

Special Training on Building Trust¹

Trust can be built during law enforcement training if it is integrated into the training curriculum rather than added on as a special focus class. The building of trust during training is possible because police officers, deputies and other law enforcement officers enter the profession with a great deal of idealism. However, this idealism is often destroyed by struggles on the job which include the enormous pressure of the work itself, the toll such pressures take on an officer's personal life and the exposure to behavior that reflects the worse side of all of us. This exposure creates a cynicism and understandable distrust in many law enforcement officers. As a result, officers can lose their way and become disillusioned with the community in which they work. However, experience and outcome research with a specialized crisis intervention program for law enforcement (CIT) has led to the conclusion that trust can be re-built through training and policy changes².

Recommendations:

- 1. Establish meaningful common tasks with the community that take place prior to training.*
- 2. Make training strategic and not traumatic.*
- 3. Redesign and rename cultural competency and empathy training.*
- 4. Address negative attitudes toward police officers as part of the training.*
- 5. Expand the use of force continuum training so that verbal interventions and de-escalation techniques are more than just one or two items on a short list of options.*

In order to foster trust with the community, it is important to establish meaningful common tasks that take place prior to training. Community involvement can be complex and messy for departments that conduct training on a highly efficient schedule. However, community involvement is important and well worth the additional effort necessary for success.

Law enforcement agencies should be required to work on common tasks with community members.³ These tasks should be related to training and corresponding policy changes. The work on common tasks creates the relationships and experiences that form the basis of trust. Trust is ultimately built on personal relationships and knowledge of another person. This trust has to start on a one-to-one basis. Shared tasks and shared accomplishments are needed to make the trust meaningful and lasting. The strategy of shared tasks works best when conducted as part of a systematic attempt to make the community a partner in addressing citizen concerns. Common tasks can start with the establishment of initial timetables, establishing a training agenda, and the selection of trainers who understand how to relate to officers. Eventually the tasks can become more substantive such as having input into policy changes and working with law enforcement to expand community support for police initiatives. Feedback from successful crisis intervention programs has a common theme. The programs consistently report that success is all about the networking.

Law enforcement builds greater trust when training is made strategic and not traumatic as a learning experience for the officer. Police training has changed over the past 25 years. Officers are better educated and look for more sophisticated and complex training. The change to a more strategic approach to policing is positive because too often training in the past has been focused on showing the officers graphic images of terrible outcomes to police/citizen interactions. In these training films, the officers are often hurt or killed. While law enforcement is a dangerous job, the concern is that focusing on graphic images or stories of harm to the officer is less effective than teaching new skills and strategies. Additionally, these scenarios may impact officer judgment⁴ and such techniques need to be re-assessed⁵. Law enforcement training is becoming more sophisticated with an emphasis on realistic scenario-based training. Trainers

understand the importance of relying on the skills of the officer and the ability of the officer to comprehend the unique circumstances encountered in a citizen event.

Teaching officers cultural competency and empathy training is a well-meaning pursuit that could use redesign and renaming. Cultural competency and empathy training should be integrated into the curriculum so that it would be redundant to have separate courses. These courses rarely give the officers a chance to learn from personal relationships about individuals different from themselves. While some lecture material may be necessary, the change in behavior is more likely to come from the officer learning on their own. In CIT training, officers participate in a free form discussion with Veterans and individuals with mental illness in a non-crisis environment. Afterwards, officers in Memphis reported “they are just like us.” The site visits led correctional and law enforcement officers in Orange County, Florida to help paint and refurbish a drop-in center that was struggling financially⁶. These responses were substantiated more broadly by research that found officers indicated greater interpersonal comfort with those with mental illness when compared with officers who had not received training.⁷

A corollary to changing officer attitudes towards the community is to address the negative image and stereotypes some community members have towards the officers. As discussed earlier, working on common tasks can produce trust with the community. However, more intensive experiences can produce attitude change as well. Many of the Crisis Intervention Team programs require community members who participate in the training to ride with the officers. Both the original receiving facility and the VA Medical Center for the Memphis Model CIT program had psychiatric staff and trainees ride with the officers. Riding with an officer and viewing the challenges faced on the street created enormous respect and changed attitudes towards the police.

Previous research has indicated that citizen use of force complaints run between 6 and 12 complaints per 100 officers.⁸ While a small percentage of the complaints were substantiated (8% of complaints), nonetheless, issues around the use of force continue to challenge law enforcement agencies. Community trust in police departments might be well served if the use of force continuum was expanded during law enforcement training. Currently verbal interventions can be limited to commands such as “stop” and corresponding more complex de-escalation techniques are not always a clear part of use of force continuums.⁹ De-escalation techniques are rated by Crisis Intervention Team officers as one of the best set of courses in their 40 hour training. Work with senior CIT officers suggests that interventions consist of a wide range of different interventions at multiple points in an escalating crisis event. The reliance on extensive training in verbal interventions and corresponding de-escalation techniques may well be responsible for the success of the program.¹⁰

The five recommendations to build trust (common tasks, strategic training, redesigned cultural competency, changing community attitudes, and expansion of use of force continuum training) are based on the assumption that communities and law enforcement agencies can find appropriate support in their attempts to make change. In addressing the population of those living with mental illness, a number of barriers need to be addressed, most notably the lack of emergency mental health services. The lack of services is often the reason cited by municipalities that do not implement a Crisis Intervention Team program. Additionally, innovative programs have had to be developed to assist smaller rural and suburban departments. However, the success of a grassroots program like the Crisis Intervention Team in developing over 2800 sites shows that meaningful trust can be established.

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² Dupont, RT & Cochran, CS (2000) Police Response to Mental Health Emergencies – Barriers to Change. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 28, 338-344

³ Hossain, L & Kuti, K (2010) Disaster response preparedness coordination through social networks. *Disasters*, 23 Mar 2010. Retrieved on-line on May 17, 2010 from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/123328458/abstract>

⁴ Fryfe, JJ (2000) Policing the Emotionally Disturbed. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 28:345-7

⁵ Martinelli, R (2014) Revisiting the “21-Foot Rule.” *Police: The Law Enforcement Magazine*, September 18. Retrieved from <http://www.policemag.com/channel/weapons/articles/2014/09/revisiting-the-21-foot-rule.aspx>

⁶ Saunders, M (2010) Personal Communication.

⁷ Compton, MT, Esterberg, ML, McGee, R, Kotwicki, RJ, & Oliva, JR. (2006) Brief reports: Crisis Intervention Team Training: Changes in knowledge, attitudes, and stigma related to schizophrenia. *Psychiatric Services*, 57, 1199-1202

⁸ Hickman, MJ (2006) Citizens complaints about police use of force. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, 10-7, June

⁹ National Institute of Justice (2009). The Use-Of-Force Continuum. *Law Enforcement Officer Performance and Safety*. August 4. Retrieved from <http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/use-of-force/pages/continuum.aspx>

¹⁰ Dupont, RT (2008) The Crisis Intervention Team Model: An Intersection Point for the Criminal Justice System and the Psychiatric Emergency Service. In A. Fishkind (Ed), *Emergency Psychiatry: Principles and Practice*. Baltimore, MD, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins Publishers

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