



Give Them the Tools

Your officers need inspired, effective training

Early in my career, four state police officers were shot and killed in a gun battle with two heavily armed suspects in an event widely known as the Newhall Incident. After this heartbreaking event was scrutinized and analyzed in hopes of preventing similar tragedies, a critical training issue emerged: During the intense and prolonged fire-fight, at least one of the officers had carefully placed his expended brass in his uniform pocket—an action that may have cost him his life. The investigation also determined that during

measure up to those standards. Training lies at the very heart of preparing police officers for their difficult and demanding role in our society.

Where & When

The time to prepare for an emergency is not during the critical event. Savvy supervisors and training officers force trainees to think through a variety of hypothetical scenarios, discuss them, make contingency plans and then train for the skills that will guide them through the test. Likewise, football players train extensively on the skills

is delivered at the training officer or first line supervisory level. Often, training and contingency planning takes place in the field or during roll call and squad meetings. Therefore, officers in this frontline role must understand and prepare themselves for this most important responsibility.

Conviction Counts

Attitude is vital, too. Research has revealed that employees respond positively to trainers who demonstrate strong conviction during the training process. Leading or training with doubt

facts, logic and principles; it results from research, analysis and actual experience; and it is a by-product of disciplined preparation by the trainer. It takes a lot of homework to develop strong conviction.

When I entered my law enforcement career, I was taught the then-traditional one-hand firing position. However, our experience in Los Angeles revealed that more than 90 percent of officer-involved shootings take place within seven yards. We recognized the practicality of the Weaver two-hand stance and began teaching and using it. The improvement in shooting capability from this new technique was impressive.

Using this technique, two officers working one of our special operations teams had been involved in several gunfights and had been proven “by fire.” They were temporarily pulled from their field assignment and given the responsibility of retro-training those of us trained in the old system. I was part of a small group of staff and command officers initially exposed to this training; I will never forget that experience. The single factor that got my attention at the very beginning of that exercise was the conviction of the two officers. They exuded their belief in this new technique and were visibly enthusiastic. They were so confident they convinced me **I would be a better combat shooter if I just followed their direction** and example. And they were right; at the end of the day, I had made amazing progress.

The conviction of my two trainers allowed them to: 1) Use principles, not just rules or techniques to explain the scientific forces at work; 2) use a body of factual evidence to support their position; 3) demonstrate positive examples of the technique; and 4) give positive reinforcement when we did it right.

Do Your Homework

True leaders and trainers inspire students. In order to inspire, they must be inspired and really believe in what

they ask others to do. They must believe strongly enough to take their belief to the point of commitment and hard work to prepare for the task.

If you want to effectively train others, do your homework. Become a leader or trainer with strong conviction—on point.

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The Newhall Incident victims, from left to right: Walter Frago, Roger Gore, James Pence, Jr. and George Allen. Read more about this incident and the lessons learned at www.pointshooting.com/survival.htm.

firearms training many officers collected their expended cartridges in that very manner, which may have carried over to the officer’s actions under stress. *The bottom line:* When officers encounter an emergency situation, they usually revert to behavior learned in training.

Clearly, training remains a very significant component of building an excellent police organization. It’s not enough to set noble goals or high standards for officers; they must be equipped to achieve those goals and

they will use on game day. They run the plays, throw the blocks and make the tackles over and over again. When the challenge of the game occurs, they are ready. Their reactions are almost automatic—like they’ve been programmed. It’s what we called “developing muscle memory” when I was in the academy.

Everyone in leadership should assess training needs, provide training resources and ensure training is delivered. So-called vestibule or academy training is important, but some of the best training and tactical preparedness

leads to doubt in the mind of the trainee. There is something about the body language, tone of voice or look in the eye that reveals to the trainee the training officer is not too sure about the direction they are giving. On the other hand, conviction is also evident and makes the trainer very believable and persuasive. When a training officer or supervisor speaks with conviction it is like the old commercial for a famous brokerage firm: “Everybody listens.”

Conviction does not grow in a vacuum. Genuine conviction is based on

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