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Training

Field Training Officer (FTO):

The Fairfax County Experience

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History

Until December 1975, the Fairfax County Police Department approached field training in a traditional manner, i.e., recruit officers were normally assigned with "senior" officers. Inherent in this approach is the assumption that senior officers are always competent trainers. When one examines this precept, however, it becomes evident that this is not true in every case.

Through the employment of the "senior officer" approach, the Fairfax County field training program for its 702 sworn officers lacked continuity with the academy recruit training. Moreover, no two recruit officers were receiving training in the same areas at the same point in time nor was there documentation of the training received.

Field training was further complicated by the department's participation in the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy, a regional training facility—a situation where the department did not have the final authority in most issues.

Goals

As the newly assigned training division commander, I recognized the need to formalize the department's field training into a structured program and to align it with the regional academy's curriculum and schedule. Such a program would also lend itself to documenting many of the State-mandated training requirements for police recruits. Basically, the following goals were established:

1. To closely align departmental field training efforts with the regional training academy.
2. To provide documentation of field training received by each recruit officer—needed for complete training records and for backup relative to State-mandated activities.
3. To provide a well-structured and formalized program, permitting all recruits to be trained similarly and for management to know what field training has occurred, rather than a fragmented approach.
4. To provide each recruit officer with a trained field training officer, not just an experienced officer to ride along with, and
5. To provide field training officers also capable of serving as squad trainers.

Introduction

There are two units within a police department to which field training officers could be assigned—training and patrol. A look around the country shows some departments using one or the other. Our department made the decision that field training officers should be a part of patrol. Although the training division is charged with the overall responsibility for training in the department, patrol also shares this responsibility.¹

One of the first steps taken was the development of a Field Training Guide. Recruit officers are issued this guide which remains with them until their basic training—both field training and police academy training—has been completed. Before the guide is returned to the training division for analysis and file, it is reviewed and endorsed by the appropriate station commander.

The Field Training Guide serves a number of purposes and has proven to be the vehicle that has helped us accomplish our goals. This guide contains the department's fundamental principles and concepts from basic information regarding the police department and the criminal justice system to specific duties. Examples of the contents are as follows:

1. Department history and organizational structure,
2. Operation of police vehicles,
3. Radio procedures,
4. Patrol procedures,
5. Elements of the most common criminal offenses,
6. Report procedures, and
7. Interview with a judge.

Each item must be explained and demonstrated by the field training officer, and when appropriate, performed by the recruit. It is then signed by the field training officer. In cases where someone else handles the "instruction," e.g., court liaison officer, that person executes the form. The guide also has a section for a narrative evaluation by the field training officer and the squad supervisor. (Figure 1 is a page from the Field Training Guide.)

A field training officer program is not a substitute for firstline supervision. It does not relieve the sergeant of his training responsibilities; it simply assists him. Firstline supervisors have a multitude of responsibilities—training is only one. On many occasions, training usually takes a back seat to many of their duties, unless a serious problem arises.

It has been found that most recruit officers frequently encounter problems. They often take their problems to either the first senior officer (with whom they have ridden) or to an officer they are personally attracted to—neither of whom may deal with the issue effectively. Human nature prevents most newcomers from taking their problems or questions to their supervisor, particularly if they feel comfortable asking another member of the

squad. However, when considering a career employee (not to mention the initial investment of \$25,000 in a probationary officer), management must take appropriate steps to guide and direct the new employee as closely and competently as possible. Proper guidance is desirable not only from the perspective of the employer, but also the employee. Since the sergeant cannot devote all his time to training and directing the recruit officer, a competent substitute must be provided. A trained FTO can fill this void.

A well-designed FTO program is flexible and can be adapted to various types of police academy formats, e.g., preacademy training, postacademy training, modular academy schedule, and straight-term academy schedule. In Fairfax County, we learned the value of a flexible program as our field training has been impacted by two recent changes. One change involved a schedule alteration by the academy when it changed from a multiple modular system, i.e., three academy training

Figure 1

	Explained	Demonstrated	Performed	Remarks
H. Property Case, Lost/Found				
I. Juvenile Cases				
J. Property Check, Home/Business				
K. Service (Serial Number Verification)				
COURT SYSTEM				
A. Function and Division of Courts				
1. General District—Traffic				
2. General District—Criminal				
3. Juvenile/Domestic Relations Court				
4. General District Circuit Court				
5. Special Magistrates Function				
A. Obtaining Warrants				
ARREST PROCEDURES				
A. Stop and Frisk				
B. Arrest with a Warrant				
C. Arrest without a Warrant				
D. Felony Arrest				
E. Misdemeanor Arrest				
F. Timing of the Arrest				
G. Use of Force in Arrest				
1. What is Reasonable Force				

modules interspersed with two practicums, to one consisting of two modules and only one practicum. The other alteration experienced was one relating to public safety demands that has caused us to discard preacademy field training and place recruits in the academy within a week of their employment.

An important feature of a viable FTO program is the camaraderie that is fostered among the field trainers themselves. This camaraderie, coupled with support and encouragement from superiors, makes for a strong force at a critical level within an organization. As pointed out by Abraham Maslow, the noted psychologist, mankind has a need to self-actualize.² Officers assigned as field trainers usually enter the needs hierarchy at the "social" level, having already satisfied their physiological and safety needs. The importance of "ego" and "self-actualization" cannot be overemphasized. The Fairfax County FTO program capitalizes on these needs.

FTO Selection

The actual selection of individuals for FTO training and assignment was left to the discretion of the district station commanders. They were, however, provided with the following criteria in making their selections. The candidate should have:

1. The desire and willingness to be a trainer. (A police officer unwillingly serving as an FTO will have a negative effect on the person(s) being trained. In terms of delivering inservice training such a person would, at best, be ineffective; in terms of recruit training such an attitude would be disastrous.)
2. The ability to function as a trainer. (Not all officers have the necessary qualities to be good trainers.)
3. The proper police experience. (Experience not only in the context of years of service, but also in duty assignments and quality of overall performance.)

4. The endorsements of their firstline supervisors. (This criterion allows the sergeant to participate in the decisionmaking process. It provides the station commander with alternative approaches to actual selection of FTO's.)

Training the FTO

The key to a successful FTO program is twofold: (1) The prospective field training officer must want to serve in that capacity, and (2) the field training officer must first be trained himself, prior to training others.

When the Fairfax County program was initiated, the candidates were given 24 hours of training. It soon became apparent that more time was required to prepare properly the officers. Consequently, Fairfax County police field training officers now receive 40 hours of basic training, as outlined below:

4 hours—Overview of the Field Training Officer Program and the Role of the Field Training Officer

2 hours—Foundations for Learning

1 hour—The Learning Process

1 hour—The Field Training Officer's Role as a Change Agent

3 hours—A Psychological Profile of the Recruit Officer

4 hours—Practical Approaches to Recruit Problem Solving

3 hours—Panel Discussion with Present Field Training Officers (this block of instruction is used once the program is underway)

4 hours—The Field Training Officer and His Relationship with the Regional Academy

1 hour—The Training Division as a Resource

10 hours—The Field Training Officer as a Squad Trainer

10 hours—Preparation for Training Sessions

10 hours—Use and Construction of Training Aids and Equipment

10 hours—The Presentation of a Squad Training Course

10 hours—Practical Exercise in Squad Training (video taped)³

7 hours—Critique Time—Spaced throughout the course

In addition to the basic training, FTO's receive additional periodic, inservice instruction. Also, each trainer is provided with a Field Training Officer Resource Handbook. This handbook is correlated with the Field Training Guide and contains related documents on each topic. For example, included in the section on the operation of police vehicles is a copy of the department's general order governing their use. Along with the section addressing the elements of the most common criminal offenses encountered by patrol officers are copies of the State and county code sections, and of course, the elements themselves. The resource book also contains sections which can be used by the recruit officer in report writing, such as frequently misspelled words and words that are easily interchanged (e.g., council-counsel, brake-break, etc.).

Feedback

An important ingredient of any plan is feedback. The Fairfax County FTO program uses both formal and informal means to gather feedback. The same mechanisms also provide information pertaining directly to the actual field and squad training being delivered.

One such mechanism employed is an evaluation form. Each FTO is required to submit a weekly evaluation of his recruit's progress. This form consists of 48 items covering 10 categories. (Figure 2 is the second page of the 3-page form.)

After the field training officer has conducted intrasquad training, he must submit a written report to the training division. The following must be included in the report:

1. Date and location of the training,
2. Attendees,
3. Training topic,
4. Course outline/lesson plan, and
5. Instructional aids used.

Many of the reports submitted are used by other FTO's at different district stations. Some are expanded into more lengthy training courses.

Goals, Accomplishments, and Related Problems

The first problem faced in implementing the program was to convince some of the district station commanders that the traditional "senior officers" approach was not as viable as a structured program. Once the program received a vote of confidence from patrol commanders, it proceeded without real difficulty. As a matter of fact, there were only two occurrences of a district station commander arbitrarily assigning officers as FTO's.

Although firstline supervisors were involved in the selection process for field training officers, many of the original FTO's were apprehensive about their acceptance since they would be viewed as infringing on their supervisor's turf. This was not the case! The FTO's were welcomed by their firstline supervisors.

The most difficult goal was the development and maintenance of a close liaison with the regional police academy. This was accomplished when the department, in cooperation with the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy, developed a field training officer program, coordinated by a representative from the academy, for other participating agencies.

The only other significant problem to be resolved involved controlling the original direction, intent, and logistics of the program. This problem was solved when the program was accepted by the department's personnel.

Summary

All goals were met as outlined for the program. Presently, each patrol squad has two field training officers. When they are not involved in recruit training, they each serve as squad trainers. During rollcall and at other previously designated times, they assist with the training of their peers. Yet, both work as regular patrol officers. Stated in another fashion, there is no role definition problem; FTO's are working patrol officers who share in the department's training efforts.

Figure 2

VI. Judgment							
20. Common Sense	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
21. Stress Conditions	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
22. Non-Stress Conditions	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
23. Tact & Discretion	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
VII. Personal Contact							
24. Physical Skills	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
25. Self-Control	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
26. Control of Conflict:							
Voice Command	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
Ability to Communicate	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
27. Department Personnel	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
28. Field Training Officer	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
29. General Public	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
30. Minorities	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
31. Officers in Squad	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
32. Supervisory & Command Personnel	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
33. Youth	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
VIII. Radio							
34. Listens & Comprehends Transmission	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
35. Articulation of Transmission	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
36. Compliance with Proper Procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
IX. Driving Skills							
37. Normal Conditions	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
38. Stress Conditions	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
39. Parking	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
40. Exercise of Speed Control	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
41. Violator Contact	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
42. Safety Consciousness	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
X. Safety							
43. Prisoner	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
44. Arrest	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
45. Search	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
46. Transport	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
47. Processing	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT
48. Vehicle Approach	1	2	3	4	5	NO	NRT

The regional academy staff is augmented by FTO's as temporary instructors. They relate well with the students and bring a sense of the real world to the classroom environment that is often lost by permanently assigned instructors.

The Fairfax County experience must be considered a success. This well-articulated program, joined with a commitment on the part of management, has vastly improved the level of field training experienced in Fairfax County. In fact, it has changed little from its inception 3 years ago. The

basic format remains constant; however, it has adapted itself to academy curriculum alterations, academy schedule changes, and variations in departmental hiring practices. **FBI**

Footnotes

¹ Even though the Fairfax County Police Department is the major contributor to the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy, it also has a training division. The training division is responsible for a number of inservice training courses, administration of the department's training funds for outside schools, liaison with the regional academy and the local portion of recruit training. The training division also serves as a coordination and resource center relative to training for the entire department.

² Abraham Maslow's theory, "Hierarchy of Needs."
³ Several of these presentations were of superb quality and have been used as actual training presentations throughout the department.

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