received significant punitive damage awards. We are now beginning to hear such legal phrases as negligent retention, failure to train, failure to supervise, vicarious liability, etc.

It must be noted again that FTO training programs are the core of efficient recruit officer training. As Mickey K. Bennett has observed

(Field Training Quarterly, 2nd Quarter, 1989), and stated:

"The FTO training program is the most important program for establishing the future of any agency.

This program deserves our dedication today to ensure quality personnel in the future."

Viewing FTO training programs as an extension of the training a recruit officer receives in the academy, may prove to be the determining factor in the retention of a recruit officer. Relatedly, the FTO is the most critical element in the FTO training program. There should be no doubt about the value of placing emphasis upon the training of the FTOs. They should be supplied with the equipment and tools necessary to be able to do a first-class evaluation of any recruit officer and establish continuity in the overall training program offered to Law Enforcement officers.

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