

**Law Enforcement Field Training Models - Is It Time For A Change?**

By

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## INTRODUCTION

Field training officer programs provide a critical link for newly graduated police academy officers, who find themselves rapidly thrust from the relatively sterile environment of the police academy into the harsh realities of “the streets”. While the typical police academy provides the new police recruit with basic training regarding the competencies needed to perform the various tasks required of a law enforcement officer, a gap often appears between classroom theory and learning to the more practical application of those learned facts, skills, and abilities on the street. An appropriate link must exist between the police academy and the day to day competencies needed by successful law enforcement officers if they are to be successful.

This transition period in the majority of contemporary police departments has often been entrusted to what the law enforcement community refers to as the field training program. Clark (2002), commenting on the importance of the transitional role of the FTO program in training recruits, remarked that, “The field training program allows the officer to experience first hand what has previously been only read or seen in the classroom. The effective field training program takes over where the classroom leaves off” (p. 1). The presumption is that, ultimately, the freshly graduated police officer will learn by following the example of an experienced police officer (in this case, the FTO officer), who in turn observes the rookie police officer perform the same task at some stage of the training itinerary.

While the current FTO model used in police training has been nothing short of revolutionary, the significant philosophical changes made in the mid 1990's, commonly referred to in police circles as community oriented policing, has caused noted problems to emerge. Law enforcement agencies found themselves instructing one style of policing, both at the academy and at the field training level, only to have the police officer expected to practice the philosophical foundations of community oriented policing. When it was discovered that our law enforcement officers were not performing in an effective manner, the training programs in many agencies were often modified to alleviate the gap in knowledge and abilities. This only caused more important issues to emerge. It was discovered that a new police field training program would be needed to fill the knowledge and ability gap.

#### *The FTO Concept*

The typical Field Training Officer (FTO) programs that one might find in the majority of contemporary law enforcement agencies today were developed in the early 1970's. These programs were developed in order to bridge a recognized gap between the classroom learning of the academy and the more realistic environment of the "streets." Habersfeld (2002) commented that, "Academy training can illustrate how things are supposed to be; an effective FTO program can demonstrate how things are" (p. 80).

A standard FTO program consists of the newly graduated academy police officer paired with a highly experienced and trained police officer for a pre-determined period of time. This period often lasts from as few as 4 weeks to as much as 20 or more weeks (Kaminski, 2002). After graduation from the police academy, the newly graduated police trainee is typically placed with a specially trained FTO. For our purposes, the FTO can be

defined as a highly trained and experienced police officer who has received additional specialized FTO training from their respective police departments or an outside training vendor. These FTO officers are tasked with training, and eventually evaluating, the newly graduated police officers in the day to day competencies needed by an officer to be successful in their work environment. The typical program calls for the police trainee to be assigned to each of the various patrol division tours of duty. It is preferable that the police trainee be assigned to a different training officer for each of those shifts, which, according to Cox and Johnson (1996), “Enables the trainee to be exposed to various styles of police work and to ensure that he or she will not be penalized because of a personality clash with a single FTO” (as cited in Haberfeld, 2002, p. 78). Although the FTO is instructed not to let personalities influence their training efforts and decisions made regarding a police trainee, the history of FTO programs in general often tells a much different story.

An example of the competencies that are typically instructed during the FTO program often range from the more simplified task of daily care and operation of the police vehicle to the more complicated task of how to successfully manage the scene at a family disturbance or a complex murder investigation. Often, such issues as officer safety, proper police procedure (i.e., rules, general orders of the departments, and applicable laws) and ensuring that appropriate paperwork is completed in a timely, concise, and acceptable manner, are examples of the types of training issues that are important during the training and eventual evaluation phases of a typical FTO program.

## **FIELD TRAINING MODELS**

### **The San Jose Model**

The first acknowledged effort at forming an FTO program was developed in the early 1970's in the San Jose (California) Police Department by then Division Chief Robert Allen, with the support of Dr. Michael Roberts, Ph.D. The original model, which has since become known as the San Jose Model, was originally referred to as the Meld Training Officer Program (since changed to Field Training Officer). This groundbreaking model quickly became the mainstay of most police officer post academy training programs (Kaminski, 2002). Recent estimates have revealed that nearly 75% of police departments today use the San Jose, or a modified San Jose model, to further train their new police officers.

#### *Drawbacks of the San Jose Model*

Three primary areas of concern exist regarding the continued utilization of the San Jose Model to guide police officer field training. These three issues are identified and discussed in more detail below:

1. Changing philosophy of policing and outdated training methods - While the San Jose Model has served law enforcement well over the past 30 years, some police officers feel that the model has become somewhat outdated, and that it does not take into consideration the fact that many law enforcement agencies are currently moving toward a new philosophy of police training (Hoover, 2002). This new philosophy, community policing, requires much more of the police officer than a simple response to calls for service that the typical agency must attend to on a daily basis. Rather, community policing looks for long term solutions to problems in a community by

utilizing various community resources to resolve the issue. An example of such a problem might be a festering problem with street racing in a local community. This problem may have resulted in property damage and other quality of life issues for a neighborhood, and has become a concern for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. A typical response under old guidelines may call for a strict enforcement (typically referred to as zero tolerance) of the traffic code in the area to reduce the frequency of this dangerous activity. However, the response for a police department who uses community policing as a guide for services would look at the same activity for more long term solutions, using not just enforcement tools but also other venues (such as community educational programs for both the street racer and the citizens of the community and an alternative venue for the street racers in a more controlled environment) to determine a solution in reduction of street racing activities.

The issue that the majority of law enforcement agencies have with the San Jose Model is that it has virtually remained the same since its inception, and that police instructors and administrators alike are concerned about using old policing standards to train police officers. These officers are then, in turn, expected to resolve pressing community law enforcement problems using community policing and problem solving techniques, for which the typical officer has not been trained (Hoover, 2002).

Hoover also commented that,

Today we are training our officers to operate just as they did more than 30 years ago. Once their post academy training is complete, we then ask them to try something different - community oriented policing and problem solving. We have treated this philosophy as an after market item that we can add once we have a "fully trained" police officer complete the field training program (p. 4).

2. Legal issues as a basis for training - Hoover (2002) related that another important concern with the San Jose Model revolved around its significant focus on legal issues, in particular liability and termination. This focus has arisen primarily due to the fact that many law enforcement organizations chose to protect themselves from the rising issues of failure-to-train lawsuits arising out of several successful civil lawsuits concerning police training issues. Failure-to-train lawsuits have historically been based on Title 42 U.S.C. 1983, which provides a remedy for the violation of an individual's federally protected constitutional rights. Failure-to-train is an outgrowth of past Title 42 U.S.C. lawsuits and another Supreme Court decision, *Monell v. New York City Department of Social Services* (1978). Additionally, the issue of inadequate training of law enforcement personnel was considered in the case of *City of Canton v. Harris* (1989). In the *Canton* case, failure-to-train amounted to what the courts referred to as "deliberate indifference" to the rights of an individual. Deliberate indifference is defined as, "The conscious or reckless disregard of the consequences of one's acts or omissions" (Lectric Law Library, 2003).

While consideration of legal issues is laudable and necessitated by the general recognition that America has developed into one of the most litigious societies in history, it should also be noted that there are current defenses afforded to the law enforcement community regarding training issues that have been rendered by the federal courts. When determining liability involving a municipality, the courts have traditionally considered several factors to determine whether or not a municipality is liable for failure-to-train under 42 U.S.C. Section 1983. The plaintiff has the burden

of proving three elements: (1) the training program is inadequate for the tasks that an officer performs; (2) the inadequacy of training is the result of the city's deliberate indifference; and (3) the inadequacy is closely related to or caused the plaintiff's injury (Johnston v. Cincinnati, 1999).

The majority of Section 1983 successful cases have involved more than one single incident of improper training before liability was assessed. A pattern or history of problems or incidents that can be related to improper training will normally be the deciding factor in assessing liability. An analysis of legal liabilities appeared in the publication of *Crime and Delinquency* (2001). In this Texas study, Michael Vaughn, Tab Cooper, and Rolando Del Carmen (2001) surveyed 849 Texas chiefs of police regarding civil liability lawsuits. Out of this group, 34 of 576 lawsuits were directly related to inadequate training, with the top three being assault and battery; false arrest, imprisonment, and detention; and unlawful searches and seizures. While this represents approximately 17% of all reported Texas civil liability cases, there was no indication of how many of these suits were successful, and only one monetary award amount was given. Kaminski (2002) commented on the liability issues specifically regarding FTO programs: "Plaintiffs win less than 4 percent of the suits brought against criminal justice practitioners" (p. 33). While liability concerns are of importance in designing or developing a field training program, the liability issues, in and of themselves, should not constrain the development of a sound field training program. Hoover (2002) commented that,



[Liability concerns] can continue to be addressed while focusing on training needs. It is not necessarily the type of training model an agency chooses that reduces liability, but rather the method by which the training is applied and guidelines adhered to that make the difference. Without proper administration and supervision no training program will protect an agency's interests in a court of law (p. 5).

3. Excessive concerns with documentation - An additional complaint of both trainers and trainees revolves around the misuse of documentation in the FTO program. Many field training programs appear to have developed into little more than a paper trail for the explicit purpose of documenting a police trainee either into, or out of, the FTO program. While documentation specifically for the purpose of retaining, re-training, or the termination of an officer is needed, too often the FTO process lapses into a way to singularly document the police trainee out of the program. It would be more desirable instead to use the opportunity of failure to reevaluate the methods, processes, or behaviors that led to unsatisfactory completion of the program by the officer first, before deciding that the action(s) that led to the termination decision were solely the responsibility of the trainee. Feedback into the training program for future improvement purposes, along with the recognition that not everyone learns at the same rate, or necessarily in the same manner, is vital to the future improvement of any training program.

### **The Reno Model**

The Reno Model is a relatively new field training alternative developed to function in a community policing environment. It was anticipated that the new model would attend to the identified gap in training caused by continued use of the San Jose Model (or a derivative of the San Jose Model). Community oriented policing is a philosophy and style of policing based on the pioneering works of Herman Goldstein, who coined the term

“problem oriented policing”, and of James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling (Broken Windows Theory). Goldstein, in his 1979 article *Improving Policing: A Problem-Oriented Approach*, argued that, “The role of the police should focus more directly on identifying, defining, analyzing, and solving specific and persistent problems in the community, such as street robberies, residential burglaries, spouse abuse, vandalism, etc.- rather than simply responding to these same types of incidents over and over again” (p. 242). James Q. Wilson and George Kelling argued that, “The police role should be expanded beyond law enforcement to include active participation in maintaining and/or improving the quality of community life through an increased focus on order maintenance” (as cited in Vila and Morris, 1999, p. 236).

Although community policing tends to resist an exact definition, we can extrapolate a simple working definition from the works of Herman Goldstein, James Q. Wilson, and George Kelling to be, “Any positive action taken by law enforcement to maintain and improve the quality of life in a community by means of the identification and reduction of crime and criminal activity, through the use of community, governmental, and private resources”. Today, one might find the community oriented police department directing their efforts toward establishing foot patrols, setting up storefront police stations, targeting area responses to crime by specialized units, redefining patrol beats and police officer responses to calls for service, starting neighborhood watch programs and neighborhood citizen patrols, and making efforts to improve the types of communications that the police have with members of the community (business and residential).

As early as 1988, community oriented policing quickly became the primary model of contemporary policing styles. Community oriented policing had community-based

partnerships and problem solving at its very core, something for which the San Jose Model did not appear to attend. More recently, numerous law enforcement training officers and administrators began to inquire as to how they could modify the original San Jose Model of field training to more closely resemble this new policing style/philosophy. Efforts were made by individual instructors, with varying rates of success, but most of the efforts did not have the desired results. It appears very difficult to place a square peg (the San Jose Model) into a round hole (the Reno Model).

The proposed solution to this important issue of was developed by the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (C.O.P.S.), and the Police Executive Research Forum (P.E.R.F.), with the assistance of Chief Jerry Hoover of the Reno Police Department. The model, which has since become referred to as the Reno Model, was developed over a two year period between 1999 and 2001. In 2001 the model was first presented to the Reno Police Department for initial beta testing, and due to the success of the model over the next several months five other sites were eventually selected to test the new model. Although only anecdotal evidence is currently available as to the success of the program, it appears that the program has met and exceeded all expectations of the parties involved in its design.

#### *Problem Solving and Problem Based Learning*

The first and perhaps most notable difference between the San Jose and the Reno models is that the Reno Model's exclusive focus on instructing police trainees in the use of problem solving to resolve ongoing quality of life and order maintenance issues within the community. The method by which problem solving techniques would be instructed to the police would also change, and police trainees would be instructed by their Police

Training Officers (PTO's) by utilization of an adult learning methodology commonly referred to as problem based learning. Problem based learning, as a method of instruction, had its beginnings in the 1970's at the medical school of McMaster University in Canada. This method can be generally described as, "An instructional strategy in which students confront contextualized, ill-structured problems and strive to find meaningful solutions" (Rhem, 1998, p. 1).

As most law enforcement officers can attest, most real world problems are ill-structured and often do not lend themselves to immediate solutions, which is often called for in agencies driven by what could be referred to as an almost obsession with the calls for service loop. Success by an agency excessively influenced by the calls for service loop is often judged not by the ability of offering long term resolution of the problem or issue, but by how quickly the officer can arrive at the incident location, resolve the problem, and return to service to be available for the next holding call for service. If a survey were to be undertaken of the typical patrol officer, it would most likely find agreement that the strict policy of following the calls for service loop does not promote the type of critical thinking and problem solving skills necessary for solving many nagging, long term community law enforcement issues.

The problem based learning approach, in contrast, is a method that is used as a foundational training method to instruct police trainees to solve oft encountered ill-structured problems by promoting critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Generally, there are three stages encountered by the police trainee when utilizing problem based learning as a basis for solving community based problems:

1. Encounter and define the problem - The police trainee should be capable of defining whether or not the encountered policing issue calls for immediate resolution, or requires a more long term, complex solution. While there are occasions that may call for immediate action (i.e., a traffic stop for driving while intoxicated) there are also problems that could lend themselves to the seeking of a more long term solution (i.e., a city park with an ongoing drug problem by area youth, or an area school plagued by nearby off-campus student assaults). At this juncture, being able to recognize the specific type of service that is needed is of primary importance.
2. Determine what resources are needed to resolve the problem - At this stage the problem has been defined as ongoing in a community, and the problem is most likely amenable to a long term solution. The trainee should begin to think about both the departmental and other community resources that are available and may be utilized for tackling the problem. The solution may, for example, simply call for the involvement of governmental resources, or there might be other outside private and community resources that may be of use to the officer.
3. Synthesis and performance - in this stage the police trainee constructs a final solution to the problem and begins the implementation process. While the plan may be instituted without any necessary changes, the police trainee should realize that not everything always goes as intended, and they should allow for an alteration or modification period. For example, an identified resource may suffer funding or alternative issues that would not allow for them to make their resources available as originally planned. Alternative resources should be

identified in the planning stages as possible sources of assistance in the event that problems arise during the implementation period. If the plan fails, the process should not be seen strictly as a failure by the officer, but as a learning opportunity. Contemporary police writers and leaders often call this “failing forward,” which suggests that by failing often the trainee can learn from plans that have gone awry, in many instances without fault of the trainee.

### *Primary Training Areas*

The second noted major difference between the San Jose and Reno models is the Reno Model’s use of two primary training areas: Substantive Topics and Core Competencies. Substantive Topics involve taking the most commonly cited policing activities, such as patrol procedures, enforcing local policies and laws, responding to critical incidents, and investigating domestic violence, and blends these topics into four substantive topic areas, as illustrated in table 1.

The Core Competencies, on the other hand, represent the activities that officers are confronted with during the daily performance of their duties (see Table 1). The term core competency is defined by the United States Office of Personnel Management as, “A measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully” (p. 310). The core competencies for the Reno Model were developed by the creators of the model, surveying over 400 law enforcement agencies to determine what the progressive activities were for the typical police officer working in a community environment.

*Table 1*  
**The Learning Matrix**

	<b>Phase A Non-Emergency Response</b>	<b>Phase B Emergency Incident Response</b>	<b>Phase C Patrol Activities</b>	<b>Phase D Criminal Investigation</b>
<b>Core Competencies</b>				
Police Vehicle Operation	A1	B1	C1	D1
Conflict Resolution	A2	B2	C2	D2
Use of Force	A3	B3	C3	D3
Local Procedures, Policies, Laws	A4	B4	C4	D4
Report Writing	A5	B5	C5	D5
Leadership	A6	B6	C6	D6
Problem-Solving Skills	A7	B7	C7	D7
Community Specific Problems	A8	B8	C8	D8
Cultural Diversity	A9	B9	C9	D9
Legal Authority	A10	B10	C10	D10
Individual Rights	A11	B11	C11	D11
Officer Safety	A12	B12	C12	D12
Communication Skills	A13	B13	C13	D13
Ethics	A14	B14	C14	D14
Lifestyle Stressors/Self Awareness/Self Regulation	A15	B15	C15	D15
Learning Activities	Introduction of Learning Matrix  Journaling  Introduction of Neighborhood Portfolio Exercise  Problem-Based Learning Exercise  Weekly Coaching and Training Reports	Continuation of Neighborhood Portfolio Exercise  Problem-Based Learning Exercise  Use of Learning Matrix  Journaling  Weekly Coaching and Training Reports	Continuation of Neighborhood Portfolio Exercise  Problem-Based Learning Exercise  Use of Learning Matrix  Journaling  Weekly Coaching and Training Reports	Final Neighborhood Portfolio Presentation Problem-Based Learning Exercise  Use of Learning Matrix  Journaling  Weekly Coaching and Training Reports
Evaluation Activities	PBLE	PBLE	PBLE	PBLE

*Source:* The Reno Model PTO training manual learning matrix.

*The Learning Matrix*

The Substantive Topics, Core Competencies, and activities are used as guidelines for learners and trainers during the training process. The reason the matrix is vital to the training process is that it can be utilized to determine what the police trainee has learned, what they need to learn, and can clarify the process that is used to evaluate the trainee. The Reno Model Training Manual provides a good example of how the training matrix is used: cell B1 deals with vehicle operations during emergency incident response. If the department has two different procedures for vehicle operations, for example, pursuit procedures and setting up roadblocks in chases, these would be labeled B1. Cell B1 would contain two sets of procedures and desired outcomes. At the conclusion of the labeling process each department should have included all relevant policies and procedures in the matrix. This matrix building exercise occurs during the training program for PTO's.

Each of the cells of the learning matrix contains a number of required skills, police procedures, responsibilities, and performance outcomes. It is incumbent on each department that uses the manual to review each of the given cells in order to add its own policies, laws, procedures, etc. During the training cycle the trainees and PTO maintain a journal of their activities while handling the various calls for service. The trainee will refer to the cells throughout the training program to ensure that they are learning the appropriate skills and achieving the desired outcomes. During the mid-term and final phase evaluations, the Police Training Evaluators will evaluate the trainee using the learning matrix outcomes to determine if the trainee is progressing as planned.



*Journaling*

The developers of the Reno Model felt that in addition to the new learning matrix and problem solving, a new method of recording the activities of the learning process was needed. In the past, the typical FTO graded the police trainee daily, many times via the use of a simple check-off form to record the day's activities. Often the required paperwork for the San Jose Model was lengthy and tedious, and instead of offering a chance for reflection of the day's events, it simply became a record for approval or dismissal of an officer from service. Instead, the Reno Model developed the use of a daily journal for recording the daily activities of the PTO and the police trainee. The book is not used for evaluation purposes, but serves as a record to note instances where learning has or has not occurred during the shift. The Reno Training Manual states that journaling will: strengthen the learning process, identify areas for improvement, provide a written opportunity to debrief calls for service, facilitate creative thinking and self evaluation, and offer the opportunity to revisit problem based learning processes and their application to police activities.

*Coaching and Evaluation Process*

The trainee's first assignment under the Reno Model calls for the development of a neighborhood portfolio. This portfolio process continues throughout the training period, and allows for the trainee to develop a detailed geographical, social, and cultural understanding of the area they are required to police. The Reno Manual states that the reason for the portfolio exercise is to give the trainee a sense of the community where they will work, and that the exercise encourages the trainee to develop community contacts that will be critical when practicing the COPPS philosophy. One of the

drawbacks of the typical FTO program is that the police trainee is not encouraged, in many instances, to make those important contacts in the community. The police officer often develops a “we versus them” attitude, not only due to the current field training programs in existence today, but also from other experienced officers who have also received training under the old philosophical regimen. The neighborhood portfolio should discourage this practice by insisting on the development of closer ties to the community by the individual police trainee. While admittedly this is not the only change that needs to take place within a department to assist in improving officer and civilian relations, it is a move in the right direction. An officer is less likely to believe all the negatives that they hear from another police officer regarding issues in the community if they have had pleasant experiences and contacts with members of the local community in which they are to police.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

While the San Jose Model was considered a revolution in post academy police training (field training specifically) in the early 1970’s, recent changes in the philosophical foundation of the roles of the police in the community (community oriented policing) has caused many agencies to take a second look at their field training programs. Law enforcement, which in the past was controlled by the “calls for service” loop and the short term, quick fix philosophy for problems in the community, was being pressed to offer more long term and permanent solutions to the problems that were recognized as supporting and exacerbating crime and criminally related issues in the community.

Often the existing field training programs were modified by management to meet current demands for departments who wanted to practice the new community oriented

policing style, but without much success. These modifications more often than not failed; they did not account for the changing philosophical styles needed by the newer community oriented policing style, they were regularly overly concerned with the legal issues surrounding training, and they frequently still relied on the overuse of documentation for those who did not appear to “fit in” with the police culture.

Additionally, new and improved methods and theories of learning have emerged since the 1970’s to guide the improvement of training initiatives for law enforcement. These improved learning methods and theories (such as problem based learning and problem solving), combined with the efforts that have been completed in the area of identifying the core competencies of law enforcement officers, has also driven the need for an improved system of field training for law enforcement. Law enforcement found itself in need of a newer model, which would account for these philosophical changes and improved learning methods and theories. What has recently emerged and shows great promise to lead these needed changes into the future of field training for our nation’s police officers is the Reno Model.

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