

# Training for Criminal Justice Personnel: A Case Study\*

BY GAD J. BENSINGER, PH.D.

*Assistant Professor, Criminal Justice Program, Loyola University of Chicago*

“THE SUREST way to increase the efficiency of criminal justice is to improve the quality of its personnel. As compared with alterations in the personnel, modernization of equipment of the institutions of criminal justice and changes in its processes are of slight importance.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement was made over 30 years ago. It is as true today as it was then. The criminal justice system is not highly automated, it depends on people. If the system is to be improved, the people who work in it must be upgraded and professionalized. Yet, throughout the United States the training and development of criminal justice, especially courts and corrections personnel, continues to be neglected.

The purpose of this article is to provide corrections and court practitioners and managers with a case study of a unique and comprehensive training project that was established primarily for non-law enforcement personnel in Cook County, Illinois.

The Cook County Criminal Justice Training and Leadership Development Section, like many other training programs, could not have started without Federal funding. However, unlike many other programs the project described here has steadily and systematically decreased its dependence on outside funding sources and has evolved into the County's major sponsor and coordinator of interagency and agency specific training programs for adult and juvenile probation officers, juvenile detention officers, correctional officers, clerks of the Circuit Court, Sheriff's court deputies, and police and youth services staff.

## *Background*

According to the 1970 census, Cook County had a total population of 5,492,369. In 1970, 65 percent of all recorded index crimes in the State were

\* Portions of this article are adapted from a number of reports submitted to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, especially *Beginning and Belonging*, Final Reports for the period July 1, 1972, to May 31, 1975.

committed in Chicago and suburban Cook County. Eighty-one percent of every criminal justice dollar expended by local government in Illinois was spent in Cook County. Despite this heavy investment very little money was allocated for personnel development. Of the nearly 28,000 people employed within Cook County's criminal justice system over one-quarter, most being non-law enforcement personnel, were denied any training and development programs.<sup>2</sup> The Cook County Criminal Justice Training and Leadership Development Section was created in July 1972 to fill this void.

## *Project Initiation*

Before proceeding to describe the substance of the project, its funding and structure arrangements are explained. For they, more than any other factor, influenced and determined the project's entire process of development.

In 1971 the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) was making special grants available to large urban counties. Cook County qualified for funding in this discretionary category and was awarded a grant. The application was submitted by the Cook County Board with the cooperation of the Chicago City Colleges. Lacking an appropriate mechanism to implement a criminal justice training program, the county subcontracted with the City Colleges for the actual implementation of the grant. The project was consequently established as a semiautonomous unit within one of the system's institutes. While given operational freedom the project became directly accountable to the colleges and generally responsible to the County through the Sheriff's Office. This unique administrative arrangement, though seemingly very cumbersome, permitted the project to operate without unnecessary political interference, interagency rivalries, or in-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in State of Illinois, *A Beginning Blueprint for Crime and Delinquency Prevention and Control in Illinois* (Illinois Law Enforcement Commission, June 1969, p. 77).

<sup>2</sup> The only meaningful non-law enforcement oriented training program that existed at the time was that of the Juvenile Court.

53328

stitutional constraints. This factor proved to be most important for the project's early success.

The project was originally funded by LEAA for 1 year, with no provision made for continued financial support. By the time the project director was selected and hired the first 3 months of the grant had elapsed. Obviously, if the project was to have any chance to be either extended or re-funded, it would have to quickly demonstrate an ability to implement its goals. The primary goal was to meet the immediate training needs of criminal justice personnel in Cook County. Consequently, when the project began the immediate question was how to secure the necessary input, support and participation of the various criminal justice leaders and agencies in Cook County. Even though the grant application had been accompanied by letters of support from the heads of these agencies, the actual commitment at first was more symbolic than real. The trick was to transform paper endorsements into practical action that would determine the ultimate success or failure of the entire project.

To gain the involvement and trust of the County's criminal justice decisionmakers it was decided that the first, and most important, step would be to make personal contact with the chief administrators in the agencies. This contact was needed to ensure the participation of the agencies in training, and also to secure the involvement of the agency heads in the design and development of the training. Additionally, these personal contacts were designed to eliminate some of the natural hostility and skepticism that the practitioner feels toward the academic or educational institution. A second step was indepth interviews with line personnel, conducted by the project staff. These interviews gathered information and data for planning purposes, established additional personal contacts, and exposed the line personnel to the concept of training. Third, staff engaged in participant observation within the agencies, discussing with supervisors and operatives on the job problems and procedures. All of these contacts sought to solidify and legitimize the position of the project through the involvement of the criminal justice personnel in the creation of their training programs.

These initial contacts were accompanied by concomitant decisions on what training to actually

deliver and how to develop the training to be delivered. After much research and analysis, including data and literature review, consultation with criminal justice experts, meetings with the heads of the various agencies concerned, input from an Advisory Board, and a thorough examination of the training needs of the total system, six training priority areas were identified. These areas were: correctional training; adult probation training; court services training (bailiffs); court services training (clerks); leadership development; and special interagency systemwide institutes and seminars.

Concurrently, a determination was made on how to deliver the training. The project's objective was to create a nontraditional college program relevant to the criminal justice agencies of Cook County. Therefore, it was decided to develop each training program according to the training organization model and the basic learning objectives matrix presented in the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training document, *Targets for In-Service Training*.<sup>2</sup> With regard to training organization, the elements adopted were as follows: (1) identification of needs; (2) selection of program design; (3) development of curriculum; (4) selection of materials; (5) selection of faculty; (6) site selection; (7) relationship of program to other training or trainees; (8) evaluation; and (9) reinforcement and rewards.

The adoption of the training model gave rise to a dilemma that had not been foreseen. The staffing provisions that were provided for in the grant application had been based on a college program model that called for 13 full-time personnel: 5 administrative and 8 instructors. The decision to base the training on the criminal justice system's needs, rather than on the expertise of an available college faculty required changes in the body of the grant. To meet this important operational requirement the instructor slots were redesigned as full-time equivalent positions, affording the project two very important benefits: (1) It allowed the hiring of outstanding individuals from a broad spectrum of academia and criminal justice whose presence in the project increased the visibility and professionalism of the training provided; (2) it made the project more cost-effective since monies were expended for actual contact-instructional hours only.

In retrospect, these twin decisions, the adoption of the training model, and the decision to hire a

<sup>2</sup> See David C. Jelinek, "Organizational Arrangements for Training," *Targets for In-Service Training* (Washington, D.C., Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, October 1967).

training faculty on a part-time contractual basis, were the most important administrative accomplishments in the early stages of the project.

### *Program Implementation*

As noted above, the project was originally funded for 1 year. However, two extensions granted by LEAA made it possible to continue operations for 18 months without additional funding. This was achieved mainly because of the economies of project stalling cited above.

During this period of operations the project initiated a wide spectrum of training that included the following components: (1) Training in applied psychology, human behavior, law, community resources, and the criminal justice system for probation officers and corrections officers; (2) 3-day training programs in interpersonal relations, communication skills, and courtroom procedure for sheriff's court services deputies; (3) an orientation program given to the clerks of the Circuit Court; (4) human relations programs for clerks and supervisors of the Circuit Court; (5) organizational development seminars for supervisory personnel in the Sheriff's Office, the Office of the Clerk, and the Department of Adult Probation; (6) Spanish for corrections officers in the Cook County Department of Corrections, and court services deputies in the Sheriff's Court Services Department; (7) human relations training and small group process training for juvenile detention officers; (8) Family Systems Intervention seminars for adult and juvenile probation officers; (9) systemwide institutes on "Communication and Cooperation" for personnel from all the major criminal justice agencies in Cook County. Through these special institutes and seminars the project began to focus on interagency activities—an area of training that was later much emphasized.

It is not within the realm of this article to provide a description of the individual training components listed above. However, the descriptions of the corrections and probation training programs which follow may be of special interest to the reader.

### *Corrections Training*

The Cook County Department of Corrections at the time of the project's initiation employed approximately 800 corrections officers. Prior to the establishment of the project the training at the department was minimal.

As was the case with all training modules, the corrections program was developed in accordance with the elements of the training model cited above.

*Need Assessment.*—A diagnostic evaluation to determine specific training needs at the department was accomplished with the assignment of four interviewers who were temporarily hired for the assessment. Each potential trainee was requested to complete a questionnaire specifically designed for this occasion, and was scheduled for a half-hour interview. A total of 644 officers was interviewed. The data obtained were primarily educational in nature.

The data included information on the trainee's educational and professional background and goals, short and long-range training needs, preferred learning format, length of training, sites, etc. The counselors submitted both objective data and impressions of training needs which proved crucial in the process of program design and curriculum development. At the same time, research was conducted to gain information about similar training programs, both local and national.

*Program and Curriculum Design.*—As a result of the need assessment, it was determined that the program for the line corrections officer would be a comprehensive training package that would touch on all facets of the officer's performance. This determination was made for the following reasons: First, the individual correctional officer in Cook County had had very little formal training of either a pre- or an inservice nature. Therefore, there was need for a total training package. Second, it was the consensus of counselors, staff, administrators, line officers, and the literature that the demands on the correctional officer were complex, changing, and frequently conflicting and therefore any meaningful training would have to equip the officer to deal with all demands on a problem-solving level.

The correctional officer curriculum consisted of seven modules. These were: The Law and the Correctional Officer; The Process of Corrections; Communication Skills for the Corrections Officer; The Role and Function of the Corrections Officer; Understanding Human Behavior; the Criminal Justice System and Corrections; and The Correctional Officer in an Urban Setting.

### *Probation Training*

The Cook County Department of Adult Probation in 1972 employed a little more than 100

officers. There was no formal training mechanism for the department prior to the project's initiation.

*Needs Assessment.*—The process of program development followed the same pattern as that of the Department of Corrections. First, an interview schedule was developed and then the four interviewers were assigned. The rationale for conducting the assessment was to determine the exact needs of the adult probation officer as reflected by the administration and the probation officers themselves. Utilizing the technique employed at the Department of Corrections, 60 probation officers were interviewed. This low number reflects the fact that at that time nearly one-third of the officers were close to retirement and, consequently, were not interviewed.)

The data from the probation interviews revealed an extensive number of potential training topics. Those most in demand were: The Criminal Justice System in Cook County; Community Resources in Cook County; Applied Psychology; Applied Sociology; Communications Skills and Criminal Law.

*Program and Curriculum Design.*—It was decided that the best way of meeting the immediate self-defined needs of the officers would be to offer a two-pronged inservice training program consisting of seminars and workshops. The first series of seminars focused on the criminal justice system in Cook County. The second dealt with the community resources delivery system particularly in Chicago. Concurrently, weekly workshops in Communication Skills and Applied Psychology were offered. The seminars were voluntary and were held in the evenings. The workshops were mandatory and were held on Department time. Each seminar series was offered only one time. The workshops were repeated several times.

The retirement of older officers and the expansion of the probation staff in Cook County created the need for a preservice program for new officers. The preservice training program was developed in conjunction with the administration and staff of the Department. The program was designed for 2 weeks' duration. The first week was devoted to a general examination of personal philosophy and probation work and practices. The second week focused on a specific, in-depth exposure to the department, its mission and operations.

The Corrections and Probation training programs and those other programs not described

here, did much to raise the morale of the criminal justice personnel, giving them a new sense of professionalism and pride in their work. Any manpower training development program, however, must continually be reinforced and built upon. To begin training and then suddenly to discontinue it, may harm the organization more than if the *status quo* were maintained. With this consideration in mind, the project administrators had a responsibility to see to it that the training programs initiated would be continued with or without Federal help.

#### *Project Institutionalization*

The fact that the Criminal Justice Training and Leadership Development Section was initiated with a Federal grant made it necessary from the beginning to consider program survival, and to plan to phase out the project's dependence on outside grants. It had been conjectured at the outset that if the project showed some success LEAA would continue to fund it for at least one additional year.

Therefore, within 6 months of the initiation of the project a new grant application was submitted to LEAA. The application envisioned a manpower development center that would eventually be incorporated as a function of county government. No sooner was this application approved by the local planning review regional commission than did LEAA announce the discontinuation of the discretionary funding category under which the project had been funded. This effectively terminated the prospects for another year's funding from LEAA. The remaining alternatives were to either obtain funding for a second year's operation from the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission or to discontinue the project.

After several months of uncertainty and following numerous meetings that involved the project's administrators, representatives from the County and the staff and administrators of the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission, the State planning agency decided to include the project in its yearly plan so that it could be funded as soon as the monies of the original LEAA award were exhausted.

This action ensured the short-term survival of the project. The project's long-term survival, at that stage, continued to remain as uncertain as ever for the dependence on grants was not reduced. Moreover, the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission made any future support conditional

on the transfer of the project from the City Colleges to county government.

As soon as the new grant was awarded a strategy was developed to cope with the emerging reality imposed on the project. The strategy that evolved included the following basic considerations: First, it had become quite obvious that if and when the project were to be incorporated in the County budget the County's financial commitment would be considerably less than the grant. The conclusion that was drawn was that whatever the project's long-term chances of survival were, its level of training activities would have to be reduced drastically. As a result it was decided that the criminal justice agencies in Cook County would be encouraged to develop their own "inhouse" training capacities. This was to be accomplished through a systemwide program that would focus on developing agency personnel as training directors and trainers. A second consideration anticipated the time when each agency would have obtained its own training competence. It was decided that the project would gradually increase its indirect training support activities so that it would evolve into a training clearinghouse and coordinating mechanism for all the County's criminal justice agencies. Related to this was the decision to deemphasize agency specific training programs in favor of systemwide programs. The objectives and activities of the Cook County Criminal Justice Training Section for the past 2 years have been based on these three considerations.

On June 1, 1975, upon ILEC's second funding, the project was transferred from the City Colleges of Chicago to County government. A significant portion of the project was, at that time, incorporated in the County's budget. Specifically, the project became an integral part of the Cook County Department of Personnel.

At the present time the section continues to be partially funded through the ILEC. A full complement of training programs is still offered on an agency specific basis, though on a reduced scale. On the other hand, systemwide training programs have been expanded, the most important being a "training of trainers" program. Through this program all client agencies have been helped to establish their own training departments. The Cook County Department of Adult Probation is a good case in point. Prior to the program's initiation the department had no training staff. It now has six trainers. Also, as a direct conse-

quence of the "training of trainers" program a countywide network of criminal justice agency trainers has been formed to articulate the system's training needs and to share existing training resources. In addition, the Cook County Criminal Justice Training and Leadership Development Section has become a major resource training center. A library of criminal justice training and management literature has been established and a capacity to produce and to lend a variety of training aids, including audiovisual equipment, is maintained.

Criminal justice non-law enforcement training in Cook County has come a long way, the credit for which must go to the criminal justice agency administrators, supervisors and line personnel who have discovered what training can do for them.

### *Implications*

Although no two situations are alike, there are some important lessons in the experiences related in this article. Some have already been alluded to, others are offered more as suggestions than a postscript for success.

In the area of personnel development the two most important factors for success are: the institution's commitment to the development effort, and the relation of the training offered to the tasks performed and its applicability to the institutional setting. The support of the top administrators is essential. Less obvious, but just as important, is the critical role that supervisors must play in the acceptance and implementation of any viable training program. Consequently, while training should be based primarily on the needs of the training population, the needs of the administration must not be overlooked. Some compromising might be necessary here! However, one fundamental principle should not be compromised: Training must always be conducted on agency time rather than on the trainee's own time. Repeated efforts by this project to experiment with alternate approaches, especially in correctional settings, have failed miserably.

Obviously, any training program is only as good as its trainers, but not less important is the training method that is utilized. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the instructor's teaching methods and techniques. Based on the training experiences in Cook County this writer has come to appreciate, and therefore advocates, the extensive use of role-playing and simulation

techniques. The method of small group discussion is much to be preferred over lecture, especially in corrections and probation training.

Evaluation has been central to the training efforts of this project. The design and content of the program, the instructor's performance and the program's impact on the trainee and the institution ought to be evaluated.

Not to be overlooked is the importance of either an internal or an external reward system. A correlation between training and promotion, salary increments, job assignment, and other relevant factors should be established. The lack of such a reward system in Cook County is one of the major weaknesses of the training effort. The minimum reward should be a letter of recognition from the administration and the awarding of a certificate of completion.

The experiences of the project point to the administrator's crucial role in taking the lead through initiative, persistence, and originality. This writer is convinced that persistence was the

real key to the continued success of the project, especially in the area of funding. If not satisfied, the administrator must not relent. If dealing with a funding agency the person assigned to the grant should be contacted again and again, even if he does not return calls--which seems to be a favorite method of avoiding commitments. If to no avail, such a person should be circumvented. When dealing with a funding agency, the administrator should present a range of ideas, if one particular idea is not accepted an alternate might. It is most important to catch the imagination of at least one decisionmaker in the funding agency. The ardent support of one such individual is more crucial than the lukewarm understanding of a number of officials.

Above all, the experiences of the Cook County Criminal Justice Training and Leadership Development Section point to the conclusion that if one believes that what one does is important, one must not give up.

## Faking It

### Principles of Expediency as Applied to Probation

BY CHARLES L. ERICKSON

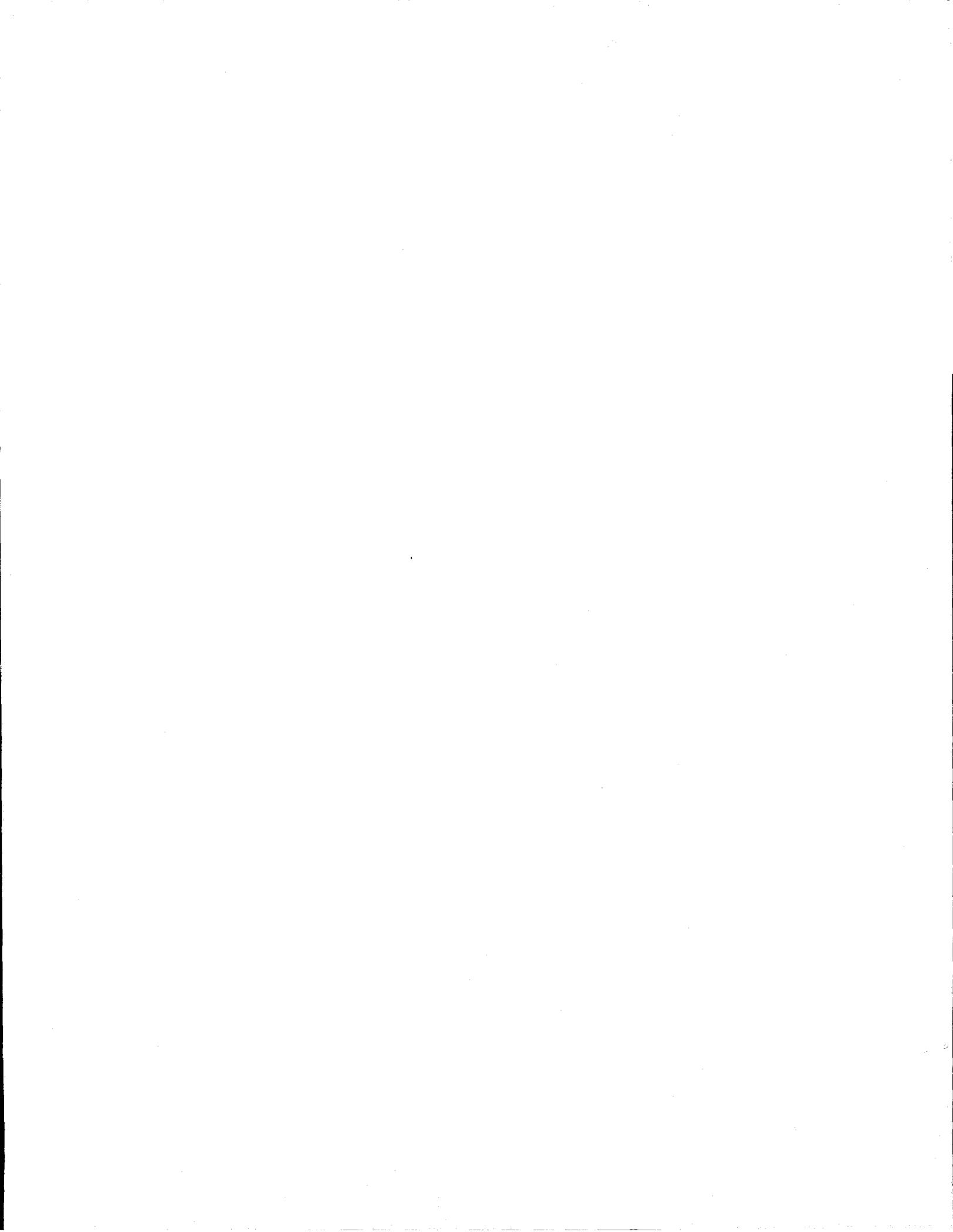
*Chief Probation Officer, Ninth Judicial District, Glenwood Springs, Colorado*

AT THE TIME that I became a probation officer my formal training and experience consisted of a liberal arts degree with a major in American history, several years of teaching science and physical education at the junior high school level, and 24 months dedicated to trying to earn a quick buck as part-owner and full-time laborer in an ill-fated wastepaper business. When the latter enterprise finally drowned in red ink, I took the only logical course, i.e., put my wife to work and enrolled in graduate school. I subsequently obtained more-or-less gainful employment as a juvenile probation and parole officer. Contrary to my original intentions and perhaps as a result of some basic deficiency in my judgment and/or character, that occupation appears to have become rather permanent.

During my tenure in this business, I've heard few colleagues complain about being underworked and overtrained. Society (and to be more specific

the cops and courts), is supplying us with a steadily increasing complement of errer, clients. Caseloads and expectations tend to be quite high. Manpower and other resources are traditionally scarce. Inservice training, if and when available, is often so idealistic and theoretical as to defy application to our day-to-day operations. We therefore tend to fall back on expediency, instinctively developing and utilizing certain self-preservation ploys. It is my contention that we have been seriously rentiss by thus far failing to adequately conceptualize, organize, and communicate the existing body of practical knowledge related to the actual everyday conduct of presentence investigations and probation counseling. We have an obligation to convey to our new or less-experienced colleagues those principles and techniques of expediency which many probation officers (but certainly not you or I!) practice upon occasion.

One fundamental approach was suggested by



**END**