

The ILEETATM Journal

Spring 2026
Volume 16 | Edition 2

"I thought I was coming to learn new skills. Instead, I found a community."

A First-Timer's Love Letter to ILEETA p.6

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OFFICER SAFETY & USE OF FORCE

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The ILEETA Journal is the official publication of the **International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association**. It exists to support, challenge, and elevate those entrusted with preparing others for the realities of the profession.

Training shapes outcomes. It influences decisions made under pressure, performance in moments that matter, and the safety of officers and the communities they serve. The Journal provides a platform for trainers and educators to share lessons learned, tested ideas, research, and practical insights that improve how law enforcement training is delivered worldwide.

More than a collection of articles, the ILEETA Journal is a professional conversation. It reflects our shared responsibility to learn continuously, teach intentionally, and **inspire excellence in law enforcement training**.

DISCLAIMER:

Unless otherwise noted, the opinions and views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policies, positions, or views of the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA).

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Kerry Avery

Editorial

Built, Not Issued

Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of **The ILEETA Journal**. The ILEETA conference was another exceptional experience with a strong lineup of classes, a wide variety of subject matter, and a notable number of presenters stepping up for the first time. There is something great about watching someone deliver their first class at ILEETA and realize that the community is going to meet them with encouragement. That spirit is part of what keeps people coming back year after year.

One theme in this edition is the gap between being certified and being ready to teach. Several contributors make the case that passing a course makes you eligible to begin, not qualified to lead. Several articles look at what is happening inside the learner, how the language instructors use can shape officer performance, why some recruits shut down under scenario stress, and how emotional intelligence is less a soft skill and more a form of protective equipment. This edition covers a range of technology, virtual reality, AI, red dot optics, conducted electrical weapons, and eLearning. There are also pieces about resilience, gratitude, and the people who support us in ways we rarely stop to acknowledge. Training is about people.

We also have multiple international articles in this issue, with contributors from the Netherlands, Brazil, and across the Pacific, plus information about a global professional development network connecting officers in more than 100 countries. A good reminder that the challenges we face in training are not uniquely ours.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition and to everyone who reads it. The investment you make in your own development and in the people you train makes a real difference.

Stay safe!
Kerry



Executive Director

Ray Merlin

Hello ILEETA Trainers and Educators,

I hope you're enjoying a great start to the summer. It has been an exciting season for ILEETA as we continue strengthening connections, expanding resources, and evolving to better serve trainers and educators around the world.

I encourage you to check out the ILEETA YouTube channel and the ILEETA History Project. These projects help preserve the knowledge, experiences, and legacy of our profession while providing valuable learning opportunities for today's and tomorrow's trainers.

Thank you to everyone who makes this Journal possible, our authors, contributors, editors, and the many volunteers working behind the scenes. Your dedication provides meaningful insight and professional development for our members.

Please take a few moments to review and update your ILEETA member profile and continue visiting our website as we introduce new resources and opportunities for engagement.

With so much happening in our world today, the role of the trainer has never been more important. The knowledge, skills, and professionalism you share directly influence the safety and success of those we serve. Your impact reaches far beyond the training environment and strengthens our profession and our communities.

Most importantly, thank you for being part of the ILEETA family and our #TribeOfTrainers. Together, we continue to learn, share, and inspire excellence.

And finally, don't forget to thank the family and friends who support you while you're away training. None of us accomplish this work alone.

Stay safe, stay connected, and thank you for all you do.

Ray





Deputy Executive Director

Joe Willis

How We Make Them Feel

In 2007, at the ASLET Conference, the class I planned to attend was canceled, so I wandered into one next door: *Grab Them by Their Hearts and Their Minds Will Follow*, presented by Valerie Van Brocklin.

I don't remember her slides or learning objectives. I remember how she made me feel.

At the end of the session, she handed each participant a small metal charm engraved with one word: *Inspire*. I still carry mine.

Maya Angelou wrote, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." That's especially true in our profession.

Encouraging the heart isn't lowering standards or avoiding hard conversations. It isn't hazing masquerading as toughness or empty praise masquerading as leadership. It's believing in people enough to hold them accountable while helping them grow.

As trainers and educators, we don't just teach skills, we shape people. Sometimes the greatest encouragement isn't, "Good job." It's, "I know you're capable of more, and I'm going to help you get there."

Quick check: Are you breaking people down, handing out participation trophies, or developing professionals through honest, compassionate feedback and high expectations?

Nearly twenty years later, I still carry that little charm. It reminds me that the lessons people remember most are often less about what we taught and more about the confidence we inspired.

Continue to Inspire Excellence.

Joe



From Participator to Presenter: Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone

Brent Colbert

I should have known how the week was going to go once my dress shirt blew down the street as I arrived during a tornado warning for ILEETA

26. To the new potential article writers or presenters, it's your time now to take that next step. Now, that sounds like a terrible start to the week, but I learned so much presenting my first class. The recurring theme since I started coming to ILEETA in 2023 is don't be afraid of change. So, I came out of my comfort zone and wrote my first article last year. I struggle to convey my thoughts in writing. Once it got published, man, the pride I felt in saying I had an article published was worth all the effort.

Oftentimes, I feel overwhelmed with the amount of knowledge at the ILEETA conference. You feel a bit intimidated and overwhelmed. However, to grow, we must challenge ourselves. That starts with realizing that growth means stepping out of your comfort zone. That started with submitting a class proposal on something I am very fluent in: media relations. The proposal got accepted, and it was go time. A lot of nights, I was writing a doctoral paper and then loading up my PowerPoint to see what I could add to make this the best. Here's the kicker, though, through 2 sessions of the class, I only had 11 students total. I felt defeated until I spoke with someone I had previously met through ILEETA, who reminded me that it does not matter how many students you impact; it is the ability to impact the ones who were there. Over the next year, many readers will have something to offer the ILEETA community. I am challenging you, the reader, to come out of your comfort zone and write an article or present a class. It's scary, nerve-wracking, and a lot of preparation, but at the end of the day, knowing you can share something with a community that truly matters is worth all the effort and nerves.

So here are three takeaways that can help you go from participator to presenter:

1. Passion

Find something that you truly care about in the law enforcement field. When you care about something, writing an article or presenting a class becomes so much easier. This allows you to show your personality and engage the reader in your topic.



2. The gentle shove

We are most at home in the comfort zone. It is what we are familiar with and allows us to skate by doing the bare minimum. At ILEETA, we are always encouraged to keep learning and grow to be the best of the best. Push yourself to come out of that comfort zone. Nothing is more rewarding than being able to show something in hard copy that says, "I am making this community better."

3. Networking

Get to know your peers at ILEETA. I have learned from so many, and without them, I would never have taken that gentle shove. We have a collection at our fingertips of some of the finest individuals in our career field. Keep learning and absorb as much knowledge as you can.

As an aside, my class went great, and the week didn't turn out how I thought it would. Small numbers don't matter; it's the lives you touch that matter. We are the cream of the crop, and the cream always rises to the top.



About the author

Brent Colbert is a veteran police officer who has held roles as a supervisor, media relations officer, and full-time training department assignment. Brent holds a master's degree in Criminal Justice Administration and is currently pursuing his doctorate in Strategic Leadership, with a graduation date of late 2026.



A First-Timer's Love Letter to ILEETA

Tara Hurst

Airport Reflections: Sore Eyes, Full Heart

I'm sitting at Gate 22 at the St. Louis Airport with sore eyes, a tired body, and that familiar heaviness in my chest that comes when something meaningful has just ended. My suitcase is heavier than when I arrived, filled with ILEETA and expo swag, challenge coins, and a week's worth of washing. But the real weight, the good kind, is the internal energy that's somehow buzzing and calming me at the same time.

I came to the ILEETA Conference for the first time, unsure of what to expect. I'm leaving feeling like I've stumbled into a community I didn't realize I had been missing. What began with intimidation, walking into a buzzing lobby full of trainers whose names and reputations I'd heard talked about across the Pacific Ocean, ended with a belonging and a renewed sense of purpose.

ILEETA was more than a conference. It was a pull. A gravitational force. And I'm grateful I answered it.

Intimidation at the Door, Belonging in Every Hallway

I stood in line at registration watching groups of seasoned trainers greet each other with hugs, inside jokes, and years of shared history. I kept telling myself: "You're supposed to be here. Just breathe."

And then, almost immediately, someone turned, smiled, and asked where I was visiting from. Before I knew it, I was in a conversation about instructor development with people who didn't treat me like a newcomer, rather like a colleague, someone worth listening to.

Moving into the newcomer's welcome night, it was clear that ILEETA conference was about far more than instruction. It's about connection and being surrounded by people who believe in lifting each other higher.



That was the theme for the entire week. If I stood alone, someone invited me in. If I looked lost, someone guided me. And if I doubted myself, someone reminded me I belonged.

A Week of World-Class Training (and Impossible Choices)

Every morning felt like choosing between diamonds. No matter which session you circled, you were sacrificing another session equally extraordinary.

Some highlights from my own schedule included John Bostains session Based on What? From Tradition to Transformation in Training. He delivered on exactly what everyone had told me he would: depth, clarity, and immediately applicable insight. The class hit me in a space between professional development and personal reflection.

Jenny Prohaska's session on Compensating for the Weakness in the Modern Day Recruit provided strong insight into the evolving needs and behaviours of new recruits, and even more importantly, how we as trainers must adapt to support them in reaching their full potential.

Even coming from different workplaces (or different continents) the sessions resonated and provided a common foundation for reflection and improvement.

Throughout the week, I found myself repeatedly struck by the range and quality of what was on offer. Sessions that challenged traditional methodologies, addressed shifts in training delivery and assessment, and pushed us to rethink communication.

Every instructor brought passion and every attendee brought curiosity. Every room buzzed with the collective desire to get better for the people we serve. The sessions left me with a notebook full of ideas and a renewed sense of conviction. This is why we teach. This is why we show up.

Where the Connections Formed: The After-Hours Magic

As powerful as the sessions were, something unexpected happened each evening. When the notebooks closed and classrooms emptied, that's when the true heart of ILEETA revealed itself.

Whether it was the Cigar night, where conversations drifted from tactical philosophies to life lessons. The Whiskey & Bags night where friendly competition took centre stage, or Old-fashioned Trivia night, which transformed strangers into teammates...these were the moments where walls dropped and friendships formed.

Continued on pg. 62

About the author

Tara Hurst is the Director of Custodial Operations Training with ACT Corrective Services in Australia, where she has served for over 11 years across roles in Custodial Operations, Prisoner Transport, and Training & Development. Passionate about building strong training cultures and supporting instructors to thrive, Tara brings a grounded, people focused approach to developing staff.



Introducing the International Police Association – A Global Network for Professional Development

The International Police Association (IPA) is the world's largest association for serving and retired police officers, bringing together over 372,000 members across more than 100 countries. Built on the values of friendship, cooperation, and professional exchange, the IPA provides a unique global platform where members can connect, learn, and grow—both personally and professionally.

At the International Police Association, we are deeply committed to the continuous professional development of our members, particularly those actively serving and protecting communities worldwide. Our mission is to provide access to high-quality training, practical tools, and professional insights that support officers in their daily duties and throughout their careers.

IBZ Gimborn – The Flagship of IPA Education

At the heart of our educational offering is IBZ Gimborn, the IPA's international training centre located in a historic castle in the German countryside. Recognised as the flagship of our Association's learning and development programme, Gimborn delivers a wide range of professional seminars led by expert speakers in an inspiring and truly unique setting.



Attending a seminar at Gimborn is more than just training—it is an experience that combines knowledge-sharing, international exchange, and friendship. Members from across the IPA world come together to learn, discuss, and build lasting connections in an environment that reflects the spirit of our Association.

While we recognise that not all members are able to travel to Gimborn, the IPA offers a range of accessible alternatives. A growing programme of webinars allows members to participate in training remotely, ensuring that knowledge and expertise can be shared beyond the physical location of the training centre.



Bringing Learning to Members Worldwide

Building on this approach, the IPA continues to expand its global training offer through off-site seminars and online learning opportunities, delivered in different regions and languages. Through the off-site seminar programme, Sections have the opportunity to host experienced Gimborn trainers in their own countries, enabling tailored, high-quality training to be delivered locally and made accessible to a wider audience.

All IPA training programmes provide official certification, enhancing members' professional portfolios and demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning within the policing community.

To view upcoming seminars and explore learning opportunities, please visit our Learning & Development page:

<https://ipa-international.org/benefits/learning-development/>

Defensive Tactics Group (DTG)

An important part of our professional development framework is the Defensive Tactics Group (DTG), an international training initiative focused on enhancing practical skills, safety, and innovation in policing. The DTG delivers certified programmes combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on techniques, including de-escalation, communication, and managing high-risk situations. It also fosters international collaboration,

enabling members to share expertise and develop best practices in defensive tactics worldwide.



Learning Through International Exchange

Beyond formal training, the IPA actively promotes professional exchange programmes, offering members the opportunity to experience policing in different countries. These exchanges encourage cultural understanding, broaden perspectives, and strengthen international cooperation between police officers.

Whether you are looking to enhance your skills, gain new insights, or expand your international network, the IPA provides the platform to support your journey. Together, we continue to build a modern, connected, and professional global police community.





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Officer Safety & Use of Force

Editor: Brian Hill



Virtual Reality as a Targeted Tool: Promise, Limits, and Judgment in Law Enforcement Training

Dr. Lon Bartel

Introduction: Between Promise and Prudence

Law enforcement training has always existed in tension between what is possible and what is necessary. The profession demands preparation for rare, high-stakes, rapidly evolving events, yet the logistical, financial, and safety constraints of recreating those events in the real world are substantial. XR (extended reality) offers immersive, repeatable, and scalable training environments, where “X” can be understood as a variable representing virtual (VR), augmented (AR), or mixed reality (MR).

XR promises to place officers inside critical incidents without exposing them or others to significant risk and offers the possibility of rehearsing decisions, refining perception, and experiencing consequences in ways that traditional methods struggle to replicate. The central question, however, is not whether XR can be used, but how, and under what conditions, it should be used.

Drawing on the author’s qualitative research and a recent critical review of XR in policing, this article examines XR training in law enforcement. The aim is not advocacy or dismissal, but clarity, helping trainers make disciplined decisions about where XR belongs in the training ecosystem.

XR as a Targeted Tool, Not a Universal Solution

A consistent finding from law enforcement trainers is that XR is not viewed as a replacement for traditional training, but rather as a targeted tool that fits certain training objectives better than others (Bartel, 2026). XR performs best when the training goal aligns with what the technology can faithfully represent; effectiveness is not inherent to XR itself, but contingent on fit between the tool and the task. When that alignment is present, XR can offer meaningful benefits; when it is absent, the same technology can become distracting, misleading, or even counterproductive.

This aligns with broader research indicating that XR’s value is tied to its ability to simulate environments that are otherwise difficult, costly, or dangerous to recreate (Podoletz et al., 2024). Simulation alone, however, is not sufficient; the



question is whether the simulation captures the right elements of the task.

inoculation, both recognized as critical to performing under pressure (Bartel, 2026).

Four Core Competencies

Findings suggest that XR's effectiveness varies across four broad areas of law enforcement performance (Bartel, 2026): decision-making under uncertainty, skill acquisition and motor performance, operational/legal frameworks, and interpersonal communication. These distinctions offer a useful framework for trainers evaluating adoption.

1. Decision-Making Under Uncertainty

XR shows promise in decision-making contexts involving ambiguity, time pressure, and evolving threat cues. Immersive environments can present officers with branching scenarios, forcing them to interpret behavior, assess intent, and act, while safely exploring "what if" pathways through repetition and variation. Research suggests that XR allows trainees to engage in active participation, reflection, and error without real-world consequences (Podoletz et al., 2024).

A distinctive strength of XR lies in its ability to elicit emotional and physiological responses. Immersion can create stress, urgency, and engagement in ways that classroom instruction cannot, opening the door to stress exposure and elements of stress

These same mechanisms introduce risk. XR environments may produce cybersickness, cognitive overload, or unintended psychological effects, particularly if poorly designed or improperly dosed, and the literature raises concerns about trauma exposure and emotional carryover when scenarios are highly intense (Podoletz et al., 2024). XR can activate human emotional systems, but activation alone is not training; without careful structuring and debriefing, it may simply be experience without transfer, or negative transfer.

2. Skill Acquisition and Motor Performance

The limitations of XR are more pronounced in areas such as weapon manipulation and marksmanship. Law enforcement skills are fundamentally perception–action coupled, requiring coordination between what an officer sees, feels, and physically does. Many

XR systems struggle to replicate the kinesthetic and tactile realities of real-world performance.

Continued on pg.63

About the author

Dr. Lon Bartel has over 22 years of law enforcement training experience, he focuses on enhancing officer and trainer performance. Lon was recognized as a subject matter expert in firearms and defensive tactics by the State of Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.). He is a founding member and lifetime advisor of the Arizona Tactical Officers Association (ATOA) and an internationally certified instructor with the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST). Lon earned his bachelor's from Arizona State University and master's in applied Exercise Science from Concordia University-Chicago. He is a Doctor of Philosophy in General Psychology with an emphasis on Performance Psychology.



The Architecture Behind Decision Making

Andrea Bogiatto

What are systems and structures if not organisms created by human beings? Managers, trainers and command staff know this: the most important asset of any strategy is not the procedure but the person who applies it. For us first responders this is obvious: every shift, from “command” to the front line, requires rapid decisions under physical and psychological stress, and it’s precisely there that procedures meet habits and the limits of traditional training are measured.

The value of the officer

Much of the training available today focuses on decision making: understanding what and when to prioritize to reach effective decisions. Scenario-based training was born for that purpose, to foster muscle memory and appropriate responses. It’s a meaningful step forward, certainly, although we still remain at the tip of the iceberg. I’m not talking theory or physiology, but about practical, measurable and trainable tools that actually serve the officer on the next shift. How many times have we gone to a course, received interesting information and then returned home, done our patrol shift and not known how to apply that information to everyday work? Personally, it happened to me a thousand times.

Instinct, habit, reward

From my 24 years’ experience in law enforcement in international contexts, polarizing questions emerged: what lies behind decision making? What is the architecture that produces a decision? With what practical tools do I understand “what is important right now”? Operationally, when an error or a sudden incident occurs there is no recovery time; what remains is the redirection of acquired patterns and a responsive latency aimed at regaining control and recovery may come later. Our responses take immediate control with three outcomes: fight, flight, or freeze, and many stress decisions are anchored precisely on these pillars. Through this behavioral framework our decisions are nothing more than the product of hundreds of previously acquired habits: we do not decide, we repeat; habits follow a simple pattern: cue — repetition — reward. A signal, a tone, a movement, a change in the environment can become a trigger, and in operational contexts the cue may be a suspect’s failure to follow



an order, a verbal assault, or a sudden crowd movement. Often the officer does not consciously perceive the cue but an automatic response is triggered based on what in the past provided relief or control (reward). The reward explains why certain actions persist and are repeated. They provide immediate relief, reduce anxiety, give the feeling of control even when they do not change the outcome, and even if the long-term result is not the desired one, the human brain prefers short-term reward even if long-term outcomes are unacceptable rather than a long-term reward or success. Repeated cue, repetition, and reward build immediate decisions that determine results, incidents, and errors.

“Scenario-Based Training” as a diagnostic tool

Scenario-based training is a powerful instrument, but everything depends on how we use it. Too many scenarios are predictable refresher platforms where the officer knows what to expect or knows that something will happen anyway, with long pauses, a few minutes of work and a return to ordinary life between scenarios, and above all controlled and balanced scenarios. By contrast, a truly useful scenario is immersive (at least three hours), prolonged and designed to maintain flow. A single briefing, few interruptions, and an environment deliberately creating controlled disequilibrium with a stated objective

to not to make the officer fail, but to surface authentic behavior patterns under stress, where the error itself is not a reason to point fingers but becomes a fundamental tool and should be sought.

Individual intervention: isolate and repeat

From observation comes practical work: the officer identifies the pattern they repeat with failing consequences, such as vocal repetition, emotional escalation, respiratory tension, etc. and focuses intervention on a single change, using the simple concept of the compound effect: one pattern to change, a disciplined practice, produces significant transformations; too many simultaneous focuses collapse. Experience shows that most officers tend to recognize their own pattern after targeted observation.

The operational journal

After identifying the pattern and deciding on a specific, targeted intervention, the work must be accompanied by a daily operational journal, simple and concise, with identified trigger, new repetition inserted, consequent reward. It is not bureaucracy; it is awareness.

This process, which must last a minimum of 30 days with daily actions, replaces the unwanted

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About the author

Andrea Bogiatto is a law-enforcement professional and operational training consultant based in Windsor, Colorado. With 24+ years' frontline experience - including crowd control, public-order operations and international K9 programs — he founded Zero Earth Academy and co-developed The Pack System and the PROMPT decision-making method. Currently a Deputy Sheriff (Larimer County), served in Italian National Police, he delivers global training on human factors, K9 deployment, command-level decision architecture and instructor development.



God's Eye Fallacy

Michael Brave

Start your exploration of the “God’s Eye Fallacy” with the article by Peters and Black in [Police and Security News](#), Video doesn’t lie? The dangerous myth behind camera evidence (Peters & Black, 2026).

In the United States, law enforcement officers (LEOs or officers) must comply with a myriad of legal, judicial, legislative, administrative, and other applicable standards. The primary force standards stem from constitutional requirements found in the Fourth, Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution (Brave, 2024; Brave et al., 2024; Brave et al., 2025; Brave & Ross, 2025a, 2025b). Some of these standards also incorporate a separate and distinct qualified immunity analysis, under which officers may be immune from civil liability for monetary damages for alleged violations brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (civil action for deprivation of rights) and related provisions such as 42 U.S.C. § 1988 (proceedings in vindication of civil rights). In *Malley v. Briggs*, 475 U.S. 335 (1986), the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) held that qualified immunity protects “all but the plainly incompetent or those who knowingly violate the law.”

The “God’s Eye Fallacy” in evaluating officer involved shootings (OISs) and other law enforcement incidents refers to the error of treating video recordings as if they provide a complete, objective, and omniscient account of an event, equivalent to what a reasonable officer actually perceived in real time under the Fourth Amendment’s on scene “objective reasonableness” standard articulated in *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985), and *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

Although SCOTUS has held that courts may reject a party’s account when it is “blatantly contradicted by the record” such that “no reasonable jury could believe it,” *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372, 380 (2007), this rule does not convert video into an infallible, God like vantage point. Rather, it permits disregard of narratives that cannot reasonably stand in light of the entire evidentiary record, which itself remains partial and perspectival. In *Barnes v. Felix*, 605 U.S. 73 (2025), the Court reaffirmed that use of force claims under the Fourth Amendment “objective



reasonableness” standard must be assessed under the “totality of the circumstances,” explicitly rejecting the Fifth Circuit’s sole timing analysis under the “moment of threat” doctrine and cautioning against reducing analysis to a single freeze framed instant or clipped video segment divorced from the broader, evolving context.

Perception, knowledge, and the God’s Eye Fallacy

Within this doctrinal framework, an officer’s legal exposure turns on what information was reasonably available to the officer at the time and how a reasonably prudent officer perceived, interpreted, and responded to that information, not on what later emerges from stopped, single frame, carefully selected frames; slowed, enhanced, repeatedly viewed or analyzed footage; or multi angle recordings reviewed with unlimited time, 20/20 hindsight, and potentially biased interpretations. The officer’s knowledge is formed through human perception—limited fields of view, divided attention, stress effects on perception and decision making, and incomplete or ambiguous sensory cues—and the constitutional question is whether those perceptions and inferences were objectively reasonable under rapidly evolving circumstances, not whether they match the composite narrative later assembled from video and other media recordings. Empirical research on body worn cameras and other video recordings shows that camera angle

and vantage point systematically shape observers’ judgments and attributions of responsibility, underscoring that recording is perspectival rather than neutral and that what appears obvious to post hoc viewers may never have been apparent from the officer’s actual viewpoint. Scholarship on technologically mediated surveillance likewise cautions against assuming that multi source visual data yield a neutral “God’s eye view,” emphasizing the partial and constructed nature of such representations. When investigators, fact finders, decision makers, law enforcement critics, and others conflate a retrospective, multi angle, slow motion reconstruction with the limited, time pressured, and viewpoint specific information actually available to the officer on scene as the incident evolves, they commit the God’s Eye Fallacy by importing an unattainable omniscient perspective into an analysis that should remain grounded in the officer’s situationally constrained perceptions and the full contextual record, consistent with *Garner*, *Graham*, *Malley*, *Scott*, and *Barnes*.

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Three Phases. One Job. Is Your Training Keeping Up?

*Colonel Dr. Wendy
Dorrestijn*

Every potentially violent incident unfolds in three phases: pre-incident, action, and post-incident.

This is not a framework. It is a description of how incidents develop, confirmed by research and, more recently, by direct observation of 1,950 Dutch police and military officers across 430 real incidents and 1,250 training scenarios (Dorrestijn, 2025).

The problem: each of those three phases activates a fundamentally different type of learning. The pre-incident phase is cognitive — mental models are built, plans formed, contingencies considered. The action phase is physical and procedural: trained behaviors are executed under stress, motor skills tested under load. The post-incident phase is reflective — what happened is processed, assumptions tested, lessons consolidated.

Training that covers only the action phase prepares officers for one act of a three-act performance, and leaves the other two to chance.

Training that starts at the door and ends when the role-player goes compliant is not realistic training. It is the action phase in isolation, stripped of everything that determines whether the action phase goes well.

Phase One: Cognitive Learning Happens Before the Door

Gary Klein's recognition-primed decision-making research shows that experienced officers do not reason from scratch under pressure. They match what they encounter to what they have encountered before, and act on that match. The more representative their training, the faster and more accurately they read and respond (Klein, 1998; Klein, 2011).

This is why the pre-incident phase matters. Officers who use the drive to a scene to build a mental model — dispatch information, prior experience, structured 'what if' thinking — arrive with a framework for reading what they encounter. What if the door is blocked? What if the suspect is in crisis? These contingency questions are the cognitive scaffolding that allows officers to adapt when reality diverges from expectation, and it always does.



The data bears this out: planning scores substantially higher in real incidents, not because danger sharpens minds, but because real incidents include the pre-incident phase that training omits. When training starts at the door, the first thirty seconds go to improvisation. In reality, those seconds execute a plan already made (Dorrestijn, 2025).

There is a deeper cost. The most valuable capacity an officer can develop — action intelligence: the ability to read a developing situation, adapt in real time, and direct the incident rather than being directed by it — requires a pre-incident phase to activate. Without it, officers are immediately reactive. Training that eliminates the pre-incident phase does not just fail to develop proactive behavior. **It trains the opposite.**

A good plan, with clear role division, does more than reduce improvisation. It creates the cognitive headroom for the two hardest elements of officer behavior to be executed together: communication with the suspect and tactical action. These are difficult on their own. The real challenge, and the one most training never creates space for, is the switch between them: shifting from hard skills to soft skills and back, in real time, as the situation demands. This is action intelligence in practice. It is only available to the officer who is not spending cognitive capacity on the

basics. Strip the pre-incident phase and you strip the precondition for the most consequential behavior in the repertoire (Kahneman & Klein, 2009).

Phase Two: Motor and Procedural Learning Happens in the Action

The action phase is where physical and procedural skills are tested under load. Repetition under realistic conditions consolidates motor skills, drives procedures into long-term memory, and reduces cognitive load when it matters — freeing capacity for reading the situation and deciding (Meichenbaum, 1985; Oudejans, 2008).

But the action phase depends on what preceded it. Under stress, fast intuitive thinking accelerates while deliberate critical reasoning slows (Kahneman, 2011). Useful when the patterns are right. Dangerous when they are wrong and no pre-incident phase was available to check them.

What the data make plain is this: communication and tactical behavior are not separate skills, they are two sides of the same coin, and officers who perform well on one consistently perform well on the other. Yet most programs treat them as distinct modules, trained apart, on different days. That division does not exist

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About the Author

Colonel Dr. Wendy Dorrestijn MPM MCDM is a serving military officer, former police officer, former fire service commander, and criminologist with more than 34 years of operational experience. She holds a PhD from Radboud University Nijmegen (2025). Her book Beyond the Split Second — Police and Military in Training and Action (Boom Criminologie, 2025) presents the full empirical findings of the study described in this article.



The Use of Force in Security: A Perspective Based on Traditional Chinese Wisdom

Fabio Gomes

My intention here is not to present absolute truths. The purpose of this text is to provoke reflection on how we understand the use of force in the field of security and on how this subject can be expanded when viewed through the lens of Classical Chinese Strategic Thought.

This line of thought has its roots in the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), a context marked by intense conflict that, paradoxically, gave rise to some of the most refined frameworks for strategy and for understanding human action. Works such as *The Art of War*, attributed to Sun Tzu, and traditional martial systems such as Ving Tsun express this legacy by understanding effectiveness not as the imposition of force, but as adequacy to context.

Force is part of the reality of security. Denying this would be naïve. In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to contain risks, interrupt aggression, or preserve lives. The problem lies not in its existence, but in the way it is commonly understood. Too often, force is reduced to the idea of impact, physical restraint, or direct response, as if its use were merely a matter of intensity.

Traditional Chinese wisdom proposes another reading. Force is not something raw that is applied, but something that is worked. It requires perception, situational reading, and maturity. It is in this sense that Sun Tzu states, *“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”*

Institutional models for the use of force, such as escalation scales and response diagrams, play an important role in organizing thinking. The risk arises when they are interpreted as fixed scripts. Real situations are dynamic and permeated by human and contextual variables that no diagram can fully anticipate. For this reason, such models function best when understood as references for conduct, not as automatic decision-making mechanisms.

In Classical Chinese Strategic Thought, the situation precedes action. It is not the agent’s will that determines what must be done, but what the context presents. Every action is, in fact, a reaction to something already in motion. The central



question shifts from “What do I want to do?” to “What is the situation asking for?”

This reading requires attention and sensitivity. Without them, responses tend to become rigid and misaligned. A clear example of this logic can be observed in the Cuban Missile Crisis, when a careful reading of the context allowed the modulation of force and prevented an irreversible escalation.

Another recurring mistake is to understand conflict as a simple opposition between “me” and “the other.” This perspective impoverishes the situation. When the other is seen solely as an enemy, the capacity to perceive the relational field in which action occurs is lost, leading to the dehumanization of the aggressor and frequently resulting in either excessive or insufficient use of force.

In martial arts influenced by Chinese thought, there is frequent reference to “using the other’s force.” This idea is not limited to employing an adversary’s energy against them, but to recognizing the forces, or resources, already present in the situation and operating from them. It means acting

on the configuration of the problem, not imposing a predetermined response.

This understanding resonates with the metaphor of water, often associated with Bruce Lee. Water does not confront an obstacle head-on, nor does it ignore it. It adapts, flows around it, and moves forward according to the terrain. To use force, from this perspective, is to recognize the characteristics of the situation and act from them.

Within this same logic, humanity becomes central as a foundation for action. Humanity here does not mean moralism or sentimentalism. It is a strategic competence. As observed by Colonel Alessandro Visacro, it is the commander’s duty to prevent the degeneration of his men. Recognizing emotions, tensions, and intentions broadens situational awareness and prevents automatic responses.

From this perspective, force is neither denied nor romanticized. It ceases to be the point of departure and becomes one resource among others, activated

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About the Author

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Fabio Gomes has worked for more than 25 years as a security consultant. His work is inspired by traditional Chinese wisdom, through the martial system of Ving Tsun. Throughout his career, he has trained Commandos and Special Forces of the Brazilian Army, Amphibious Commandos of the Brazilian Navy, officers of the Rio de Janeiro BOPE, UN Peacekeepers, and professionals from the corporate sector.

His approach integrates strategic intelligence and human development, offering comprehensive preparation that goes beyond physical combat and fosters an anticipatory and adaptive mindset.

He is the author of THE ART OF FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING: The Chinese Martial System Ving Tsun in the Special Operations of the Brazilian Army, available on Amazon in Portuguese and English.

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The Learning Loop: A Practical Framework for Training That Transfers

Jeff Johnsgaard

In most use-of-force encounters, the outcome is shaped in a few seconds or less. Yet much of our training still treats performance as if officers have time to think through decisions step by step, when they don't.

What they do have is a rapidly unfolding cycle of perception, sense-making, expectation, decision, and action. All happening fast, overlapping, and often outside of conscious awareness.

If we want training to transfer to the street, we need a way to see that process and most importantly coach it.

This article presents the “Learning Loop” and gives you a ‘coaching card’ to immediately help you shift your coaching. The Learning Loop is a framework I use to guide my coaching both real time and prior through training design. Understanding it helps me apply strategies to sharpen officer’s skills and decisions.

Not a Checklist - A Way to See Performance

The Learning Loop is not a step-by-step checklist. It is a way to observe, coach and shape what is already happening fast, overlapping, and often outside the learner’s (and instructors’) awareness.

In real-world encounters I believe:

- Officers are not consciously moving from step to step.
- They are continuously attempting to make sense of what’s happening.
- Trying to predict and anticipate what they believe is about to happen next.
- Trying to get ahead of those future events to negate them if possible or act immediately and decisively if unable to.

Sense-making linked to officer action under time pressure is what I think of as ‘Game IQ’. Not how much an officer knows but how effectively they read a situation and act within it.



Slowing Down What Happens Fast

Because these moments unfold so quickly, they can be difficult to coach in real time.

The Learning Loop allows us to slow the event down after the fact so we can understand:

- What the officer noticed.
- What they believed was happening.
- What they expected to happen next.
- Why they acted the way they did.
- And how they adapted when things changed.

In simple terms:

The Learning Loop helps us slow performance down after the fact so we can sharpen sense-making and decision-making under pressure.

A Simplified, Transfer-Oriented Model

For training purposes, the 8-stage process can be viewed in four connected functions:

1. Perception & Attention
What information was detected and what was prioritized?
2. Sense-Making & Expectation
How was the situation interpreted?

What did the officer believe was most likely to happen next?

3. Decision & Action
What option was selected and how did that action shape the situation?

4. Error Detection & Adaptation
Did the outcome match the expectation?

If not, how was behavior adjusted?

These are not separate steps.

They are continuously interacting, often in fractions of a second.

Why This Matters for Instructors

In my experience most performance breakdowns come from:

- Missed or misinterpreted information.
- Expectations that don't match reality, causing hesitation.
- Delayed or poorly timed decisions.
- Failure to adjust due to failure to recognize when something isn't working.

In other words, errors are not only physical skill execution problems, they are also **perception and sense-making problems**.

If we only coach mechanics, or if we just give more reps of the same training design, we miss the root cause.

The Learning Loop helps us shift from:

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About the Author

Det/Sgt Jeff Johnsgaard (Ret.) founder of Training On Purpose, By Design. Jeff combines his years of teaching for Force Science, Reality Based Training Association and others with his deep knowledge of the research-grounded principles to improve law enforcement officer performance. Jeff regularly delivers training and consultation in the US and multiple other countries.

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Pistol-Mounted Optics Conversion-Our Experience

Tom Snelling

By now, many, if not most, agencies have adopted Red-Dot Sights (RDS)/Pistol-Mounted Optics (PMOs) on their handguns. For those who haven't, I'd like to share our experience when my agency converted to Red-Dots late last year. We did a 16-hour, 2-day course, and in summary, it went better than expected. Your mileage may vary.

I truly believe that Red-Dots are a game-changer for all competent shooters. One thing that they will not do is make an officer with weak fundamentals (grip, trigger control, etc.) better. That issue needs to be addressed separately.

While many things need to be considered before adopting PMOs, I'll try to address the main ones. We went with the Glock 45 COA, as our previous handgun was the G45 MOS (Modular Optic System) minus the optic. The first issue was that some instructors had no PMO experience other than a 2-day instructor course. While this worked out, I would highly recommend that if you have instructors with RDS experience, let them take the lead.

Getting Started

We started with a few hours of classroom instruction about what PMOs are and how they work. They're not a laser, not a scope nor any other commonly held misconceptions. We stressed the new idea of focusing on the target, not the front sight. Put another way, your target is your new front sight. Also stressed were the physiological benefits of both eyes wide open and focusing on what's trying to harm you.

Next was zeroing. Policy is to zero at 10 yards. The instructors zeroed the guns (with duty ammo) and then had the officers confirm zero by placing at least two of three shots in the tan/gold 2-inch circle on the Aimpoint COA targets from a braced position. Interestingly, right out of the box, the optics ran the gamut. Some required little to no adjustment, while others needed quite a bit of tweaking.



Then came the biggest challenge with Red-Dots. Presentation, Presentation, Presentation. We spent over an hour having the officers draw and learn finding the dot. (from a new holster, which also required training). As with iron sights, remember: the gun comes up to the eyes, the eyes do not go to the gun.

On the Range

When it was time for live-fire, we started with baby steps. We began at the 5-yard line, drawing and firing one round at a time on small circle targets. One big issue was finding the dot, then getting everyone to focus on the **TARGET**, not the dot! One mistake some well-meaning instructors new to RDS training made was telling the group to use their iron sights to find the dot. Don't do that! That technique is a guaranteed way to make a slower shooter. One analogy that I like to use compares it to driving. If you have a bug on the windshield, you're aware of the bug, but you're focusing on the road. The same thing applies to Red-Dots.

The next issue was the constant movement of the dot. This is a normal phenomenon that becomes less noticeable as one gets more experience with PMOs. The trick here is to get the students not to worry about the perfect picture. If the dot is anywhere on the target, send the shot! From there, we moved to follow-up

shots, once again, slow fire. We did encounter some minor issues; some officers with astigmatism had difficulty with the dot, and at least one reported seeing multiple dots. Those issues were easily addressed by presenting the optic in a slightly different manner, adjusting the dot intensity, etc. Virtually every drill was performed from the holster to help officers build familiarity with their new equipment.

We then proceeded to multiple shots, gradually increasing speed. One of the best drills is obstructing the front of the optic with painter's tape. This drill will quickly fix the problem of closing one eye. Additional drills followed, including shooting with iron sights and the dot turned off.

We then did the state qualification to check that box. After breaking for dinner, we did the state's night qualification and acquainted the officers with the difference in the day/night intensity of the dot and possible dot wash-out using the weapon-mounted light.

On day two, we did drills with the optic totally obscured, using the housing as a sight, mimicking a worst-case scenario. The COA is a closed emitter, but we still did drills by spraying water on the optics and letting the officers shoot, mimicking a strong rainstorm.

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About the Author

Tom Snelling is a firearms instructor with 11 years of experience training for both his agency and Homeland Security contracts and has served 22 years as an auxiliary officer. He holds multiple instructor certifications from FLETC, FDLE, among others. A retired airline pilot with over 48 years of aviation experience, Tom brings a unique perspective to training and operations. He is a member of ILEETA, IALEFI, NALEFI, and NTOA, and holds an MBA from Mercer University and a BS from Georgia Tech. He can be reached at tsnell78@comcast.net

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A police officer in a dark uniform with a "POLICE" patch on the shoulder is aiming a rifle down a school hallway. He is wearing a headset and has a hand on his shoulder from another officer. In the distance, a digital figure of a person in a blue suit and mask, holding a rifle, is superimposed on the scene. A red box with the word "THREAT" is above the figure. Blue grid lines are visible on the right side of the image.

THREAT

**Instructor
Development**

Editor: Dan Fraser



Teach to Retain: Turning Officers into Instructors for Better Learning

Dan Fraser

We've all felt it. Seasoned officers come in for some annual requal-type training and their skills and knowledge suck. Somehow, they don't seem to remember much from last year's session. It's not because they weren't trained, it's because they didn't retain it.

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden famously said, "You haven't taught until they've learned". But how do we know that our students have actually learned something?

There are two main evidences that learning has occurred. The first is that we can retain it, and the second is that we can transfer that new knowledge or skill into the real world when we need it. If we can't retain what we've learned, we have no hope of being able to use it later.

Retention isn't something we luck into, it's trainable.

We've all seen the uncomfortable shift that takes place in our students the moment we announce that, "At the end of this class there will be a test." Students tend to lean in, pay more attention, and even take more notes. Arguably, even if you didn't have a test at the end, their retention will likely be better in this state than if you said nothing.

Some recent research tells us how to make this effect even more robust. This is often called the Protégé Effect: teaching, pretending to teach, or preparing to teach information to others increases retention.

The Protégé Effect explained:

A 2024 meta-analysis of 39 experiments looking at this effect revealed a few key take aways:

1. Expecting to teach significantly improves learning and retention.
2. Simply expecting to teach after a lesson can boost learning, but actually doing it is better.



3. And the most important: This really only works if students know they're expected to teach at the start of a class. In studies where students are surprised with the teaching task after the lesson, the protégé effect disappears. They have to know beforehand.

This isn't just theory. I've unknowingly done this with all kinds of stuff that I was learning. I would think to myself, "How would I teach this?" and "How could I teach this more effectively than how I'm currently learning it?" or "How would I explain this to a child or to someone who has no background in the subject?" I think about what the keys points are, and how I might explain them using analogies or even exercises. My wife has somehow put up with me teaching her all kinds of useless (to her) but interesting (to me) lessons that I've taken over the years.

A 2014 study found that simply telling students they were going to teach the material later, and not even making them actually do it, improved learning. John Nestojko, the lead author, said: "When compared to learners expecting a test, learners expecting to teach recalled more material correctly, they organized their recall more effectively and they had better memory for especially important information."

Now, think about the secondary benefits of having your students teach. It levels up both their communication skills and their confidence.

Why it works.

Expecting to teach can lead to increased metacognition. This is just a fancy term that means thinking about our thinking. Here, students become more aware of their own learning process. Students start to use more effective learning strategies, like really looking for key points and organizing their learning. Student motivation also gets a boost because they are no longer just learning for themselves.

Strangely, it doesn't even matter who they will be teaching this newfound knowledge to. One 2009 study saw this effect on full display even when

students only had to teach to a digital character in a computer program.

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About the Author

*Dan Fraser is a presentation maven. He takes hard lessons from over 25 years of building and delivering dynamic presentations in government and the private sector - and hands them to you on a silver platter. Dan has spent over two decades in law enforcement in Alberta, Canada, where he has trained thousands of officers and partner agencies. Dan speaks internationally as an instructor development specialist, helping trainers to deliver transformative experiences. He is the author of the book *Kickass Presentations: Wow Audiences with PowerPoint Slides That Click, Humor That's Quick and Messages That Stick*. He can be reached at kickasspresentations@gmail.com*



Rethinking the AI Productivity Promise

Kerry Avery

The early evidence on AI's impact on workplace productivity was pretty exciting. A 2023 Harvard Business School field experiment found that consultants using GPT-4 completed 12% more tasks, 25% faster, with over 40% higher quality (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023). Those numbers travelled fast through professional development circles, and honestly, they should have. Three years later, though, the picture looks a lot more complicated.

Dr. Philippa Hardman's April 2026 synthesis of current AI productivity research lays out a sobering counter-narrative. Workday's 2026 study of 3,200 business leaders found that while 85% of employees report saving one to seven hours a week with AI, nearly 40% of those gains get immediately eaten up by rework — reviewing, correcting, and rebuilding content that looked finished but wasn't. Stanford and BetterUp researchers have named this workslop: AI output that passes a surface-level quality check but falls apart under scrutiny, costing organizations an estimated \$8-9 million annually per 10,000 employees in rework time alone (Hancock et al., 2026, as cited in Hardman, 2026). Hardman's conclusion is direct: "This isn't a tools problem. It's a use problem."

For instructional designers and trainers, that distinction is worth sitting with, because our use problem has a specific shape.

The Theory of Time Savings

The efficiency logic of AI-assisted instructional design makes sense on paper. A task that used to take a full day (writing a comprehensive test bank, drafting a scenario set, building a first-pass lesson outline) can now be completed in a fraction of the time with a capable generative AI tool and a conversation with it. This is not theoretical. I now write a complete set of test questions in one to two hours. The same task that used to take an entire workday. The time compression on bounded content production tasks is real.

The problem is that this calculation rarely includes everything that came before it.



The Hidden Cost of Proficiency

Before any instructional designer hits that kind of efficiency, they have to invest in something that never shows up on a project timeline, actually getting good at using the tool. That means learning its capabilities and limits, experimenting with prompts, learning to recognize when output is reliable versus just plausible-sounding, and training the models with enough context to produce results that are appropriate for your specific domain and learner population.

For independent practitioners, this investment is entirely self-funded. There is no billable code for the hours spent learning to use a tool that will eventually make client work faster. For training agencies, the cost is institutional: staff time, onboarding, and a sustained productivity dip before any efficiency gain shows up.

Hardman's framework is useful here. She identifies three zones of AI use: the Sidelines (non-users falling behind on fluency), the Trap (users generating output without any real verification), and the Sweet Spot (a roughly 10% minority using AI within deliberate verification and improvement loops). The Sweet Spot is not where most people start. Getting there takes time, and that time belongs in any honest

accounting of what AI adoption actually costs.

This is not an argument against adopting AI. It is an argument for being accurate about what adoption requires.

The Course Design Fallacy

The more consequential use problem for our field is one of scope. There is a persistent temptation to treat generative AI as a course designer. Prompt for an outline, expand the outline into modules, generate content, produce assessment items. The output, as Hardman notes, will look polished, but it will not constitute instructional design.

Course design is not a content production activity. It is a series of analytical judgments, with needs assessment, learner analysis, performance objective construction, sequencing decisions grounded in cognitive load theory, modality selection, and assessment alignment to learning outcomes. These judgments are contextual, iterative, and dependent on expertise that cannot be resolved through prompting. There is a real gap between a plausible-looking AI-generated course outline and a defensible instructional design.

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About the Author

Kerry Avery is the owner of [Odin Training Solutions Inc.](#) Kerry has a Master's degree in Education and over 20 years' experience designing training programs, with the last 17 years spent working with law enforcement. Kerry has consulted for various LE agencies and organizations in Canada, the United States, Central America and Ukraine. Kerry teaches in the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education program at the University of Victoria and facilitates workshops on AI tools for designing training.

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Preventing Confidence Collapse in Scenario-Based Training

Richard Caito

We have seen an increase in Gen Z recruits shutting down during scenario-based training, particularly when the instructional stress is delivered by way of yelling or humiliation. What we see during scenarios is a complete collapse of confidence and a shutdown by the recruit. The issue was brought to light after the last class of recruits completed the exit questionnaire/critique. We saw overwhelming reports of, “I didn’t learn anything,” “the instructors didn’t teach me, they just yelled at me when I made a mistake.” In this article, I want to talk about how we, as instructors, can prevent this confidence collapse and develop lawful decision-making during stress, which will improve officer safety on the street.

Scenario-based training is necessary to recruit development because it allows them to take what they learned in the classroom and apply it in a simulated real-world scenario. Historically, instructors often used yelling as “stress inoculation,” and it was supposed to prepare us for the type of behavior we would experience on the street. While that method may have worked well for us, Gen X recruits, it does not work for Gen Z recruits. Gen Z recruits often interpret yelling and humiliation as a personal threat rather than task-relevant urgency. The result is disengagement, deteriorated communication skills, and poor decision-making. The challenge for instructors is calibrating stress to maximize learning and thus their performance. I know what you are thinking, “Why are we getting ‘soft’?” “Why are we lowering our standards?” The answer to these questions is, we are not; we are still going to put stress on them; it just comes from a different place, the role-players, and not the instructor. As instructors, we are responsible for teaching recruits, not stressing them; they should be looking to us for guidance and assistance.

It is important to understand the differences between the Gen X instructor and Gen Z recruit, so we can tailor our training methods to optimize their learning. The Gen X instructor values independence, gains resilience through adversity, and thrived when “sink or swim” methods were used. The Gen Z recruit is a digital native; they grew up with smartphones and social media; they expect digital integration and visual content. They are collaborative learners and prefer



teamwork and shared problem solving. They are purpose-driven and want to know why tasks matter and how they connect to real-world problems. They are also feedback-oriented in that they expect immediate, constructive feedback. They enjoy the psychological safety of their environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities.

There are also key differences in their communication and learning styles that we as instructors should be aware of. The Gen X instructors learned under a strict hierarchical structure, where the Gen Z recruit prefers an approachable authority figure who explains the reasoning behind the instruction. When it comes to feedback style, the Gen X instructors were used to blunt, periodic evaluations, whereas the Gen Z recruit requires continuous, specific feedback delivered in a constructive tone. For us Gen X instructors, we interpreted being yelled at as a motivator, and the Gen Z recruit interprets it as disrespect, which leads to disengagement and shutdown.

The Yerkes-Dodson Law describes an “inverted U” relationship between arousal and performance: performance improves as arousal rises to an optimal point, then deteriorates as arousal becomes excessive. The optimal point, or the top of the inverted U, comes with task complexity: complex, unfamiliar tasks such as a felony car stop. The

stress of yelling at the recruit for making a mistake pushes the recruit beyond the performance peak. This is unproductive stress, and where their performance starts to decline. The goal is to reach optimal arousal without pushing recruits into overload. The way we can do this is for our role players to create stress by offering resistance (passive or active), interjecting bystanders into the scenario, dividing their attention by making them use their portable radio, or creating a loud chaotic environment. The role players should create chaos, and the instructor should create the learning. The role player should add stress, and the instructor should add clarity. The role player should act unpredictably, and the instructor should remain consistent.

Some methods that we can use would be to provide a clear structure for them which includes pre-briefing training objectives and letting them know the relevance to the job and what they need to do to be successful; we also need to normalize errors because mistakes are a part of learning. We can be more interactive and visual by using video analysis and scenario walkthroughs. Feedback must be

immediate and respectful after each scenario, challenging their decisions and not their dignity.

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About the author

Richard is a retired police officer, having served for 26 years. He is a Master Instructor and IADLEST Nationally Certified Instructor and has taught at the Erie County Law Enforcement Training Academy for two decades. He holds many instructor-level certifications including EVOC and Defensive Tactics. He also serves as the coordinator for the Instructor Development and Field Training Officers Courses where he has trained and certified hundreds of instructors & FTOs. He was also a K-9 Handler/trainer.



Create Next Level Training Using Adult Learning Concepts: It Begins in the Classroom

Capt. Mark Candies, (Retired)

Adult learning concepts remind me of a young officer being issued their first radar unit or computer. They open the carton, remove the device, and immediately go to work without any instructions or training. This usually produces lackluster results requiring a better understanding of how the device operates to achieve the desired performance.

Many instructors approach adult learning the same way. They hear terms like engagement, collaborative learning, and student-centered instruction, then immediately start adding activities to their courses without understanding their purpose or how they fit into a lesson plan. This can result in critical errors like omitting clearly defined performance objectives, building progressive drills, or preparing meaningful debriefs. Then when the training falls flat, they wonder why the students were disengaged or the training didn't transfer to the street.

Early in my career, I believed adding more activities automatically made training better. All I did was create movement without learning. When I slowed down, studied adult learning principles, and intentionally designed training around that concept, I saw measurable improvements in student engagement, retention, and performance.

Begin the Correct Way

The key to a successful adult learning program is creating a positive learning experience. Instructors set the tone for that environment through communication, feedback, and the way they respond to mistakes.

This is done by creating an atmosphere where officers feel respected enough to participate, ask questions, and make mistakes during training rather than on the street.

For example, it can be as simple as changing how we respond to wrong answers. Instead of telling a student, "No, that's wrong," you might say, "Walk me through your thought process." That small change encourages discussion instead of shutting it down.



Likewise, reducing the fear of failure can dramatically improve participation during practical exercises. During scenario-based training, remind students that training is the place to make mistakes, identify weaknesses, and improve decision-making. When instructors treat errors as learning opportunities rather than public failures, students become more willing to engage and problem solve under pressure. Officers that feel valued and respected are more invested in the training process and more inclined to apply newly learned skills in the field. (M. Knowles, 2020)

Lesson Plans

The next step is to shift your focus to designing training programs that keep adult learners engaged and accountable. Any training program worth the paper it's written on begins with clear performance objectives incorporated into a well-designed lesson plan. Adult lesson plans should answer the four primary questions adult learners ask:

- Why is this important?
- What do I need to know?
- How do I apply it?
- What if things do not go as planned?

Effective lesson plans address those questions by focusing on the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA). The KSA model moves students from understanding information (knowledge), to practicing techniques (skills), to independently applying those techniques in realistic conditions (abilities). For example, consider a use-of-force lesson:

- **Knowledge:** Students learn department policy, legal standards, and decision-making principles regarding force applications.
- **Skills:** Students practice communication techniques, de-escalation strategies, and force options through drills and instructor-guided exercises.
- **Abilities:** Students participate in realistic scenarios where they must independently assess threats, communicate effectively, and justify their decisions under stress.

This progression helps ensure students are not simply memorizing information but can apply it in real-world situations. (AETC, 2009)

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About the Author

Capt. Mark Candies is a retired 36-year veteran of the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office where he rose to serve as the Director of Training. He earned his Criminal Justice degree from Nicholls State University and is a Senior Master Law Enforcement Instructor for the Louisiana P.O.S.T. Council. Capt. Candies has been qualified as an expert witness on Police Training Tactics and Use of Force in U.S. District Court and has provided expert opinions. Capt. Candies holds various instructor certifications, including Use of Force, Adult Learning Concepts, and Emergency Vehicle Response. He founded Candies Consultant Services LLC, a law enforcement training specialist company.

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The Three Things Evidence-Based Law Enforcement Training Must Do

Jennifer Kerwin

Law enforcement training is not theoretical. The decisions officers make are shaped by uncertainty, time pressure, and real human consequences.

Effective training must prepare officers to apply judgment, regulate stress responses, and make sound decisions when conditions are far from ideal.

Online training can play an important role in how agencies prepare officers today, but only when it is designed with evidence-based principles and a clear understanding of the realities of policing. When training reflects how officers actually learn and operate in the field, it becomes a meaningful tool for readiness rather than a box to check.

Training that works for law enforcement must do three things well. It must:

1. Respect officer experience
2. Support real decision-making under pressure
3. Create safe opportunities to practice judgment before it is required in the field

1. Training Must Be Designed for Experienced Professionals

Law enforcement professionals are not novice learners. Officers bring field experience, prior training, and professional judgment into every learning environment. Training that treats them as blank slates quickly loses credibility.

Evidence-based training reflects this reality by emphasizing application over information delivery. Research in adult learning consistently shows that experienced learners engage more deeply and retain more when training is relevant, active, and clearly connected to real-world challenges. For officers, that means training focused on decision points, not definitions.

It also means respecting time and context. Training is often completed across shifts, roles, and limited time windows. Evidence-based eLearning accounts for these constraints by prioritizing focused content, clear purpose, and realistic scenarios instead of long, passive modules. When training respects officers' experience and time, it earns trust and engagement.



2. Training Must Strengthen Decision-Making Under Real Conditions

In policing, performance hinges on judgment. Officers must assess incomplete information, manage stress responses, and make decisions with real consequences. Training that focuses only on policy recall or procedural steps does not fully prepare officers for these moments.

Evidence-based training supports decision-making by creating opportunities to think through complex situations in a controlled environment. Scenario-based learning and branching decision paths allow officers to practice assessing risk, choosing responses, and seeing how decisions play out. This type of practice strengthens cognitive readiness and supports recall under stress.

Training is further strengthened when it incorporates practitioner perspectives. Video interviews with experienced officers, trainers, and subject matter experts add credibility and context. Hearing how others navigated critical incidents—what informed their decisions and what they would approach differently—adds depth that purely instructional content cannot provide.

Used thoughtfully, real-world materials such as body-worn camera footage and incident-based examples can also support learning. Examined through an after-action lens, these materials help officers identify decision points, consider alternatives, and understand how stress and perception influence outcomes. The goal is reflection and growth, not critique.

3. Training Must Create Safe Space to Practice Before It Matters

Experience is one of the most powerful teachers in policing. Much of what officers rely on in the field comes from exposure—encountering situations, observing outcomes, and learning how decisions unfold over time. Effective training recognizes this and creates structured opportunities to build experience safely.

Evidence-based eLearning provides a way for officers to engage with high-risk scenarios without real-world consequences. Officers can assess situations, make decisions, and learn from outcomes in a space designed for learning rather than evaluation. This kind of practice builds confidence and reinforces judgment before similar situations arise in the field.

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About the author

Jennifer Kerwin leads the ecoLearn Learning Management System team to create custom LMS solutions for d'Vinci's clients. Drawing on 25 years of experience in training and education, she has served as a dedicated account manager for large-scale training programs supporting municipal police officers, first responders, and counterdrug professionals. Jennifer brings a proven ability to navigate complex, compliance-driven environments and translate organizational needs into streamlined, technology-enabled learning solutions. She has led, consulted on, and contributed to hundreds of learning, communication, and technology projects, always focused on the needs of the learner. She has served our clients as an instructional designer, strategist, and account manager. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from Mansfield University and is a member of the Association for Talent Development.



Certification Is Not Mastery: Why Instructor Development Is Broken

Josh Logan

Every year, agencies certify instructors in a matter of days, then immediately place them in positions where they are expected to develop others. The assumption is simple: if they pass the course, they are ready. That assumption is wrong.

Law enforcement training has a problem that is widely experienced but rarely addressed directly. At its core, we have confused certification with mastery. Certification establishes exposure and verifies a minimum standard, but it does not produce instructors capable of consistently developing others. The issue is not a lack of certified instructors. It is a lack of developed ones.

What Makes a Mastery Level Instructor

A mastery level instructor is defined by the ability to develop performance in others in a measurable and defensible way. True effectiveness exists at the intersection of three domains: technical skill, teaching ability, and diagnostic and coaching skill. Certification without development is not mastery. It is eligibility.

Technical Skill

An instructor must be able to perform at a high level, not simply meet qualification standards. Performance must be consistent, repeatable, and accountable under time and pressure. Without this, credibility erodes quickly. If you cannot perform at a high level, you cannot teach performance at a high level.

An instructor must also demonstrate at speed, at a level of mastery, not merely proficiency. True competence is performance on demand. If performance cannot be delivered under realistic conditions, it cannot be developed in others.

Teaching Ability

Performance alone does not translate into effective instruction. Teaching requires structure, clarity, and the ability to break complex skills into components that can be understood, practiced, and retained. Too often, instruction becomes explanation. Courses lack progression and are built around preferred drills rather



than systems designed to develop performance.

Research shows traditional training often produces short-term performance gains without long-term retention. Instructors must build processes that can be measured, replicated, and retained. Training must also be defensible. Instructional methods may be scrutinized in court and should align with accepted principles of reliability, validity, and generally accepted practices, consistent with standards reflected in Daubert or Frye. If training cannot be articulated and justified, it places both the instructor and agency at risk.

A drill without context is not education. It is entertainment.

Diagnostic and Coaching Skill

The most overlooked component of instructor development is the ability to diagnose and correct performance. Many instructors can identify what went wrong, but far fewer can explain why. Without understanding cause, improvement is limited. If you cannot diagnose performance, you cannot develop performance.

Instruction is a human performance event that requires adapting to the needs of the student, not delivering a fixed curriculum. As the Mayo Clinic states, "the needs of the patient come

first." In the training environment, the needs of the students must come first. If instruction is not adapted to the learner, development does not occur.

We teach people, not curriculum.

The Performance Fallacy

A common belief is that high performers naturally become effective instructors. This assumption is flawed. High performers often operate at a level of automaticity. They can demonstrate success but struggle to explain the process behind it.

Demonstration without explanation is not instruction. It is imitation. Performance during training is often mistaken for learning, even when it does not transfer to real-world application. Effective instruction requires a holistic integration of technical skill, teaching ability, and diagnostic and coaching skill.

Where Agencies Get It Wrong

Instructor development is often treated as a single event. An officer is certified and immediately assigned to teach. This is not development. It is delegation.

The most effective instructors are built over time through experience, mentorship, and continuous

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About the author

Josh Logan is a law enforcement professional, firearms instructor, and expert witness with over 20 years of experience in military, law enforcement, and instructor development. He is the Co Founder of Guardian Training and Consulting and Founder and Principal Expert of Logan and Partners Expert Consulting. He is a U.S. Air Force veteran, NRA Law Enforcement Staff Instructor, Force Science Certified Analyst, and USCCA Training Counselor. Logan specializes in performance-based training, use of force analysis, and developing instructors into measurable and defensible training professionals.



Packing the Parachute

Derek Miller

While I was driving to the 2026 ILEETA Conference, I was enjoying the Illinois countryside and listening to the church sermon I had missed that morning.

My pastor shared the story of Captain Charles Plumb. Charles Plumb was a Navy pilot in the 1960s. Plumb was one of the pilots who helped develop the Naval Weapons School that would soon become the TOP GUN program. The year after he helped with this program, he was deployed to Vietnam to serve in the war efforts. Plumb was flying an F4 Phantom Jet, which was the Navy's hottest jet at the time. He was assigned to the Aardvark Squadron as part of the 114 Fighter Squadron that launched from the USS Kitty Hawk. Plumb had flown 74 successful flight missions and was 5 days away from returning home from deployment when he left on his 75th mission on May 19th, 1967.

While he was over Hanoi, his jet was hit by an enemy surface-to-air missile. Plumb had no choice but to eject. His parachute deployed and floated safely to the ground. However, Plumb was soon captured by enemy forces and spent the next 2,103 days as a POW in the camp, The Hanoi Hilton. Plumb was released as a prisoner of war in 1973 and retired as a Navy Captain in 1991.

After his retirement, Plumb became an author and public speaker, talking about his time in the Navy and his captivity. One evening, years later, he was eating in a restaurant with his wife when a man approached him and asked if he was Charles Plumb. Plumb said he was but did not know the man. The man then told Plumb he was the person on the Kitty Hawk who packed his parachute. He joked with Plumb and said, I guess it worked. Plumb told him, indeed it did. The man asked Plumb if the canopy was fully intact. Plumb told him that 3 panels on the canopy were torn. The man apologized. And Plumb told him he had nothing to apologize for, he had ejected at over 600mph and exceeded the rating of the parachute. Plumb asked the man if he kept track of every parachute he packed or how many parachutes he packed that saved someone's life. The man said no, it was enough gratification knowing that he served.

After some self-reflection, Plumb realized he would have likely never paid that man any attention on the ship. He was a hotshot pilot, and this man worked



in the lower levels of the ship below that water line. He performed a task that a pilot like Plumb thought he would never need to utilize to save his life. However, because this man did his job with intention, diligence, and a servant's heart, Plumb's parachute opened, and he survived.

After hearing Plumb's story, I reflected on how this relates to Law Enforcement Training. Many officers think of themselves as Plumb did. They tend to have big egos and think they are the biggest and toughest person on the road. Nothing bad is ever going to happen to them. We often teach courses and skills that seem menial and redundant not only to the students, but sometimes to us as well. Skills and information that officers think they will never need or use. This may include mandated in-service training topics like Haz-mat, bloodborne pathogens, and weather exposure, or simple firearms skills like magazine changes with an incapacitated arm. We owe it to our students, and to ourselves, to make sure we are doing our job with intention and diligence, to ensure we are packing their parachute correctly with the knowledge and skills they need. We, and they, never know when, like Plumb, our officers will need to pull that rip cord and pray the canopy opens. Even if they have exceeded the "rating" of what that parachute was designed for, or the training we gave them.

We may never know how many times those parachutes get deployed. Because the officers themselves may not have realized it was deployed. That tingle on the back of their neck or uneasy feeling in their gut as they approach a situation that keeps them out of danger. Doing a passenger side approach and not getting hit by the passing drunk or sleepy driver. It could be something as simple as not telling a joke or making a smart comeback to someone because that course on sexual harassment you taught made them pause and think it over before saying it.

Instructors can often be one of the most overlooked positions within an agency. It's easy to be seen as Plumb described the man who packed his parachute, just someone who works in a room below the waterline, doing a task that our officers' egos tell them they will never need.

Beyond packing that parachute, we have to make sure we pack it correctly. We have to make sure the lines are tied and not twisted. We have to inspect and make sure the canopy is intact and properly folded. In the words of the great Vince Lombardi, "Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect." Like the man who packed Plumb's parachute, the task of an instructor is to do our job diligently with a servant's heart, not knowing how many we save, but just being grateful to serve.

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About the author

Derek Miller has 20 years of law enforcement experience and has served with the Warrick County Sheriff's Office in Indiana since 2013. Derek is an Indiana Master Instructor, firearms instructor, and a field training officer.



The Illusion of “Instructor Certification”

Ian Tindale

In the early 1990's, I completed my first instructor certification with an equipment manufacturer (AKA Factory certification). My initial class had been delivered by a very competent and engaging instructor who had covered many of the fundamentals of teaching. With youthful confidence, I believed I knew everything. After a week of several classes, I had certificates declaring me an 'instructor.' Teaching my first class as the instructor brought blunt feedback and a reality check.

Certification and the illusion of instructor readiness

As ILEETA members know, our industry values and relies upon credentials. Agency, state, or national certifications often serve as benchmarks. Instructor certification courses are central to this culture.

This article focuses on short instructor certification courses for equipment or defensive tactics, usually offered by manufacturers, private companies, or jurisdictional programs. Longer courses that teach instructional techniques is a separate subject.

Confusion arises when these short courses are seen as comprehensive instructor preparation rather than confirmation of limited technical ability. Without knowing this, I believed I was ready to teach, only to realize I didn't know how to engage learners. My presentations were filled with “um” and “ah,” I read from slides, and struggled with demonstrations. Early and ongoing feedback from a mentor was invaluable.

The lesson I learned was how little the certification class prepared me to deliver the user course effectively. Instructor certification courses assess limited outcomes. Generally, can you teach a specific skill to a minimum documented standard? Certification confirms familiarity with material, possibly with some instructional ability for that narrow scope.

What certifications courses commonly miss

Instructor development takes time. Growth occurs with preparation, practice,



feedback, and reflection. Short courses alone don't create teachers.

Some courses effectively teach equipment or technique and assess your ability to impart that knowledge. However, some are little more than extended user courses with sales pitches. As a student, remember these courses have a narrow purpose.

Most short certifications rely on slides and scripts. Little attention is given to how adults learn or how to communicate under stress. Fundamentals like voice control, eye contact, pacing, or monitoring engagement are often skipped despite evidence that learners read instructors long before they hear them.

Preparation to teach is often overlooked. Few courses discuss hours of prep per hour of instruction, organizing handouts, synchronizing visual aids, or rehearsing flow. Slide design, where to stand, and calming nerves are rarely addressed. These habits shape safety and learning outcomes.

Adult learning principles are given limited attention. Instructors rarely design sessions to include seeing, hearing, and doing. Few courses encourage guided practice or problem solving. Teaching often defaults to demonstration and compliance.

Hands on operational training brings extra responsibility. Many courses miss how equipment and stress affect

behavior and decision making. Safety management is often treated as a checklist instead of a leadership role. Screening learners and enforcing safety rules receive limited discussion.

Some course providers require instructors to use their supplied materials and content in entirety, which can conflict with agency policies. For example, I attended a restraint equipment class to find they taught unarmed holds not used by my agency, and not vital to the safe or effective use of the tool. Adding new skills would cause confusion and additional training needs, so we didn't adopt the otherwise fit-for-purpose equipment. Other providers let instructors create their own materials, which may be useful for experienced instructors but can confuse new instructors and potentially leads to liability.

Supervising, managing fatigue, and responding to injury are often policy language rather than practiced behavior. Even today, we can watch videos online of highly dangerous practices, all done in the name of 'realistic' training. Correcting faults, distinguishing learning from safety errors, and teaching weapon use safely are rarely emphasized.

Development beyond the certificate

Documentation is a major instructional gap. New instructors often don't

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About the author

Ian is an Australian trainer with experience across state and federal sectors. He has led operational training, directed curricula development, and chaired the development of national training standards.



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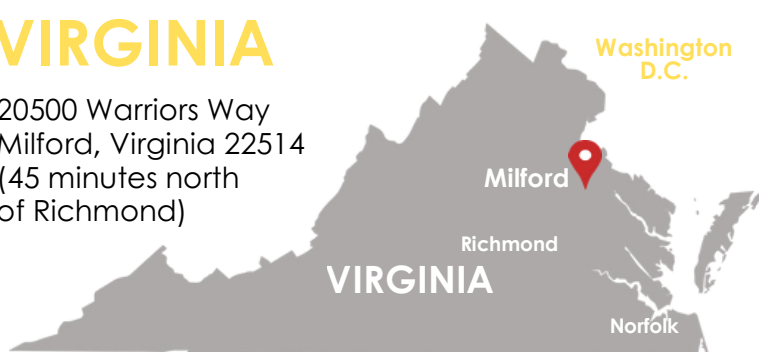
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**Law Enforcement
Environment**

Editor: Kim Schlau



From the Garden: Lessons in Resilience, Perseverance, and Finding Your Release

Kim Schlau

Five years ago, I planted a peony bush. I had done everything right: chosen the spot carefully, prepared the soil, set it at just the right depth. Then a worker accidentally stepped on it, crushing the tender stems into the ground. I looked at the flattened, broken plant and thought: *that's it, it's gone.*

I was wrong.

The following spring, a few tentative shoots pushed through the soil. By summer, a couple of blooms had opened, small, fragile, but undeniably there. This past season, five years after what I thought was its death, that peony bush erupted in a profusion of flowers so abundant that neighbors stopped to ask about it.

That bush exemplifies resilience.

Getting Knocked Down Is Not the End

In law enforcement, you will witness the worst of what life can deliver. You respond to tragedies, absorb other people's crises, and are expected to remain functional and professional through all of it. And sometimes, like that peony, you get stepped on.

It might be a line-of-duty injury. A difficult investigation that doesn't end the way it should. A string of calls that leaves a mark you can't quite explain to anyone outside the profession. The compounding weight of years of shift work, missed holidays, and a world that often feels like it's fraying at the edges.

The peony didn't bounce back overnight. It took a full year to show even modest signs of life. Resilience in this profession rarely looks like a dramatic comeback. More often it looks like just getting up the next shift. Showing up. Pushing a small green shoot through hard ground.

The lesson the garden offers isn't that pain doesn't matter. Surviving it is not the same as being finished.



Perseverance Is a Long Game

What changed between year one and year five wasn't dramatic. The peony didn't suddenly receive extraordinary care or perfect conditions. It simply kept doing what plants do: growing a little more each season, establishing deeper roots, storing up the energy needed to eventually thrive.

Perseverance in law enforcement works the same way. It's not one heroic act of willpower. It's the accumulation of small decisions: to seek help when you need it, to invest in relationships outside the job, to find something outside the badge that reminds you who you are as a whole person.

The officers I've seen endure and grow over long careers share that quality. They don't necessarily have it easier. They've just found ways to keep putting down roots, even in rocky soil.

Rage Gardening and the Case for a Physical Outlet

I'll be honest: I don't always garden peacefully. Some evenings I go out there and I *attack* the weeds. I dig with more force than necessary. I haul mulch like I have a grudge against it. What the gardening community has come to call "rage gardening" (using physical exertion in the garden to burn off stress) is, I can confirm from experience, extraordinarily effective.

There is something deeply satisfying about redirecting frustration into something productive. The same energy that might otherwise churn internally gets poured into the soil and comes back as an improved flower bed. The physical labor demands enough focus that the mental noise quiets. And when you're done, you can see what you accomplished. The bed is cleared. The plants are mulched. Something tangible happened.

Law enforcement culture has long understood the value of physical fitness. What we sometimes undervalue is the *purposeful* physical outlet, one that produces something beyond personal conditioning. Gardening, woodworking, running a trail, building something with your hands: these activities engage the body, focus the mind, and leave behind evidence that you were here and you made something better.

That feedback loop matters more than we often acknowledge.

Accomplishment as Antidote

One of the quiet hazards of this profession is that your work is often invisible. Crimes prevented are never reported. Situations de-escalated don't make the news. You operate in a world where outcomes are frequently

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About the author

Kim Schlau lost two daughters in 2007 to a traffic crash caused by a distracted Illinois State Trooper. Since 2009, Kim has spoken at numerous law enforcement agencies, academies and conferences throughout the United States, as well as schools and businesses to prevent crashes due to speed and distracted driving. Kim is also a section editor of the ILEETA Journal and can be reached at kimberly.schlau@gmail.com.



Priming Performance: How Instructional Language Shapes Officer Response

Jamie Blume

The Weight of Labels

After a particularly bad night on an early 2004 military deployment, I had just drifted off to sleep as the sun was coming up over the horizon in Al Anbar Province. Seconds later, my cot was kicked and I was hurriedly told to get in formation.

I found myself standing rank and file within our compound beside other Marines. I squinted in the painful brightness of Iraq's morning sunlight. The platoon sergeant started yelling.

Despite the blood stains on his uniform and his fresh injuries, he started with something like "any of you little teenaged girls know how to rig up a Chinese mortar and remotely detonate it from a quarter mile away with a garage door opener?"

He paused for effect.

"I didn't think so" he continued. "Yet I continually hear slurs and cute little nicknames from you about your enemies. Meanwhile you idiots are doing good to tie your boots on in the morning. You'd better wake the hell up."

He stared deeply at us with a frustrated look on his face and there was another long pause before he went on.

"These aren't all amateurs. Some have studied engineering, sciences, and mathematics. You should assume they're experienced fighters - that they're travelled. Multilingual. Assume that if they are fighting, they are living for this fight and they know how to run their weapons, which is more than I can say for you kids."

He finished the chastisement with promises to adequately "fix" us, and he adhered to those promises by way of perpetual drilling and rehearsals between missions.



The whole point of this literal and metaphorical wakeup call was that we weren't taking our enemy seriously enough. He was right, and we'd already paid a price for it. We took the opposition seriously from that moment on, and our platoon survived the deployment, despite many more purple hearts and multiple medical evacuations over the next several months. Every one of us survived, thanks in no small part to that sergeant and the emphasis he placed on taking our enemy seriously. That started with which words we used to describe our opposition.

Application for Police Instructors

It's been over two decades since that morning in Iraq. As a cop, in a very general sense, I've noticed something over those years. When cops train, we tend to do the same thing we Marines were doing, pre-Fallujah, in 2004: we don't take our potential adversaries seriously enough. We don't adequately visualize engaging with someone legitimately formidable. We use the wrong words in the stories we tell ourselves about the fights we envision that we'll be in.

This is improper priming by officers, instructors and the culture around us. It may be a part - a small part, but an impactful one - of why we've sometimes seen cops fail to respond appropriately to active threats.

With one or two exceptions, every instructor I've listened to during hundreds of hours of active threat training has described the perpetrators of these "active shooter"/mass killing crimes as "cowards."

I'm not suggesting there is anything about these murderers or their behavior that is commendable, but one thing they are not is cowards.

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines a coward as, "a person who lacks the courage to do or endure dangerous or unpleasant things." The Oxford definition of bravery is, "a demonstrated readiness to face and endure danger or pain."

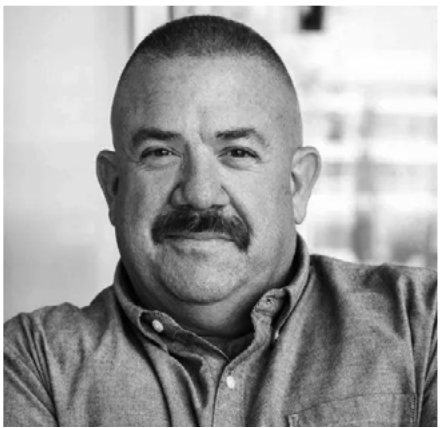
Going on a killing spree is dangerous. Most of these killers are both suicidal and homicidal, and the acts committed are certainly unpleasant, as outlined in the above definition. They have fully embraced the danger aspect and welcome it, apparently. A perpetrator must also possess a legitimate, very high level of "I don't give an F" before committing to one of these attacks.

I understand why we use the term coward to describe these killers. It's a knee jerk attempt to convey our contempt. It's part of an "us versus them" process that tribes of humans have honed for thousands of years to psychologically prepare themselves

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About the author

Jamie is a police captain with over 25 years of police experience, and he currently oversees Professional Standards & Training at the Beckley Police Department. He has a master's degree in public safety and is an adjunct criminal justice professor at a state university.



Smart, Not Soft: The Invisible EQ Shield in Corrections

Michael Cantrell

Walk into any correctional facility, and you'll see officers wearing the tools of the trade: duty belts, radios, keys, and vests. All of it is visible. All of it is tangible. And all of it is critical.

What you won't see, but what may matter just as much, is whether that officer has any protection for the emotional weight of the job.

Corrections is a profession built on constant exposure to stress, conflict, and human volatility. Officers operate in environments where hypervigilance is necessary, emotional restraint is expected, and mistakes can have serious consequences. Over time, that pressure adds up. Research consistently shows that correctional officers experience significantly higher rates of PTSD, chronic stress, depression, and suicide than the general population. And yet, when we talk about officer safety, emotional resilience is often left out of the conversation.

The reality is this: technical skills alone don't protect officers from burnout. Policy knowledge won't stop emotional exhaustion. Tactical proficiency won't automatically help an officer process repeated exposure to trauma.

That's where Emotional Intelligence (EQ) comes in.

Reframing Emotional Intelligence in Corrections

Mention "emotional intelligence" in some training rooms, and you'll feel the temperature drop. It's often dismissed as a soft skill, something abstract or irrelevant to real-world operations. But that perception misses the point entirely.

In corrections, EQ isn't about being emotional; it's about being aware. It's about recognizing stress responses before they turn into bad decisions, unnecessary use of force, health problems, or disengagement. EQ functions as invisible protective equipment, helping officers manage themselves as effectively as they manage inmates and incidents.



Think of EQ as a shield. Not something that makes the job easier, but something that makes the officer stronger.

The Four Pillars of the EQ Shield

Emotional intelligence can be broken down into four practical, teachable components that align closely with correctional work.

Self-Awareness is the foundation. Officers who can recognize early signs of stress—irritability, emotional numbness, cynicism, sleep disruption—are far more likely to intervene before those signals escalate into burnout or misconduct. Self-awareness isn't introspection for its own sake; it's situational awareness turned inward.

Self-Management builds on that awareness. This is the ability to regulate reactions under pressure—pausing instead of snapping, thinking instead of reacting. In a profession where every word and movement can escalate or de-escalate a situation, emotional regulation is a tactical advantage, not a liability.

Social Awareness is about reading the room. Officers rely on this every day, whether they label it that way or not. It's recognizing tension in a housing unit, noticing when a coworker is off their baseline, or sensing when a

routine interaction is starting to shift. High social awareness improves safety by catching problems early—before they explode.

Relationship Management is the pillar that often gets neglected. The corrections culture has long rewarded toughness and independence, sometimes at the cost of connection. But strong peer relationships and support networks are proven buffers against trauma. Officers who trust their partners, supervisors, and teams don't have to carry the weight alone—and they're more likely to ask for help before reaching a breaking point.

Breaking the “Suffering in Silence” Cycle

One of the most damaging myths in corrections is that emotional strain is just part of the job and should be endured quietly. That mindset doesn't produce resilient officers; it produces isolated ones.

Practical EQ strategies can disrupt that cycle without turning the workplace into group therapy. Simple tools like brief emotional check-ins, post-incident reset routines, and peer support protocols normalize stress management as part of professional

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About the author

Michael Cantrell is a retired federal corrections professional with over 29 years of experience and the host of The Prison Officer Podcast. He retired from the Federal Bureau of Prisons as Chief of the Office of Emergency Preparedness, where he specialized in crisis response, tactical operations, and staff development. Michael continues to support corrections professionals by providing practical strategies for career success, mental health resilience, and professional development. Contact him at mike@thepersonofficer.com or visit www.thepersonofficer.com.



Part 4: Igniting Knowledge - Practical Strategies for Teaching Fire Investigation to Law Enforcement

Jason Dunn

The preceding installments have underscored the critical importance of fire investigation awareness for all law enforcement officers and provided a foundational understanding of fire behavior and arson indicators. This final part of the series focuses on the practical application of this knowledge: equipping law enforcement instructors with effective strategies for integrating fire investigation basics into their training curricula. The goal is not to create miniature fire investigators, but rather to cultivate observant, informed officers who can contribute meaningfully to the investigation of fire-related incidents.

One of the most effective ways to impart this knowledge is through **dedicated training modules**. Consider incorporating specific lessons on fire behavior, arson indicators, and scene security within existing criminal investigation, evidence collection, or even first responder courses. These modules should use a variety of teaching methods, including lectures, visual aids (such as photographs, videos, and diagrams), and interactive discussions. Allocate sufficient time to allow for thorough coverage of the key concepts.

Scenario-based training offers officers an invaluable opportunity to apply their knowledge in a realistic context. Develop simulated fire scenes, complete with potential arson indicators (e.g., unusual fuel loads, simulated pour patterns, witness statements suggesting suspicious activity). Task officers conduct an initial assessment, identify potential red flags, secure the scene, and formulate initial questions for witnesses. Debriefing these scenarios should focus on the identified indicators, the rationale for their assessment, and the proper procedures for scene management and information sharing.

Leveraging guest speakers' expertise can significantly enhance training. Invite local fire investigators or certified fire marshals to speak to recruits and in-service officers. Their real-world experiences, case studies, and insights into the collaborative relationship between law enforcement and fire services can be incredibly impactful. These experts can also offer valuable insights into local arson trends and challenges.



Visual aids are crucial for illustrating complex concepts. Utilize photographs and videos of actual fire scenes and various burn patterns. Diagrams explaining the fire triangle/tetrahedron and heat transfer mechanisms can also aid understanding. Online resources, including videos and interactive simulations related to fire behavior and arson investigation, can supplement classroom instruction.

Tabletop exercises provide a low-risk environment for officers to analyze simulated fire scenes and discuss potential causes and investigative steps. Present scenarios with limited information and encourage officers to collaboratively identify potential arson indicators and outline a preliminary investigative plan.

Explore opportunities for **cross-training exercises** with local fire departments. Joint training sessions can foster better understanding and communication between the two agencies. Firefighters can provide valuable insights into fire behavior and scene safety, while law enforcement can share their expertise in evidence preservation and criminal investigation techniques.

Provide officers with access to **online resources and training materials** related to fire investigation. Reputable organizations and government agencies often offer valuable information and training modules that can supplement in-house instruction.

Case studies of actual arson investigations can bring concepts to life. Analyze cases where initial police observations were crucial in identifying arson and leading to successful prosecutions. Discuss the indicators that were present, the investigative steps taken, and the importance of interagency cooperation.



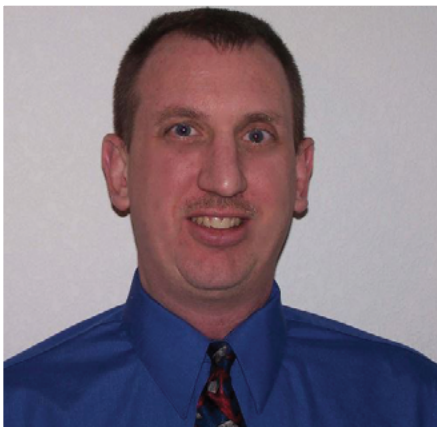
Throughout all training, **emphasize officer safety** at fire scenes. Reinforce the potential hazards and the importance of following the directions of fire department personnel. Ensure officers

understand the need for appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and the dangers of entering unstable structures or areas with hazardous materials.

Finally, encourage **continuous learning**. Fire investigation techniques and knowledge are constantly evolving. Provide officers with resources and opportunities to stay up to date on the latest trends and best practices in the field.

By implementing these practical strategies, law enforcement instructors can effectively “ignite knowledge” within their trainees, fostering a greater understanding of fire investigation and its critical role in law enforcement. This will not only enhance individual officers’ capabilities but also strengthen the community’s overall response to fire-related incidents, ultimately contributing to safer and more just outcomes.





You Check Your Gear Before Every Shift. When Did You Last Check Your Heart?

Brian Hill

I showed up to work and strapped on my gear with my heart running at 200 beats per minute. I told myself I was fine. I was not.

If you are reading this before your body forces you to, you are already ahead of where I was.

This is not a generic wellness article. This is me telling you what happened, because I think a lot of us are walking around ignoring the same warning signs I ignored for way too long.

I have had multiple AFib episodes over the past few years. My heart going completely out of rhythm, ER visits, the whole thing. After the first one I made some changes, stopped drinking energy drinks, thought I had it handled. I did not. It kept coming back. Eventually I ended up going to work the morning after an ER visit with my heart still running between 185 and 200 beats per minute. Standing there in uniform, doing the job, with my heart in full chaos. I did not tell anybody. I just pushed through it, because that is what we do.

I finally saw a doctor who sat me down, explained what was actually going on, and pushed me to get an ablation. I had the procedure. I am on the other side of it now and doing well. But I will be honest with you, in the days leading up to it I was scared. More scared than I let on to most people. And sitting with that, I kept thinking about how many people in this profession are doing exactly what I did. Feeling something off, telling themselves it is nothing, and getting back to work.

The people waiting for you at home cannot afford for you to assume it is nothing.

What This Career Does to Your Heart

We train for the threats we can see. What we do not talk about nearly enough is the slow damage that builds up over years of this work. The chronic stress. The broken sleep. The adrenaline spike at 2 a.m. followed by hours of sitting still. The way your body never fully unwinds.



That takes a real toll, and the numbers are hard to ignore. Officers are 25 times more likely to die from heart disease than from a violent encounter on the job. The average age of an officer's first heart attack is 46. Not retirement age. 46. And during a pursuit or a physical fight, the risk of sudden cardiac death can spike 30 to 70 times above normal.

Most of us have not had a serious cardiac checkup in years. Some of us never have.

What We Owe the People We Train

This is where I want to speak directly to you as trainers and instructors.

The people in our classes are watching how we carry ourselves. Not just on the range, or in the classroom. They watch how we talk about taking care of ourselves, whether we treat our own health like it matters. When we ignore warning signs and power through, we teach that. When we finally decide our health is worth protecting, we teach that too.

We build wellness into our curriculum. We talk about stress and resilience and the long term cost of this career. And then a lot of us go home and skip our own checkups. I did that for years. Part of modeling the way is being honest about it and then actually doing something different.

Signs That Should Not Get Pushed Aside

Heart pounding or racing at rest or after light activity. Shortness of breath doing things that used to feel easy. Chest tightness that comes and goes. Feeling genuinely wrong after exertion in a way that is more than just being tired. We all know these signs, but many of us ignore them.

I had those signs and talked myself out of every single one. Do not do that. It is not strength. It is stubbornness dressed up as toughness.

Do Something With This

Get a cardiac evaluation this year. Not just a basic physical. A real heart focused checkup with an EKG and an honest conversation about your risk factors and what your daily work life actually looks like.

Know your numbers. Blood pressure, resting heart rate, cholesterol, blood sugar. Write them down and pay attention to how they move year to year.

Tell your doctor the truth about this job. The sleep, the schedule, the stress load. Most of them will not ask the right questions unless you bring it up yourself.

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About the author

Brian Hill, an ILEETA charter member, has worked for an agency in the Denver metro area for over 20 years. He is also the owner of MentalAmmo.com, a law Enforcement training provider. Brian is a former Vice-Chair for Colorado P.O.S.T. Arrest Control SME Committee. He is also the editor of the Officer Safety/Use of Force section of the ILEETA Journal.



Leadership in a Recruit Training Environment: Building Teams that Produce Professional Officers

Travis Stansell

In law enforcement training, leadership carries a unique weight. Unlike operational assignments, where performance is measured in real-time outcomes, the training environment is where habits are formed, mindsets are shaped, and future leaders begin to emerge. What is modeled and emphasized in training does not stay in the academy, it follows officers throughout their careers.

Because of that, leadership in a training environment must be intentional. It cannot rely on authority alone. It must be built on trust, credibility, and a genuine commitment to developing others. At its core, effective training leadership is rooted in servant leadership, reinforced through example, and sustained through mentorship.

Servant Leadership in Training: Setting the Tone Early

The foundation of any effective training program is the culture established by its leaders. Recruits quickly form perceptions about leadership—not from policy manuals, but from daily interactions with instructors and staff.

If leadership is rooted in ego, authority, or intimidation, recruits may comply but fail to grow. When leadership is grounded in service, recruits begin to understand that leadership is about responsibility, not status.

Servant leadership in a training environment means placing the development of the recruit above the comfort of the instructor. It requires patience, consistency, and a commitment to teaching rather than simply directing. It also requires leaders to ask a critical question: Am I here to be in charge, or am I here to develop future officers?

When recruits believe their instructors are invested in their success, trust begins to form. That trust creates an environment where learning can take place—not out of fear of failure, but out of a desire to improve.



Leading by Example: The Standard Is Set by Action

In a training environment, credibility is established quickly—and lost just as fast. Recruits are constantly evaluating their instructors, often without saying a word. They are watching how instructors carry themselves, how they communicate, and whether they can do the very things they are teaching.

There is no substitute for leading by example.

If an instructor emphasizes professionalism, they must model it consistently. If they expect discipline, they must demonstrate it. If they demand effort, they must be willing to give it themselves. The standard is not what is written in a handbook, the standard is what leaders demonstrate daily.

Maintaining proficiency is critical. Instructors who remain engaged in skills training, participate alongside recruits when appropriate, and demonstrate competence reinforce a critical message: these standards matter, and they are accountable to them as well.

When leaders model the behavior they expect, recruits are far more likely to adopt those behaviors themselves.

Moving Beyond the “Boot Camp” Mentality

For many years, law enforcement training environments have been influenced by a paramilitary, boot camp-style approach. While discipline and structure remain essential, leadership rooted in fear and intimidation often produces short-term compliance at the expense of long-term development.

Recruits trained in overly harsh environments may learn to follow orders, but they may also hesitate to ask questions, think critically, or admit mistakes—behaviors that are essential for effective policing.

Leadership in training must evolve beyond this model.

A development-focused training environment emphasizes accountability without humiliation, discipline without degradation, and high standards without unnecessary hostility. It creates psychological safety—a space where recruits understand that mistakes are part of the learning process, provided they are corrected and learned from.

This approach does not lower standards. It requires leaders who can coach, mentor, and correct behavior in

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About the author

Travis Stansell has 24 years in law enforcement and is currently the Director of Walters State Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy in Tennessee. He is an IADLEST National Certified Instructor, has an AAS in Law Enforcement from Walters State, a BA in Communications from Carson-Newman University, a MS in Justice Administration from the University of the Cumberlands and is a graduate of the Northwestern University School of Police Staff & Command.



Training for Reality: Teaching Evidence-Based Policing in a Changed Environment

Dillon Tittle

Why Training Must Catch Up to Reality

Policing and training have evolved, but not together. Officers and supervisors observe similar operational patterns: reduced discretionary activity, narrower definitions of acceptable engagement, uncertainty about how to apply proactive strategies, and, in many cases, a lack of knowledge of policing strategies.

Over the past several decades, law enforcement has adopted evidence-based policing models. These approaches are supported by research under specific conditions. The problem is not their existence, but that officers are rarely trained on these models and how these approaches operate together.

Policing models are typically presented individually. Officers are then left to apply these concepts as independent entities, with minimal guidance. The result becomes disengagement or hesitation. To the public, this may appear as absence. To officers, it reflects unclear guidance. Not a lack of willingness to act.

Setbacks Since 2014

Any honest discussion of modern policing must acknowledge the past decade.

The 2014 shooting of Michael Brown marked a significant shift in public scrutiny, legal exposure, and oversight of policing. Research documented declines in discretionary and self-initiated activity in some agencies, particularly proactivity. These effects were not uniform across all departments, but they were measurable and persistent in certain contexts.

Policy changes, increased oversight, and disciplinary measures often progressed more quickly than training on how officers should maintain proactive, lawful, and confident behavior. In many agencies, the safest choice became doing less. Many, including myself, took a step back to see the fallout. The question was “Is it worth it?”

COVID-19 intensified these pressures. Staffing declined and patrol practices narrowed dramatically. Academies reduced training, and informal mentoring



deteriorated. Officers, particularly rookies, lost repetitions in decision-making, communication, and problem-solving. An entire generation of cops grew up in this world of reactionary policing. The effect was not the disappearance of police officers, but a redefinition of presence without integrated training to support it.

What the Evidence Supports Problem-Oriented Policing

Problem-oriented policing (POP) focuses on recurring problems and emphasizes analysis prior to response. A systematic review found consistent, statistically significant reductions in crime and disorder when POP was implemented as a problem-solving framework and supported by supervision and analysis (Hinkle et al., 2020). It requires officers to identify patterns, analyze contributing conditions, implement tailored responses, and assess outcomes.

Community Policing

Community policing is supported as a legitimacy-building strategy. A randomized field experiment demonstrated that non-enforcement police contact can improve public attitudes toward police and perceptions of legitimacy (Peyton et al., 2019). Research shows mixed results for broad crime reduction but consistent effects on trust, satisfaction, and cooperation. Legitimacy influences compliance, resistance, complaint

behavior, and the flow of information to officers.

Hot Spots Policing

Multiple systematic reviews and meta-analyses show that focusing police resources at hot spots produces meaningful reductions in crime and violence, often without displacement (Braga, 2005; Turchan et al., 2024). The strongest effects occur when hot spots are small, interventions are time-limited and focused, and supervision is active. Hot spots policing is among the most consistently supported deployment strategies in modern policing.

Disorder Policing

Recent research indicates that disorder policing is associated with overall crime reduction, but effects vary substantially depending on how programs are designed (Braga, Schnell, & Welsh, 2024). Focused, place-based disorder interventions outperform broad or aggressive enforcement approaches. Programs that integrate disorder enforcement into problem-oriented and place-based frameworks perform better and carry fewer legitimacy risks.

Data-Driven Policing

Data-driven policing improves targeting, accountability, and evaluation when used appropriately. Crime analysis and performance

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About the author

Dillon Tittle is a Marine Corps veteran, law enforcement professional, and leadership scholar whose work focuses on bridging the gap between policy and street-level practice. Drawing on operational experience and evidence-based research, he teaches advancement in leadership systems, police culture, mentorship, and decision-making in policing. His work emphasizes a practical leadership philosophy to foster a high-quality, sustained policing culture.

Book Review:

Criminal Justice Technology in the 21st Century

by Laura J. Moriarty

In a world that is becoming increasingly technology-driven, this detailed text can serve as a significant asset for trainers and educators working within the law enforcement and public safety professions.

I found the book to be highly comprehensive, and readers seeking detailed examination and conceptual depth will likely appreciate Laura Moriarty's approach to the subject matter.

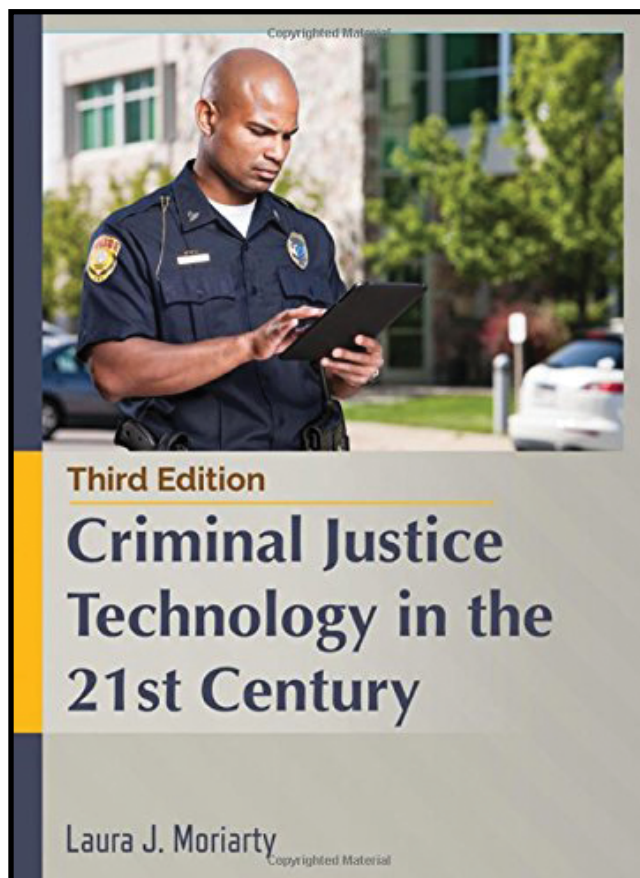
The book begins by examining technology infrastructure across law enforcement, judicial administration, and correctional environments. The text provides an overview of law enforcement technologies, including the transition from traditional beat patrol methods to fleet modernization and the evolving role of the patrol vehicle in modern policing functions.

The author also discusses the evolution of radios and cellular communication while emphasizing the importance of interoperability between agencies.

As trainers, this topic is particularly relevant when conducting tabletop exercises or large-scale multi-agency training with public safety partners. I especially appreciated the discussion surrounding the challenges associated with radio and cellular communication in rural environments where signal reliability may be limited.

The text further examines subject control technologies, including OC spray, conducted energy weapons (CEWs), and vehicle pursuit technology, before transitioning into discussions surrounding body armor and officer safety equipment. This section was of particular interest to me as a Canadian trainer, as many of the public security professionals I work with wear either stab-resistant vests or Level IIIA ballistic armor prior to moving into specialized assignments such as investigations, traffic enforcement, or tactical operations.

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Book Review:

Common Sense Law Enforcement Leadership

by Gerald W. Garner

I was originally in line to write another book review, and this was presented to me, and man, this is right in my wheelhouse. Far too often in law enforcement, leadership is discussed and discussed, but it is forgotten at the practical level. This book does a great job of diving into what matters, why it matters, and how it can be implemented.

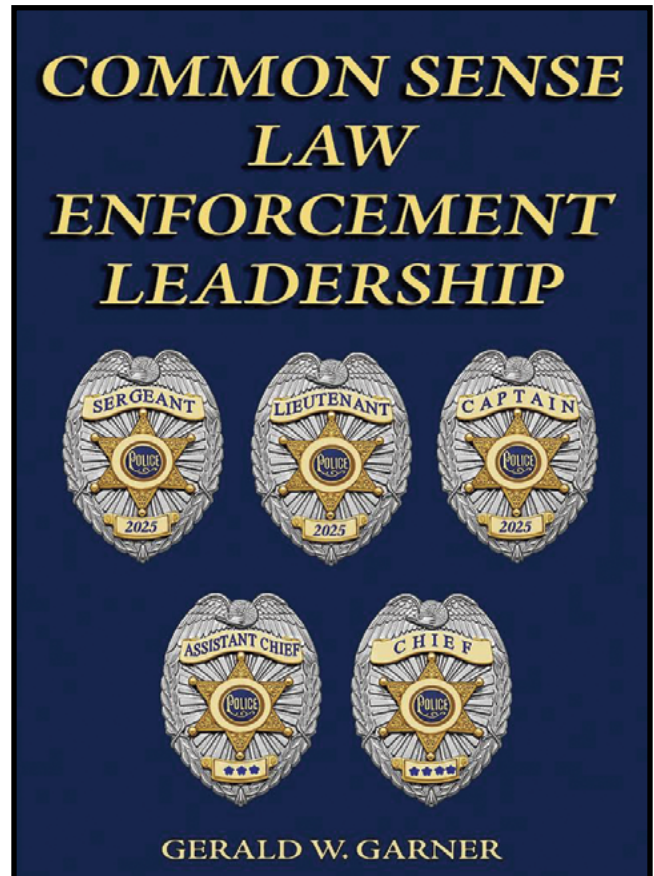
First and foremost, what stood out to me was that, before even the book's contents, it defines why leadership matters and who leaders are. Spoiler alert: we are all leaders! This sets the tone of the book and is a great intro. As the book dives into the details, it is a well-thought-out book that covers everything a leader could need. Leadership isn't about a one-size-fits-all approach and isn't just a point-and-go profession. In today's day and age, you must be a leader, trainer, counselor, coach, and a little bit of everything in between, whether you're a frontline supervisor or the Chief of Police. The book does a great job of breaking down very important points into subheadings and presenting them in digestible chunks. Often, we try to take in too much information at once. This format lets you pick it up and spend 5-10 minutes reading a bit of the book each time, while still gaining knowledge.

I really want to hit on some high points of this book, but it's hard to pack everything into one article.

Media Relations Matter:

Far too often, we get on social media or turn on the national news, and we see depressing police headlines. These narratives snowball repeatedly because we fail at the leadership level to address these issues head-on. This book does a great job addressing the role of the leader in dealing with the media. Whether that is a frontline supervisor, a public information officer, or the Chief of Police,

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A First-Timer's Love Letter to ILEETA

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This was more than networking. It wasn't superficial contact swapping. This was connection- both genuine and energising.

I found myself in conversations that challenged my assumptions, expanded my understanding, reframed my training philosophies and reminded me why diverse perspectives are a gift.

Every late-night discussion left me feeling more grounded in my purpose and more inspired to return home and grow for my staff, and myself.

Forever Changed: Professionally and Personally

I thought I was coming to the ILEETA conference to learn new skills and gather ideas for curriculum. I thought I was coming simply to attend a conference, but instead I found:

- a community of passionate and driven professionals
- a network of mentors I didn't know I needed
- a sense of belonging that wrapped around me like armour
- a reminder of why this profession matters so deeply

I am leaving forever changed, not only as a trainer, but as a person. My approach to teaching feels sharper. My understanding of my staff and recruits feels clearer. My sense of responsibility feels heavier in the best possible way.

This experience gave me more than knowledge. It gave me connection and confidence.

Until Next Year

As they call for boarding my chest tightens again, but this time instead of from sadness, from gratitude. ILEETA didn't just exceed expectations; it rewrote them entirely.

To the instructors, the mentors found in hallways, the friends made, and every person who took the time to offer a kind word or a challenging question - thank you.

I arrived intimidated.

I'm leaving inspired.

And I can't wait to come back.

For Anyone Considering the Leap...Take It.

If you've been thinking about attending an ILEETA conference but haven't taken the jump yet, here's your sign: go. Jump in with both feet. It will be one of the best decisions you make for your growth as a trainer and as a person.

Step outside their comfort zone, apply for a scholarship, put your name down to present, and contribute. We did, and we're incredibly grateful for the opportunity that ILEETA gave us to attend.

And for those who already attend year after year, keep encouraging others to come along. That's what makes this community so special. The more people we welcome, the stronger, richer, and more impactful ILEETA becomes.



Virtual Reality as a Targeted Tool: Promise, Limits, and Judgment in Law Enforcement Training

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Trainers in Bartel's (2026) study noted concerns about the lack of physical resistance or touch feedback, differences in weapon handling compared to the real world, and technological constraints that create unnatural limits in movement and positioning. These factors reduce fidelity, and fidelity affects transfer. If the physical component of a skill is degraded, the risk of negative transfer, learning that does not carry over or interferes with real-world performance, becomes significant. Prior research has documented instances where VR training impaired real-world task performance under certain conditions, a risk law enforcement cannot afford.

3. Operational/Legal Frameworks

XR offers a repeatable platform for training step-by-step processes that

allow deliberation and reflection. Foundational tasks such as report writing, evidence processing, or applying legal frameworks related to search and seizure can be represented in XR. Scenarios that raise questions about when a search or seizure, such as a Terry Stop, is lawful can be explored in controlled, replayable environments.

This is another domain where fidelity matters. Inaccurate visuals or weak kinesthetic feedback limit the experience, especially for tasks requiring fine motor skills. Looking at blood spatter patterns and removing and packaging SD cards are very different in a virtual experience; XR may effectively represent fluid dynamics

related to velocity and direction of blood, but struggle to capture the touch and nuance required to package delicate items.

4. Interpersonal and Communication Skills

XR has been used to train communication, de-escalation, and tactical empathy (compassion), areas of growing importance in modern policing. Immersive perspective-taking can be powerful, allowing officers to experience scenarios from multiple viewpoints and potentially enhance their understanding of community interactions and human behavior.

Yet representation is especially critical here. Limitations in avatar realism, conversational flow, and behavioral nuance can undermine the authenticity of interactions. The “uncanny valley” effect, where near-realistic human representations feel unnatural, can disrupt engagement and learning. If the human element is not convincingly represented, training risks becoming artificial in precisely the domain where authenticity is most critical.

The Trainer Remains Central

Across all competencies, one finding stands out: XR does not replace the trainer; it amplifies the need for one. Trainers are responsible for selecting appropriate use cases, structuring scenarios, guiding attention and interpretation, and conducting critical after-action reviews. Without this human layer, XR risks becoming an experience rather than a training intervention.

The literature reinforces that simulation environments are most effective when paired with structured reflection and feedback, enabling trainees to connect action with understanding (Podoletz et al., 2024). In practice, XR should function as a component within a broader instructional system, deliberately integrated rather than treated as a standalone solution.

Clarifying Training Objectives

Perhaps the most important implication of XR is that it forces trainers to clarify their objectives. Before adopting XR, trainers must ask what specific competence is being targeted, whether XR represents that competence with sufficient fidelity, which elements are missing, and how much those omissions matter. They must also consider how they will ensure transfer to real-world performance.

These are training questions, not merely technical ones. XR does not simplify training decisions; it requires that trainers sharpen them.

Disciplined Adoption Over Enthusiasm

XR holds genuine promise for law enforcement training. When properly aligned with training goals, it can enhance decision-making, expose officers to meaningful scenarios, and increase training accessibility. But it is not a universal solution; its effectiveness is uneven and bounded by both technological and human factors. Current findings suggest a demanding standard: use XR where it fits, and resist it where it does not. For trainers, this is an opportunity to think more precisely about training design,

to match tools to tasks, and to ensure that innovation serves performance rather than the other way around. In a profession where outcomes carry real consequences, that level of discipline is not optional.



The Architecture Behind Decision Making

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pattern by introducing a new one, with consequent work on decision latency. Decision latency is the measurable concept of the time interval between trigger and repetition of the new habit, which, thanks to constant repetition, reduces that interval itself. Through the learning stages:

- unconsciously incapable (I don't know the pattern and I don't know how to manage it)
- consciously incapable (I am aware of the pattern to change but have not yet started the change)
- consciously capable (I am aware of the pattern and I am inserting the new one)
- unconsciously capable (new pattern installed, latency reduced, action automated)

In critical moments we revert to patterns consolidated by thousands of repetitions; if we automate a new pattern, that will be the fastest response when needed. Bringing awareness means practicing a single, focused objective in training.

Measure and verify

After the 30-day practice period a new scenario is run to verify whether the pattern has been modified and



whether latency has decreased with simple measures such as timestamps, and structured observations. The journal makes it possible to quantify improvements, not as mere formality but with the assurance that training produces real, quantifiable change in each officer's operational gestures.

Operational priorities: urgent vs. important

In this specific frame, alongside this work, it is necessary to develop an approach that must itself become a behavioral pattern; distinguishing urgent from important. Urgent is what has a deadline. Important is what, if done or not done, compromises success or failure. Confusing them leads to ineffective choices. Using the lens of the Eisenhower Matrix helps the officer place a stimulus in one of four boxes, urgent and important; important but not urgent; urgent but not important; not urgent and not important, is a practical lens, not a theoretical exercise.

Conclusion: making error an asset

These elements do not travel separately, they intertwine. The training error, if managed, becomes an asset. Controlled unpredictability transforms the instructor into a craftsman of training, able to shape effective habits rather than repeat procedures. Procedures are useful, but not enough on their own. Observation, identification, isolation, practice, measurement are tools instructors can use every day to improve decisions and reactivity, reducing errors during deployment that cost reputation, legal liability and, in extreme cases, lives.

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Three Phases. One Job. Is Your Training Keeping Up?

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in operational reality, and training that reinforces it produces officers less capable of the switch that real incidents require (Dorrestijn, 2025).

Phase Three: Reflective Learning Happens After

The post-incident phase is where deliberate critical thinking should be most active. This is the moment to slow down, examine what actually happened, test assumptions against outcomes, and consolidate what was learned into something that will be available next time. Done well,

it converts a single scenario into a development arc. Done badly — or skipped — the scenario leaves no trace.

Debriefing is not a courtesy. It is a learning mechanism: trainees learn faster and retain more with structured debriefing, especially with video (Oudejans, Nieuwenhuys, & Willemsen, 2010). It is also where the cognitive patterns built in phase one are confirmed or corrected. An officer who built the wrong mental model and never reflected on it will build the same wrong model next time.

One pattern in the data is worth highlighting for trainers: reflection scores higher in training than in real incidents, because training environments reward it. But consider what reflection looks like in practice. An officer who turns to their partner and says “If you had been standing where I told you, I could have moved in sooner — that delay was on you” is not reflecting. That is a reproach. It is the post-incident phase being used to assign blame rather than to revise assumptions. Structured facilitation is what makes the difference (Dorrestijn, 2025).

One Principle, One Standard

Each phase activates a different type of learning: cognitive, motor, reflective. Cover all three and you develop officers who think before they act, execute under pressure, and learn from what happens. Cover only the action phase and you develop officers who can execute — until the situation diverges from what they practiced (Kahneman & Klein, 2009).



The standard is not realism in the action phase. It is representativeness across all three. Build in the pre-incident phase: dispatch information, time to plan, structured ‘what if’ thinking. Design the action phase for the full range of real incidents, not just their most extreme form. And protect the debrief — not as an afterthought, but as the phase where the next incident begins (Dorrestijn, 2025).

Think back to your last scenario. Where did it start? Where did it end? The gap between your answer and the three-phase structure of a real incident is not a design detail. It is the difference between training officers for the job and training them for a simplified version of it.

Incidents have three phases. Training should too.

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The Use of Force in Security: A Perspective Based on Traditional Chinese Wisdom

Continued from pg. 21

when the situation demands it. The criterion shifts from “right or wrong” to what is appropriate.

To think about the use of force through the lens of traditional Chinese wisdom does not mean abandoning norms or protocols, but deepening their understanding. It means recognizing that effectiveness arises from reading the situation and that acting well is not about imposing one’s will, but about responding appropriately to what presents itself.

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The Learning Loop: A Practical Framework for Training That Transfers

Continued from pg. 23

*“Fixing what they did” →
“Understanding why they did it”*

That’s where real improvement happens.

Coaching Through Questions, Not Answers

If the goal is better performance under pressure, our job is not to give better answers. It’s to ask better questions.

Please use the following post-course handout card to help apply these concepts more meaningfully in your training.

Transfer-First Debrief Card (Instructor Use)

Purpose: Help the learner discover why actions occurred, not just what occurred.

Rules:

- Ask 1–2 questions only.
- Use silence intentionally.
- Do not solve problems the learner has not experienced.
- Praise detection and adaptation, not perfection.

Debrief Flow

Perception

- What information told you it was time to act?
- What did you expect to see that you didn’t?

Attention / Emotion

- Where did your attention go under stress?

- What helped you stay task-focused?

Decision

- What options did you consider?
- What would have changed your decision?

Action

- What did your movement allow you to see next?
- What problem did that action solve?

Adaptation

When did you realize something needed to change?

Transfer

If this looked different next time, what would still apply?

Reminder:

These questions allow us to shape the learners perception, decision-making, and action under pressure.

The Instructor Shift

Using the Learning Loop requires a shift in how we see our role. We are not there to immediately correct or provide all the answers.

We are there to:

- Reveal how the officer is making sense of the environment
- Help them recognize when expectations don’t match reality
- Guide their ability to adapt in real time

That is what transfers.

Continued next page.



Setting the Stage for Better Training

When instructors view performance through this lens, training starts to change:

- Scenarios become less about “getting it right” and more about exposing meaningful problems
- Debriefs become less about critique and more about discovery
- Errors become a necessary part of effective learning

This leads to the next critical question I will address in a coming article:

If performance is driven by perception, expectation, and decision-making under pressure;

Where do errors actually come from and how do we design training to prevent them?

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Pistol-Mounted Optics Conversion-Our Experience

Continued from pg. 25

As everyone became more comfortable, we did distance shooting, moving back to 50 yards. The vast majority of our officers had never shot a handgun at that distance. They surprised themselves with how well they did. The rest of the day was spent shooting faster and faster (under a PACT timer), engaging multiple targets, moving and shooting, etc.

Conclusion

In the end, everyone got through with fewer issues than expected. Even students who presented known challenges did unexpectedly well. Without a doubt, we had our share of skeptics at the beginning of the course who were ultimately either sold or at least accepting of the benefits of PMOs. Three months later, this past March, we held our normal requalification. Virtually no one had problems qualifying, and most scores were noticeably higher than in previous years.

It appears PMOs are here to stay, and for good reasons. As previously mentioned, they're not a cure-all for someone with weak fundamentals. But for shooters who have a strong basic foundation, PMOs can elevate those shooters to another level. Here's hoping that if you're instituting PMOs, your transition goes as well as ours did, and that you avoid the pitfalls I mentioned.



Teach to Retain: Turning Officers into Instructors for Better Learning

Continued from pg. 29

How can we apply this tomorrow?

Simple – tell them early about the expectation that they teach this to their classmates and set up some teach-back drills that will happen right in class. These don't have to take much time. The key is to let our students know ahead of time that they'll be teaching this to others. Here's a couple of methods I've used in my own classes:

1. Informal teach backs. Have students pair up and teach each other a subject or skill that they've learned in your class. This can take as little as two minutes. Don't wait till the end, you can do these quick hitters throughout your lesson. Right after, you can follow up with the class to see what came out of that exercise, or simply move on.
2. Formal teach backs. This is where you let students know that they will have to present to a group of students, or even the whole class, on a topic they learned. This topic can be pre-selected for them or can even be pulled from a list of topics you've already covered.

Watching your students teach what they just learned is a great way to informally gauge where they're at with their understanding. It will expose gaps in their knowledge and will ultimately help you to become a better coach and teacher.

This isn't about you, it's about your students and their ability to be effective long after they've left your class. This small adjustment to how you teach

is proven to increase their retention and will give them the best chance at effectively transferring this knowledge to the messy, ambiguous and high consequence real world.

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Rethinking the AI Productivity Promise

Continued from pg. 31

When a training agency prompts a general-purpose AI for a lesson plan and forwards the output to a subject matter expert for approval, they have not accelerated course development. They have moved the quality bottleneck from creation to correction, often with a reviewer who knows the content well but was never asked to function as an instructional designer. The workslop problem Hardman identifies in corporate environments is arriving in training departments now.

Continued next page



Task Decomposition as the Core Competency

The skill that actually resolves this is not better prompting. It is task decomposition. Breaking a course development workflow into discrete task types and being honest about which ones fall within AI's reliable capability and which ones require human instructional judgment.

Generative AI performs well on bounded content production tasks with defined parameters, such as generating scenario variations from a provided framework, drafting formative check questions against a specified learning objective, producing first-draft content within a structure the instructional designer has already built. These are tasks where the design judgment has already been exercised.

AI executes within those constraints; it does not establish them.

AI performs poorly on tasks that are fundamentally design tasks: determining what a learner population actually needs, sequencing content across a multi-module curriculum, aligning assessment to performance objectives at the right cognitive level, or making the modality decisions that determine whether learning actually transfers to the job. These tasks require verification effort that quickly offsets the time savings.

Hardman's sixth practical recommendation is to "map the workflow before adding the tool." For instructional designers, the application is more granular, map the task before assigning it to AI.

Conclusion

The question of whether AI saves time is not answerable in the aggregate. It depends on what you are doing, how proficient you are, and whether you are asking AI to produce content or to make design decisions. Hardman's research points to verification and deliberate use as the markers of the productive minority. In instructional design specifically, deliberate use starts with one prior question: Is this a content task, or a design task? AI handles the former well. The latter still requires us.

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Disclosure: This article was developed in collaboration with Claude AI as a writing partner. All concepts, experiences, and factchecking described are my own. I used AI to help structure and refine my ideas - modeling the responsible use of AI tools I advocate for in training design.



Preventing Confidence Collapse in Scenario-Based Training

Continued from pg. 33

I want to talk specifically about the debriefing process; this is where the learning takes place. Start by having them perform a self-assessment of the scenario. This can be done by simply asking them questions like, "What went well and why?" "What can improve and how?" Involving them in the learning process restores cognitive control. Focus on one issue at a time, the greatest safety or legal risk; what can get them killed or what can get them jammed up legally. Additional corrections can be made in later repetitions. Use consequence-based language such as, "you lacked facts to detain the person, that can result in suppressed evidence."

Next, let's talk about how we can restore their confidence after they have a collapse. First, end the scenario because allowing it to continue and get worse is not productive. Next, pull that recruit aside and make the correction in private using a calm, direct approach. Simplify the scenario and run it again, and after they are successful, ramp it back up to the level where they collapsed to see how they do after feedback and instruction.

Having a better understanding of how Gen Z recruits learn and why traditional methods that were employed on us, and that worked for years, no longer work will make us better instructors. Remember, we are not lowering standards; we are improving outcomes!



Create Next Level Training Using Adult Learning Concepts: It Begins in the Classroom

Continued from pg. 35

In the Classroom

Adult learning lesson plans should follow the KSA progression: tell them, show them, let them practice, then evaluate their ability to apply the information in realistic conditions.

While these concepts can be implemented in a classroom-only setting, adult learning is most effective when students are actively involved in the process. Even within classroom constraints, instructors can incorporate strategies that increase participation, critical thinking, and retention. (P.White, 2024) A few examples are:

- **Demonstrations:** Show students both the correct and incorrect way of performing a task often creates stronger retention than lecture alone. For example, during a handcuffing class, an instructor may intentionally demonstrate poor positioning or improper suspect control before showing the correct technique. Students immediately see how small mistakes create officer safety issues. The instructor then explains why proper positioning matters and how it reduces risks during real encounters.
- **Lectures:** Lectures have value when used strategically. Short segments of approximately 9–10 minutes help instructors deliver critical information without overwhelming students. For example, after presenting use-of-force case law updates, the instructor might pause and ask: "How could this ruling affect



the way you handle resistance during an arrest?" That one open-ended question transforms students from passive listeners into active participants. Instead of simply hearing information, they begin connecting it to their own experiences.

- **Role Plays:** Role play allows students to physically and mentally engage with the material in a controlled environment. For example, rather than just discussing verbal de-escalation techniques, students can work through a brief role-play involving an emotionally disturbed subject refusing commands. with students playing the officer and subject. The instructor periodically pauses the exercise and discusses communication choices, body language, and escalation cues. This helps students discover what works, what doesn't, and how quickly situations can change under stress.
- **Case Studies:** Case studies are extremely valuable because they force students to think critically and defend their decisions. For example, an instructor might present body camera footage from an actual incident and stop the video at key decision points. Students can then discuss available options, legal issues, tactical concerns, and possible outcomes before watching what occurred. This method develops critical thinking while reinforcing the reality that field situations rarely unfold perfectly.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning remains one of the most effective methods for teaching adults because officers often learn as much from each other as they do from the instructor.

Group discussions, peer teaching, role-play debriefs, and team-based problem solving all encourage students to share experiences and perspectives. These conversations often create stronger retention because students are actively processing and applying the material rather than simply receiving it. (C. May, 2024)

One strategy that has worked particularly well for me is assigning small groups different tactical or legal problems to resolve and have them explain their reasoning to the class. This creates discussion, encourages participation, and allows instructors to evaluate comprehension in real time.

The key is to do a little, a lot. Small, repeated moments of collaboration throughout the course are often more effective than one large group exercise.

Conclusion

Adult learning is not about adding activities for the sake of entertainment. It is about deliberately designing training that helps officers understand information, develop and practice skills, and apply sound decision-making under realistic conditions.

Just like that young officer with the new equipment, it is tempting to skip the instructions and jump straight to the fun part. However, effective instructors understand that successful training requires structure, preparation,

and purpose. When we slow down and intentionally build training based on adult learning principles, we create courses that are more engaging, more meaningful, and ultimately more effective on the street.

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The Three Things Evidence-Based Law Enforcement Training Must Do

Continued from pg. 37

Just as important, effective training does not end at launch. Product updates, policy changes, and evolving conditions require reinforcement over time. Evidence-based training is designed as a system, not a single event. It returns officers to the few skills and decisions that matter most and makes them easy to revisit when needed.

Where Evidence, Experience, and Training Come Together

Evidence-based law enforcement

training is not about abstract research or generic best practices. It is about applying what we know about learning, stress, and decision-making to the realities officers face every day.

When training respects officer experience, supports judgment under pressure, and provides safe opportunities to practice, it becomes more than information delivery. It becomes preparation.



Certification Is Not Mastery: Why Instructor Development Is Broken

Continued from pg. 39

improvement. Assignment without development is not instruction. It is liability.

What This Looks Like in Training

These gaps are visible in everyday training. Students complete drills but cannot explain the skill. Corrections are given without identifying root cause. Performance improves in drills but fails to transfer.

These are not student failures. They are instructional failures. If skills do not transfer beyond training, the training has failed.

The Liability Nobody Talks About

Training carries into the field and directly impacts decision making under stress. In post-incident reviews, officers often articulate what they were told to do, but not why. That is a training failure.



Ineffective training can support failure to train claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Agencies are expected to provide training that is both effective and defensible. A compounding issue is that the least experienced instructors often train the least experienced personnel, placing foundational development in the hands of those still developing themselves.

Training without accountability is not defensible. It is exposure.

Moving Forward

Certification should be the starting point, not the end state. Effective instructor development requires structured mentorship, progressive teaching responsibility, and ongoing professional development. Instructor development must be treated as a system, not an event.

If you are not developing instructors, you are maintaining mediocrity.

Conclusion

The profession does not suffer from a lack of certified instructors. It suffers from a lack of mastery, driven by a lack of mentorship, accountability, and structure. Certification may establish a baseline, but it does not create instructors capable of developing others.

Mastery is not a certificate. It is a standard. And outcomes matter.

In this profession, those outcomes are measured in lives, liability, legitimacy, and public trust.

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- Disclosure: This article was edited with the assistance of AI based writing tools.



Packing the Parachute

Continued from pg. 41

I pray that none of my students ever find themselves in a gun battle or having to perform a magazine change with an incapacitated arm. If they do; however, it is my job as an instructor to make sure that when they pull that ripcord to deploy their “parachute” that it opens correctly, and is packed with the training/knowledge that they need to help them land safely.



The Illusion of “Instructor Certification”

Continued from pg. 43

realize training depends on lesson plans, attendance, safety briefings, and testing methods. Deviation from curriculum shifts responsibility onto the instructor. Written documentation is key to legal defensibility.

Assessment design gets little attention. Instructors are taught what to test, not how to test. Skills like progressive development, sequencing, and evaluating judgment over memorization are seldom covered. Assessments usually confirm minimum standards, not operational competence.

I’ve worked with instructors who hold multiple certifications. The strongest treat each credential as a starting point. The weakest rely on certificates alone. Relying solely on certifications inflates belief, not skill. Consider a new certificate a ‘learner’s permit.’

Clear expectations help the training community. Instructor development requires focus on adult learning, presentation, communication, safety, assessment, and documentation.

Certification from a reputable organization is vital, but I treat it as a baseline. I’ve continued learning by attending a variety of classes on related topics, researched, completed short and college courses on adult learning and presentation, observed others, and sought feedback from those I want to learn from. Never rest on your laurels!

ILEETA’s mission is to improve training professionals across disciplines.

Engage by attending the conference, presenting at the conference, submitting an article for the journal, and being part of the community by sharing lessons learned with peers.

Credentials open doors, but ongoing development keeps them open. Don’t let your instructor certification be the final word on your development. Commit to exceeding the ‘minimum standard’ required by certification. Be a life-long learner, seek feedback, and actively practice and refine your teaching skills. Elevate yourself beyond basic credentials by embracing adult learning principles, prioritizing safety and documentation, and engaging with the broader training community. Your growth as an instructor depends on the deliberate steps you take to become a true educator and leader.



From the Garden: Lessons in Resilience, Perseverance, and Finding Your Release

Continued from pg. 47

ambiguous, where cases stall, where the people you help don’t always stay helped.

The garden offers something different: clear, visible, undeniable results. You plant, you tend, and eventually, sometimes years later, you get peonies. Nobody can take that away from you. The blooms are real. You did that.



The psychological value of accomplishment is well-documented. It builds self-efficacy, counteracts helplessness, and creates a sense of control in a profession where so much is beyond our control. Whether it's a garden, a workshop project, a recipe, or a marathon training plan, finding a pursuit that offers concrete markers of progress is one of the most practical investments a law enforcement professional can make in their own sustainability.

What the Peony Taught Me

That crushed plant in my yard didn't survive because conditions were ideal. It survived because it was left alone long enough to do what it was designed to do: grow toward light, establish roots, and bloom when ready.

We are not so different. We need good conditions when we can get them: sleep, relationships, time away from the weight of the work. We need the equivalent of good soil: peer support, mental health resources that carry no stigma, leadership that understands the cumulative cost of this career.

And we need our version of the garden: a place, a practice, a pursuit that is ours. Something that grows. Something that blooms.

The world is, as I often think while pulling weeds, genuinely strange and difficult right now. The demands on law enforcement are significant, and they are not getting simpler. All the more reason to find your peony bush, whatever form it takes, and tend it.

The profusion of blooms is worth the wait.



Priming Performance: How Instructional Language Shapes Officer Response

Continued from pg. 49

and dehumanize opponents as they do their best to prime themselves for optimal performance during conflict. But it hasn't worked for us.

There are recent cases that have unfortunately exemplified how cops who have perhaps been trained to expect to face "cowards" during a particular type of event respond when they are required to face a person who is prepared to "endure dangerous or unpleasant things" and "ready to face and endure danger or pain."

Of course, I'm not suggesting that evil killers are "courageous" per se, but we should not prime officers with assurance they'll be fighting a coward. If we must assure them of anything, let's assure them that they'll be going toe to toe with evil. That evil may be trained, experienced, ready and equipped, or it may not be, but it'll most certainly be evil, and by the definitions above, it won't be cowardly either.

Conclusion

Hopefully "evil" is a word we can all agree on in this context. At first this word distinction is seemingly a minor issue, but details matter. Whether it's tied boot laces, functional batteries, inches on a target, or the words we use, the small stuff can make a difference. For the sake of a nail, as the saying goes, the battle may indeed be lost.

Human behavior is complex and influenced by many factors. Eliminating a word or words from a vocabulary will

not neutralize other factors, but words can and will affect overall mindset. The mentality we instill within officers to prepare to face evil as opposed to the assurance they'll face cowardice might just make a difference.

We must choose our terms carefully and contemplate the influence they may have. When game day comes, the terminology we've used while preparing can affect the score.

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Smart, Not Soft: The Invisible EQ Shield in Corrections

Continued from pg. 51

readiness. These practices don't lower standards; they raise them by keeping officers mentally sharp and emotionally present.

Just as importantly, EQ provides early warning systems for burnout. Officers who can name what they're experiencing are more likely to address it early, through rest, support, training, or professional help, rather than waiting until performance, health, or relationships collapse.

Smarter, Safer, and Sustainable

This approach isn't about being softer. It's about being smarter.

Higher emotional intelligence is consistently linked to better mental health outcomes, reduced turnover, improved decision-making, and safer work environments. Officers with strong EQ skills communicate more effectively, manage conflict more efficiently, and recover more quickly from critical incidents.

Corrections will always be a demanding profession. No amount of training can remove the inherent stress of the job. But we can equip officers with tools to carry that stress without being crushed by it. Emotional intelligence, when framed correctly and taught practically, becomes a form of psychological armor, one that protects not just the officer but the entire facility.

Final Thought

We've spent decades refining tactical equipment and physical safety procedures in corrections. It's time we gave the same attention to the mind. Because when an officer's emotional armor fails, everything else is at risk.

Want to go deeper?

The concepts in this article are explored in detail in "POWER SKILLS: Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills for Correctional Officers, First Responders, and Beyond" by Michael Cantrell. Available now on Amazon.



You Check Your Gear Before Every Shift. When Did You Last Check Your Heart?

Continued from pg. 55

Watch what you are putting in your body. I learned that one the hard way and it stuck.

If you have any pull with your union, your command staff, or your state legislators, push for heart and lung presumptive legislation in your state. Officers in some states already have legal protection recognizing that this career contributes to cardiovascular disease. Every state should. That fight is worth having.

And talk to the people around you. The officer next to you, the instructor down the hall. Ask when they last got checked. Make it normal to have that conversation instead of something we avoid.

We look out for each other out there every day. The most important piece of gear you have goes home with you every night. Start treating it that way. Get the checkup. Know your numbers. Model it for the people watching you, because they are watching whether you think so or not.



Leadership in a Recruit Training Environment: Building Teams that Produce Professional Officers

Continued from pg. 57

a way that builds competence rather than resentment.

Mentorship: Developing More Than Skills

Training is not just about teaching tactics, laws, and procedures. It is about shaping decision-making, character, and leadership potential.

Every interaction between instructor and recruit is an opportunity for mentorship.

Effective leaders recognize that recruits are not just learning how to perform tasks, they are learning how to think, communicate, and carry themselves as professionals. This requires more than instruction; it requires guidance.

When recruits feel supported rather than belittled, they are more willing to engage, ask questions, and take ownership of their development. Over time, this creates officers who are not only competent, but confident.

Building a Cohesive Instructor Team: The Foundation of Effective Training

While much attention is given to developing recruits, the effectiveness of any training environment is ultimately determined by the strength of its instructor team. Recruits will only experience servant leadership, professionalism, and mentorship if those qualities are consistently demonstrated across the entire instructional staff.

An academy is only as strong as the cohesion of the people delivering the training.

Building an effective instructor team begins with intentional selection. Instructors must be more than subject matter experts—they must be communicators, mentors, and professionals who understand that how they teach is just as important as what they teach.

Once assembled, the instructor team must be unified in purpose and expectations. Inconsistent messaging, conflicting standards, or varying leadership styles can quickly erode credibility with recruits.

Leaders must clearly define the culture they expect the instructor cadre to create, including:

- A shared commitment to servant leadership and recruit development
- Consistent standards for professionalism, discipline, and communication
- An understanding that mentorship—not intimidation—is the primary method of instruction
- Accountability among instructors to uphold and model these expectations

Equally important is fostering trust and communication within the instructor team. Instructors must be able to collaborate, share ideas, and address challenges as a unified group.

Strong training leaders remain actively engaged with their instructors. They observe, provide feedback, and are present in the training environment—

not just administratively, but functionally.

Finally, effective leaders develop their instructors just as intentionally as instructors develop recruits. Ongoing mentorship, professional development, and honest feedback ensure continued growth.

When the instructor cadre is cohesive and aligned, everything else becomes more effective. Recruits receive a clear, consistent example of leadership.

Conclusion: Leadership That Carries Forward

Leadership in a training environment is not about control; it is about influence that lasts beyond the classroom.

Servant leadership establishes trust.

Leading by example builds credibility.

Mentorship develops capability.

And a cohesive instructor team ensures consistency.

Together, these principles create a training environment that develops professionals prepared to serve and lead.

Because in the end, the true measure of a training leader is not what happens during the academy.

It is what those recruits become after they leave it.

Disclosure: This article was edited with the assistance of AI-based writing tools.



Training for Reality: Teaching Evidence-Based Policing in a Changed Environment

Continued from pg. 59

metrics help agencies determine where and when to deploy resources

and assess outcomes. However, data does not justify tactics and does not replace lawful discretion. Well-governed data supports clarity rather than control.

Proactive Policing

The National Academies' review concluded that some proactive strategies reduce crime, but outcomes vary (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Unfocused or aggressive tactics increase risks to legitimacy and civil liberties. Procedural justice training has been shown to reduce use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints, demonstrating that how officers police is not fixed and can be shaped (Wood, Tyler, & Papachristos, 2020).

The Integration Problem

Officers are expected to be proactive while avoiding complaints, be visible while limiting contact, and enforce the law while prioritizing legitimacy. These expectations are not conflicting, but become unmanageable when not properly taught. When policing models are kept isolated, officers tend to stick to old habits, which is a logical response to unclear guidance.

Training for Integration

For law-enforcement educators, integration is a solution.

1. Data-driven analysis identifies locations and patterns

2. Hot spots policing determines where time is concentrated
3. Problem-oriented policing defines what conditions must change
4. Community policing governs how officers interact
5. Focused disorder policing addresses environmental contributors
6. Bounded proactive policing prevents harm while preserving legitimacy

This framework aligns with evidence and may provide some clarity.

Training Determines Presence

Over the last ten years, policing has faced increased scrutiny, reform efforts, and setbacks more rapidly than training programs have kept pace. This has led to a profession with a wealth of evidence but a lack of cohesive integration. For law-enforcement educators, the goal isn't to advocate for just one policing approach. Instead, they must train officers to confidently navigate multiple models, rooted in evidence, guided by law, and strengthened through reinforcement.

That is how officer presence returns.

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Criminal Justice Technology in the 21st Century, by Laura J. Moriarty

Continued from pg. 60

The book continues by exploring technological advancements within correctional institutions, forensic science, surveillance systems, and the legal challenges associated with emerging technologies. The author also addresses the complexities of navigating an increasingly technology-dependent criminal justice landscape.

One of the book's strengths is the substantial amount of information provided for trainers and educators, along with the numerous references to additional resources that support continued learning and professional development.

Overall, this book serves as a valuable reference for trainers, supervisors, and public safety professionals seeking a broader understanding of how technology continues to shape modern criminal justice operations.

I would suggest however that this is not a book that you read from start to finish in one go, I would suggest that the strength of this book lies in its ability to be a reference to look back on from time to time

About the author:

Ben Wallace is the owner of BDW Crisis Training Solutions. He has completed the Force Science Analyst Course, the Realistic De-escalation Instructor Course, and the Force Encounters Course. Ben is a certified Use of Force Instructor through Tirsia Tactical, a Handcuffing Instructor through ASP, a Critical Incident Aftermath Instructor through the National Association of Combative Firearms Instructors, and a Below 100 Instructor. Ben currently serves as the in-house trainer for the Protective Services Branch of GardaWorld and has trained approximately 1,056 security professionals in subject control tactics since October 2023



Common Sense Law Enforcement Leadership, by Gerald W. Garner

Continued from pg. 61

each has a role in dealing with the media, and it is very important to define those roles. It also lays out practical tips for dealing with the media and for being respectful while still using the media to our advantage.

Making the Tough Calls:

As I have been in law enforcement full-time for 12 years, I have had very good leaders and very bad leaders. The bad ones have stood out more and not for the right reasons. We often remember the bad things leaders do to us. This chapter goes into great detail about why making tough decisions matters, what is involved in that process, and some traps to avoid. No one leader is perfect; however, to not be that officer's last bad memory, use this chapter to guide you as a leader to make the tough decisions, but be fair while doing it.

It's all about communications:

This is one of the standout chapters for me. It is broken down into digestible information so that you can build a strong communication knowledge base very quickly. This is so important because each officer and the general public has their own opinion of you and the agency. How we communicate with each person can make or break a reputation. It touches on a lot of things we may not even think about, like the importance of putting things in writing. When it is written down, it's much harder for someone to say they didn't get the message. Also, it then delves into the importance of maintaining face-to-face communication and how

relationships are solidified or broken through that type of communication. In the age of text messaging and emails, this often gets lost. I know that I often want a leader who is willing to take the time and ask how my day is going. This chapter hits all the high notes without forgetting the main topics that drive those communication relationships.

Overall Rating:

As a doctoral student studying leadership, I'm a nerd for leadership books. However, I don't consider myself an expert. I consider myself an evolving learner in the field of leadership. If you want to go deep into the leadership realm while doing it in easy-to-digest, bite-sized bits of information, then this book is for you. It covers pretty much everything a leader needs to encounter on the job. I rarely give out such high praise for a book, but I truly believe this is a top-tier leadership book and well worth the investment. It's a long read, so don't think you are going to knock it out in one setting. However, leadership isn't a linear journey, nor is it quick. Just as that journey goes, this book will take some time, but it is worth every second of reading. This book is a solid 10/10 rating.

Review by Brent Colbert

Brent Colbert is a veteran police officer who has held roles as a supervisor, media relations officer, and full-time training department assignment. Brent holds a master's degree in Criminal Justice Administration and is currently pursuing his doctorate in Strategic Leadership, with a graduation date of late 2026.



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