

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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The Field Training Instructor

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An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College

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Submitted by

Delbert C. Dawes

Humble Police Department
Humble, Texas
February 2004

ABSTRACT

Training has become a major focal point for the law enforcement personnel of today. Now, more than ever, police administration is being held accountable for actions of police officers. When the lack of, or improper training has been proven in court, often the results end with the cities or states reaching deep into the pockets of the taxpayers to satisfy the judgment. Twenty-five police agencies across the state of Texas were consulted in a survey. Of these twenty-five agencies, there were twenty-seven individual respondents. These respondents range from front-line supervisors to chiefs-of-police. The survey places its emphasis on the field-training program with the focus on the Field Training Instructor. The findings of the research show that in a field training program the attention is primarily on the Probationary Police Officer. The conclusion of the research will show a need to evaluate a Field Training Instructor before he is given a training assignment.

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INTRODUCTION

A Field Training Instructor (FTI) is the first person a new recruit is placed with for training after the recruit successfully passes the Police Academy training phase. This is the recruit's first hand on experience to what he/she has chosen as a career. The recruit will now be placed with a FTI for at least eight hours a day, five days a week, for what is usually a six-month period. Some agencies offer the opportunity to rotate FTI's at two-month intervals. Even with the rotation of the FTI's the recruit still has an extensive exposure of time with each individual.

The purpose of this project is to present how the Field Training Instructor's character plays a vital role in the training of a new recruit. This research will address the issue of a much needed means of evaluation that will accurately measure the qualifications of a FTI specifically to answer the question: Is the FTI accurately evaluated before given the opportunity to train a new recruit?

This project will address the liability issues of departments that have provided inadequate training for their officers either by omission or improper training.

Methods of research will include interviews of police chiefs, patrol supervisors and officers working the street. Research will include a review of lawsuits that address a department's lack of proper training for police officers. A questionnaire consisting of twelve different questions will be submitted to officers by way of e-mail and mail-outs. The questions will address issues of how Field Training Instructor's characteristics have affected their career in a positive or negative manner. Also questions of the need of evaluation for FTIs will be asked.

The anticipated findings of this research should show that Field Training Instructors are at this time evaluated after the training of a new recruit, and that this evaluation also includes observations of the new recruit. This leads to the evaluation being biased for several reasons. First, the new recruit will be reluctant to give their FTI a bad grade because of fear of repercussion from the instructor due to the fact that many departments are smaller and the probability of having to work beside the instructor exists after the recruit is released from the training program. Second, the recruit looks at this training as being behind them; therefore their opinion can only affect their future and not change the inadequate training they received. Third, the new recruit does not want to be looked at from their supervisor or peers as a problem officer who likes to bring about discontent. Another finding that this research will show is that FTIs are accepted just because they carry the title and have been used in this field for an extended period of time. This research will reveal the need to examine the Field Training Instructor to the degree that they may be disqualified if needed before he has an opportunity to contaminate the first-time police officer arises. If the FTI passes the evaluation, and is allowed to train, the product that they produce should slow the incoming complaints where public references are made that officers fail to do their duty, complaints of officers being unprofessional and more serious issues of corruption, abuse of power, the loss of integrity.

Think of how many things of this life start with a seed. There are seeds of great ideas and great content that grow into marvelous things. These are the things that make life so pleasant. Then there are seeds of destruction that when sown will grow into a bitter, unproductive and often a dangerous product. Law enforcement administration has

a duty to make sure that the Field Training Instructor is a seed of good character and integrity, qualifying him/her for that role of training. Not only does the law enforcement community benefit but the community it serves will benefit as well.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the literature chosen for research will show the effect training has on a Probationary Police Officer (PPO). More specifically, the issue of the effect that a Field Training Instructor (FTI) has on the PPO will be addressed. It has been proven that training or the lack thereof, will continue to be the success or failure of the police organization.

A Probationary Police Officer (PPO) is a term used to describe a new recruit who has successfully completed a formal police academy training phase and now is placed with a Field Training Instructor (FTI) for the actual hands-on training that will prepare him for his chosen profession.

For the purpose of this research a definition of training structured towards law enforcement will be used. As defined by More and Wegener (1996), "Training is the practical and applied side of education designed to transmit the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to improve an employee's problem-solving ability and on-the-job behavior" (p.446). Training focuses knowledge so that it can be applied in specific situations. Effective training is relevant and job-specific.

Research shows that practically all police agencies have a field training program currently in use. These programs have some variances from one agency to another; however, they are similar in the respect that they all use FTIs to mentor the PPOs (Williams, 2000). The field training programs usually last up to six months with the PPO

training in two-month intervals with a different FTI. During this period the PPO is examined and evaluated by the FTI or a Field Training Supervisor. Documentation is made by the FTI, which becomes a part of the training file for the PPO.

An examination of current field training programs has shown that the PPO evaluates the FTI during the training phase. This would result in a biased opinion with fear of retaliation from the FTI. Subsequently, what deficiencies or faults the PPO recognize may never surface. Another consideration is that the opinion of the PPO is based on the inexperienced police officer.

The requirements to become a FTI also vary in different departments, some requiring as few as two years experience and a forty-hour instructor course. How could this possibly qualify the officer to become a FTI without a thorough evaluation? Consider the role a FTI must fulfill to facilitate the needs of a PPO's psychological development. He must be a teacher, role model, advisor and guide. According to E. Porter, Harris County District Attorney Police Integrity Unit, Houston, Texas, (personal communication, May, 2004) the police administration body must recognize the dramatic influence a FTI has on the new recruit. Porter expressed that a habit or trait a PPO learns from a FTI can be passed on for generations of officers to come. Porter went on to say through years of investigations that the H.C.D.A.P.I.U. has conducted on police officers the officer was shown at fault. In some of the cases the officer's decision was deficient in integrity and resulted in an event that caused a violation of a subject's rights. For the officer, this can lead to anything from job dismissal to a class action lawsuit. Porter, who also is an investigator in these acts, concludes the roots are often traced back to the

officer's probationary training period. Guess whom the PPO was with during this phase? The FTI.

Addressing the issue of the FTI's psychological development, a common similarity is that they enter their career with enthusiasm, a desire to help others, and a dedication to making a difference. According to James (2003), "Over time, officers become frustrated, angry, apathetic, and cynical" (p.36). This is not uncommon due to the negative environment, undesirable events, and the stress that an officer must deal with every day. Often a FTI is someone who has had to endure many years of psychological abuse. A professional does not easily recognize except the effects of this. The character flaws that this can produce may pass as opinions or habits detrimental to the PPO's career.

The purpose of this research is not to undermine or place blame on the FTI when a PPO is guilty of a violation of ethics, morals, or integrity. In fact, the most noteworthy and successful officers of date have more than likely spent a tour with a FTI at some time in the beginning of their career. Research shows once a FTI has received the assignment of training a new recruit they are not evaluated before the assignment. The evaluation, if any, comes after the PPO completes their training. Often this is too late to correct faults, habits or deficiencies. When an evaluation is performed the Field Training Supervisor often conducts it. This supervisor bases their evaluation on the performance of the PPO during the training phase.

Comparisons of police agencies surveyed indicate that the majority conducts at least three different types of examinations before a person is considered for employment

as a police officer. These examinations consist of a written exam, a physical fitness test and thirdly, a psychological examination. These three in conclusion present an evaluation of the person to qualify or disqualify the applicant.

Review of the court case in *B. v. Vernal City, U. S. District Court of Utah* (1982), C77-0925. Stated a police officer on the job less than two weeks broke the arm of a plaintiff while trying to arrest him. The arrest was illegal. The officer had no probable cause to even attempt an arrest. The plaintiff filed suit, alleging that the chief of police was “grossly” negligent because he failed to train the officer correctly. The federal district judge ruled that anyone who would put an officer on duty for “one minute” without proper training was grossly negligent. The court found in favor of the plaintiff.

METHODOLOGY

Law enforcement agencies must address the issue of how a FTI’s characteristics affect the PPO and the need of a FTI evaluation before their training assignment begins. A psychological evaluation performed by a professional could uncover hidden problems of character possessed by a FTI. Detected early enough, these issues could either be corrected or the FTI disqualified before the next training assignment.

To assist in research twenty-five agencies statewide were asked to participate in a survey. The size of these agencies varied from as few as twenty-one officers to the Dallas Police Department with an employment number of almost three thousand officers. The representatives of these agencies are officers from front-line supervisors to the rank of chief of police (see Appendix).. All of the departments asked did participate with a response of twenty-seven questionnaires completed.

Representatives were asked questions about their experiences with and knowledge of FTIs, their job descriptions and expectations. They were asked to evaluate their overall field training experience. A list of questions and answers will be addressed in the Findings section of the Administrative Research Paper. The information contained in these responses support the hypothesis that a FTI's character definitely impacts the PPO and that a pre-evaluation will bring to attention any areas that the FTI may need further instruction to adequately train the PPO. Another purpose for pre-evaluation is to discover character flaws that may be passed on. These flaws may include but not be limited to bad attitudes toward the public, supervisors and peers. The stress that is brought about by the constant demands of professionalism in police work in the twenty-first century alone has a tendency to give officers the attitude of indifference. FTIs are not excluded.

FINDINGS

Based on information provided by the survey and personal interviews police agencies in the state of Texas do not require any type of pre-evaluation before a FTI begins a training assignment. All officers agreed that a new police officer/PPO has a tendency to behave in the same manner as the FTI who trained them.

Of the twenty-seven officers who answered the survey, all stated it would be important for them to know who trained the PPO prior to them being placed on their shift for a patrol assignment. Twenty-two of twenty-seven officers believed when the PPO makes a mistake the tendency is to place blame on the officer and not consider a possible

training deficiency. Twenty-five of the twenty-seven officers surveyed agreed that a PPO will give a biased answer if asked to evaluate their FTI.

With survey completed, personal interviews were conducted referencing the questions asked. Most officers agreed that departments should conduct some type of pre-evaluation before the training assignment is given to the FTI. Officers/supervisors agree that previously most of the emphasis has been placed on material covered during the training phase and not the trainer.

Of the officers surveyed, all agreed that it would be impractical to pre-evaluate a FTI if his assignments are ongoing with one right after the other. When asked for a possible solution, they agreed that periodic evaluation would probably be sufficient to recognize any major deficiencies. When asked what kind of time frame a periodic evaluation would warrant, too many different periods were given from two months to five years.

Findings also conclude that if a officer remains on active duty long enough he will go through a type of burnout, affecting the attitude. Attitude affects character, character is contagious, and when a FTI possesses a character flaw he has a tendency to pass it on to whomever he is training.

Attitude is an inward feeling expressed by behavior. Sometimes our attitude can be masked outwardly and others who see us are fooled. But, usually, the cover-ups will not last long (Maxwell, 2003). Police personnel are in agreement that the evaluation of a FTI without professional help would give an incomplete assessment.

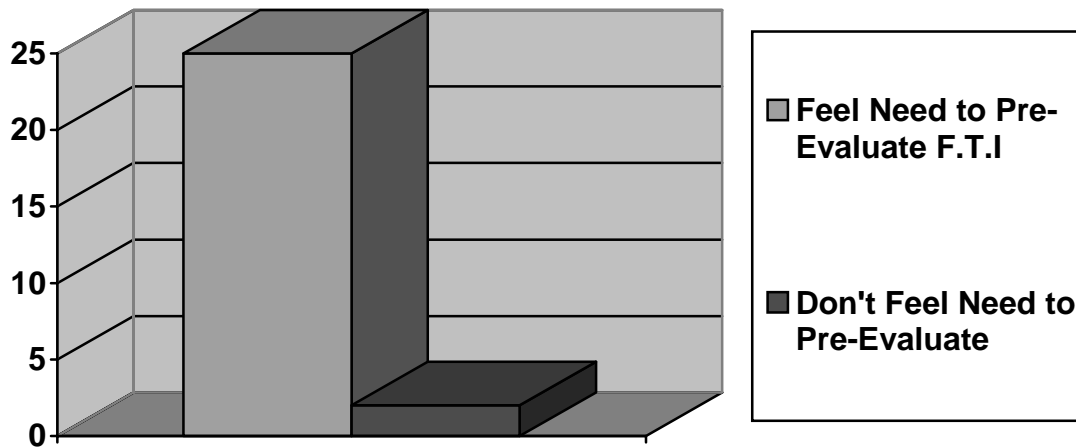
DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose for this research is to address the problem that a FTI is not required to undergo an evaluation before they are given a training assignment. The study reveals police agencies are providing training for the PPO and an evaluation after the training cycle is complete. The research question is should a FTI be evaluated before he begins a training assignment in order to qualify or disqualify his ability to properly instruct, lead or mentor the PPO.

The results clearly show that a FTI has a dramatic influence on the PPO. This training phase is a PPO's first hands-on experience. If the FTI has deficiencies then the PPO will lack in training. If the FTI shows bad character and displays bad habits then the PPO is exposed to what may be perceived as an acceptable work practice.

Conclusions resulting from reviews of literature, a survey involving twenty-seven police officers, and oral interviews support the hypothesis. It has been proven that a need for FTI pre-evaluation does exist (Figure1). Always before, the FTI is evaluated after the training assignment. FTIs have been excluded from the training program, but this was usually after a PPO was involved in an incident that brought attention to a training deficiency or an event that led to a violation of civil rights and ended with a lawsuit. In either case, the damage had already been done.

Necessity of FTI Evaluation (Figure 1)

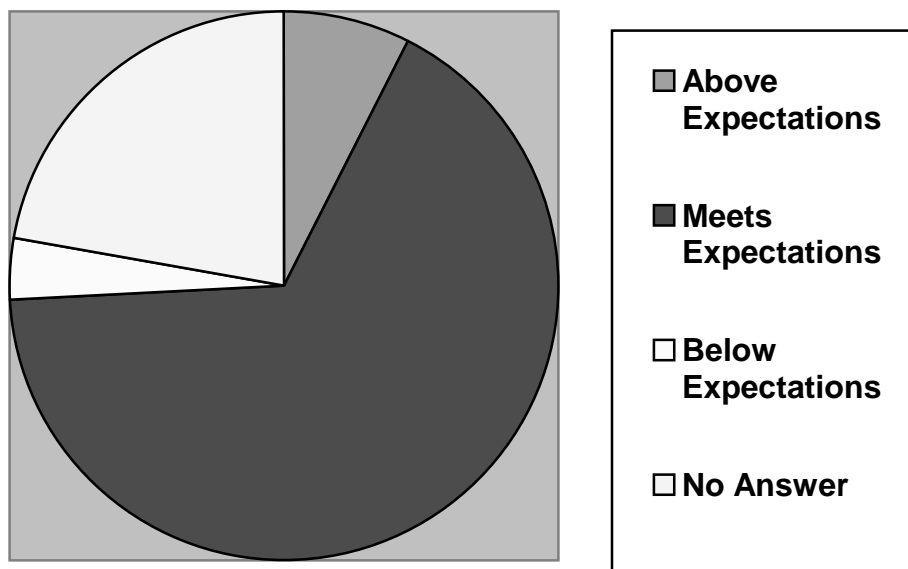


When it comes time for the FTI to evaluate the PPO, if there are any shortcomings on the part of the FTI, can they accurately evaluate a PPO? Have you heard the term “a team is only as fast as the leader”?

One of the limitations that may have hindered this study was the officers’ reluctance to give an answer on survey question number five. The question asked “If you were trained by a FTI how you would rate your field training experience”. The answers were multiple choices with three selections. First choice was “above expectations.” Second choice was “meets expectations”, third choice was “low expectations.” The officers surveyed were asked to circle one answer. Of twenty-seven officers one chose below expectations. Eighteen officers chose “met expectations”. Two chose “above expectations”, and six refused to answer. These answers are represented by a pie chart, (Figure 2). Looking inside the answers and evaluating them, the one officer who chose

“below expectations” felt as though their training was not sufficient to provide them with needed tools to begin their assignment in a patrol position. The eighteen officers who chose “meets expectations” are in essence saying that they received just enough training to begin a patrol assignment but with average skills and confidence. Disturbing was the reaction when six officers failed to answer the question. This could indicate that their answer more than likely would have been “below expectations”, but the officers did not want to expose the FTI or was uncomfortable with giving an answer, fearing the shed of light which shows a deficiency in their capabilities. Only two officers gave the answer of “above expectations”. This is less than eight percent of the people surveyed. Anything below “above expectations” experienced during the beginning phase of your career should not be accepted.

FTI Evaluation (Figure 2)



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APPENDIX

The Bill Blackwood

Law Enforcement Institute of Texas

SURVEY

1. When you began your career did a certified Field Training Instructor (FTI) train you? Yes No
2. If the answer to question number one was yes, what length of time were you with the same instructor? _____
3. Where you a FTI before you became a supervisor? Yes No
4. If you were in charge of the training program what would be the minimum years of experience required for an officer to become a FTI? _____
5. If you were trained by a FTI, how would you evaluate your field training experience? (Circle one). Above Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations
6. A police officer is held accountable for his actions. Should a FTI be held to a higher set of standards? Yes No
7. At any time in your career have you witnessed a FTI action that would make you question their ethics? Yes No
8. Will a new police officer have a tendency to act like the FTI who taught them? Yes No

9. Some agencies require the new police officer to evaluate their FTI every two weeks for an opinion of “are you receiving the proper amount of training?” Will the new police officer give an unbiased answer? Yes No
10. A new officer has just completed their field training program and is being placed on your squad. Would it be important to you to know who their FTI was? Yes No
11. When a new officer makes a mistake we have a tendency to place the blame strictly on the officer and not consider a possible training deficiency. True or False.
12. A FTI should be evaluated using the same standards as those of a supervisor and these evaluations should qualify or disqualify them before they receive the assignment of training a new officer. True False

Name_____ Rank_____

Department_____

Thank you for assisting in this survey.

Please return to:

Delbert C. Dawes

Humble Police Department