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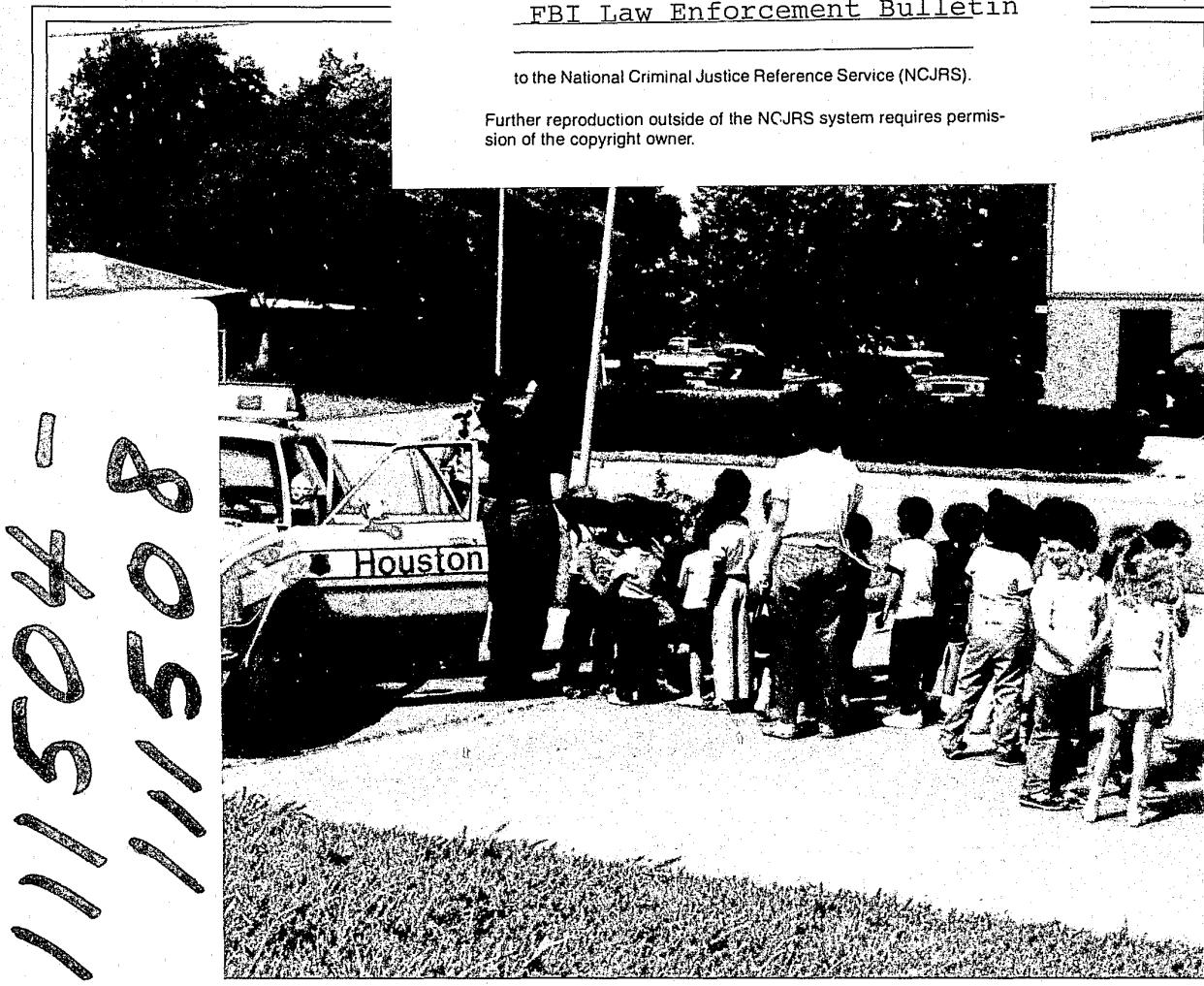
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Taking Aim at Truancy

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Truancy officers work with all age groups in an effort to promote goodwill throughout the entire school system. (See article p. 8.)

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Training

Inservice Training For Law Enforcement Personnel

"If you believe that acquiring and providing inservice training presents problems, consider for a moment the problems a lack of training could produce."

By

PAUL M. SMITH

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Several years ago, a highway patrol officer was assigned to a remote section of the State after successfully completing basic training. His agency had a take-home vehicle policy. After several months, the patrol vehicle's engine failed. The engine was totally ruined. The diagnosis: No oil in the crankcase.

The agency initiated disciplinary action against the officer, which resulted in dismissal. He appealed and was reinstated. The appeal board's ruling in favor of the officer was based on a single premise: At no point in time had the officer been instructed to insure that there was oil in the patrol vehicle's crankcase.

Most police managers are painfully aware of the veracity of this story or know of similar incidents. This story underlines one very important point: Inadequate training of personnel can create serious problems for police managers, officers, and the public and must be addressed.

Establishing Training Priorities

The paramount concern in establishing inservice training priorities, of course, is preserving the lives and welfare of law enforcement personnel and

the public. This is, more often than not, intertwined with the second level of training priorities—the effective and efficient use of equipment and resources.

The third, and final, level is training engineered to further the smooth operation of the law enforcement program. The volume of training at the third level often exceeds that of the first and second, simply because of the relative ease with which it can be presented.

Procuring Training

While most of us have had to deal with budgetary constraints and mounting administrative concerns, we have watched our profession grow increasingly more technical, thus requiring an ever-widening scope of training in order to effectively serve the needs of society. A source of state-of-the-art training in virtually every avenue of law enforcement can be found somewhere, but it is often too expensive and causes depletion of available manpower to an unacceptable degree.

In attempting to establish or maintain a budget, many managers are forced into a position of having to cut training funds in order to meet normal operational demands. This situation



Mr. Smith

seemingly creates a dilemma, but it actually serves to shift the focus to more novel approaches to training. Acquiring sound training is limited solely by a manager's imagination and resourcefulness.

Availability of Training

A limited training budget, or even the lack of such funds, does not necessarily present an obstacle. A resourceful manager does not need to look very far for a good source of training.

In a 10-officer department, there is, in all likelihood, at least 1 officer who has a particular area of expertise or a skill which is job applicable and can be taught to other members of the department. This resource should be tapped.

It is conceivable that the person who repairs and maintains radios is also knowledgeable in radio communication procedures. Ask that person to train your officers.

The high school coach might well be versed in strength training or defensive tactics. Invite the coach to provide training to your officers. Or, consider approaching an English teacher at a local school to help officers improve their report writing skills.

Be alert for training being offered in neighboring jurisdictions. A very sound, comprehensive inservice training program can often be established by using local personnel and resources.

Availability of Training Aids

One of the most effective training scenarios I have experienced centered on a successful hostage rescue situation. The props for the scenario consisted of a dimly lit barn, several saw-horses, and a portable tape recorder

with a prerecorded tape. The officers undergoing the training were equipped with a flashlight, service-issued two-way radios, and service-issued weapons. The total cost of the training aids was the price of a blank cassette tape.

Laser guns and computers can certainly be valuable training tools, but less sophisticated training aids can be just as effective. They are readily available and can be employed with a minimum cash outlay.

Selecting a Training Contractor

When training needs mandate that an outside source be contracted, the police manager must become a frugal consumer. A myriad of contract trainers exist—nonprofit organizations, profit organizations, retired and active law enforcement training officers, technicians who are recognized as experts in their fields. The selection is almost endless. The vast majority of these vendors are solid, reputable, and totally dedicated to the improved level of law enforcement.

Most vendors are convinced, understandably and perhaps justifiably, that their concept or technique is the best way to approach their particular area of expertise. Which do you choose?

One question which should be asked is, "Which one can train my trainer?" A desirable fiscal posture to assume in this situation is one which allows you to expend funds only once for the training of an officer who will, in turn, train others. If funds will be needed for followup consultation/evaluation fees, establish this arrangement during the initial stages of the contract negotiations.

The "train the trainer" concept costs the department a minimum in initial cost outlay for the contractor and

"Resources should be expended on training that is, quite simply, job specific."

places the manager in a position of solid control for man-hours allotted to training in a particular field. A stable balance can be achieved between enforcement operations versus training. From a more-refined, cost-effective position, it takes into account the possibility of the trained officer leaving the department. It is much less expensive to send another officer through the same training process than to recycle the entire force through the training.

Frequency of Training

A department's personnel is its most valuable asset. To insure your investment, determine the average annual rate of attrition and convert this number into a percentage of total authorized positions. Double that percentage to arrive at the minimum percentage of the force which should receive some type of training at least semiannually. This has a cumulative effect and will raise the department's level of training exponentially.

The residual dividends will be manifested through the enhanced confidence and morale of the officers. Keep in mind that this formula provides a minimum figure. In the rare event that the department experiences zero attrition, use an artificial percentage of 10-percent attrition.

Type of Training

Resources should be expended on training that is, quite simply, job specific. Once the enforcement needs of the community have been isolated, training targets become more readily identifiable. If the community has not experienced an armed robbery in 10 years but has incorporated a portion of

a major highway where motor vehicle accidents are prevalent, enforcement priorities become obvious and will dictate the type of training which should be provided.

There are common pitfalls which should be avoided when selecting the type of training, namely, "new wave" training and gadgets. Often, a technique or a piece of equipment is found to be ineffective through prolonged use or by research and testing. The secret here is to let someone else pay for the testing. Reputable publications and the "grapevine" serve to keep the astute manager current on which techniques and equipment have been proven effective.

Often, police managers send an officer to a training session simply for the inherent prestige attached to completing the course. Even with the most lavish training budget, resources could be used more effectively elsewhere. If your department does not have a computer and does not anticipate the acquisition of one, it serves little purpose to send an officer to a recognized computer school, other than to enhance his/her marketability. Closely examine the training curriculum prior to making a decision.

When training does become available, considerable thought should be given to the criteria used in officer selection. It is wise to be selective. Some officers are unsuited for certain types of training.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Training

This can be a nebulous area. Your initial assessment of training provided can be determined through critiques of the course by attending officers. These

critiques are valuable and can be used to improve future training. A police manager might even consider monitoring the training personally. The long-term impact of the training, however, often cannot be measured.

However, there are certain steps which can be taken to assist in determining training priorities. During a debriefing of an officer following an incident, for example, include certain questions. "Do you believe that the training you received in this area helped you to respond appropriately"? "Do you believe that training/further training in this area would be of value to you in the future if confronted with a similar situation"?

Keep in mind that any training must somehow be reinforced if it is to have value. The reinforcement may take the form of repeated on-the-job usage. Or, it might be in the form of refresher or followup training. This is especially true in areas involving psychomotor skills. The necessity of repeated training in a particular skill should not necessarily be used as an indicator as to the value of the initial training.

Conclusion

A myriad of problems confront the police manager. However, a sound training program can be used to alleviate some of these problems. A police manager should recognize the need for training and be alert for sources of instruction. Don't become guilty of the "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" syndrome. Plan and budget to train. If you believe that acquiring and providing inservice training presents problems, consider for a moment the problems a lack of training could produce.

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