

Police Ethics Trainings' State-of-the-Art Now More Effective and Comprehensive

Ann Prevost, J.D., and Neal Trautman, Ph.D.

Ethics is law enforcement and correction's greatest training and leadership need for several crucial reasons. Most law enforcement agencies neglect to conduct annual internal ethics training and some have never presented such instruction although nothing is more devastating to both individual departments and the entire profession than scandals. The devastation has many forms:

- Large-scale civil suits with their substantial settlements or judgments,
- Misconduct is fully publicized and sometimes exaggerated by the media,
- Community relations and respect from the public is damaged,
- Supervisors may lose be hired or demoted. Others are more fortunate, yet may never be promoted again,
- Individual officers and their families face overwhelming public humiliation, and
- Each year, two to three times the number of officers who die in the line of duty commit suicide. Some of them do so as the result to their misconduct, believing they have lost both their career and can not face their loved ones.

Major Difference from a Decade Ago

Police ethics training became popular after the International Association of Chief's of Police established its first Ad Hoc Ethics Training committee in 1995. Now, a decade later, the need is just as great, there are thousands of trainers and consultants presenting a multitude of instruction variations. The major difference between then and now lies in new research and our improved understanding about how to conduct ethics training. This article is an up-to-date summary of the most important elements of police and correction's ethics training.

Academy Ethics Training

There are three major components of academy training. The first is video simulation training similar to that which revolutionized firearms training during the last several decades. Instead of "shoot/don't shoot scenarios, recruits are confronted with ethical dilemmas. Second, every academy instructor should address the ethical perspectives of their particular topics. Lastly, lecture and role-play scenarios should be used to teach officers how to deal with stressful dilemmas and temptations.

FTO Training

FTO programs are critical to preventing misconduct. You seldom find institutionalized scandals without the FTO program being ineffective. FTOs should always play a major role in in-service ethics training, and it costs nothing for them to conduct the training. They can be the instructors of the simulation training, address the ethical perspectives of each training topic and train senior patrol officers in addition to rookies.

Leadership Training

Some agencies make the glaring mistake of presenting ethics training to everyone but the administrators. Few mistakes are more harmful because the top leaders have the best opportunity to make positive change. Most corruption prevention solutions fail to be utilized because decision-makers have little knowledge about them. To make matters worse, the decision-makers often fail to take advantage of opportunities to learn about the solutions. When chiefs and sheriffs choose not to attend ethics training, their absence conveys the message that the training was important enough for them to be present.

Top leaders must address their agency's ethical problems prior to ethics training being conducted. Administrators are viewed as hypocrites when "the troops" are ordered to ethics training while glaring unethical situations within the department remain unaddressed. For example, when everyone knows a married captain is having an affair with another officer or a lieutenant is allowed to regularly demean

officers, it become very difficult for an ethics instructor to tell non-supervisors they must hold themselves accountable for their behavior.

Virtually every significant case of employee misconduct had warning signs that leaders either ignored or failed to recognize as important. Furthermore, leaders themselves rest at the core of the causes and solutions. Misconduct frequently occurs because all levels of leaders do not know what they can do to prevent or stop it. Their lack of training does not excuse them from being responsible. They must still hold themselves accountable for ensuring they learn how to implement and maintain the state-of-the-art in preventing misconduct. Leadership training should consist of the following areas:

Quality Background Investigations

The best predictor of future behavior has been and will always be past performance. The most crucial element of the hiring process and vital requirement for having superior background investigations is a sincere commitment from the upper administration.

Quality FTO Program

Most FTO programs struggle with a variety of serious problems such as poor communication, lack of standardization, a flawed FTO selection process, insufficient compensation and inadequate support from administrators. Implementing the *cutting edge* of field training helps to ensure that field trainers are not angry and frustrated. This increases the likelihood of maintaining a positive organizational culture within the patrol division. FTOs should also be taught how to teach ethics/career survival to new officers.

Fight Political Interference

Political interference has always been a detriment to law enforcement. It typically attacks five aspects of an agency by lowering hiring standards, interfering with promotions, interfering with transfers, failing to provide needed resources and interfering with discipline. The best solution is usually to educate local officials about the consequences of their actions.

Ensuring Consistent, Fair Accountability

The continual lack of accountability is extremely destructive to the culture of an organization. The upper administration is the only correct place to start when you truly want to improve accountability because they are usually offenders themselves. They must set an example by holding themselves accountable for starting to resolve integrity needs.

Officers' Anger and Frustration

The existence of bad morale is a particularly significant contributor to misconduct. Unhappy officers often rationalize their misconduct because they feel they have been mistreated by their department. The National Institute of Ethics recently finished the most extensive study ever conducted on poor morale in law enforcement and corrections. The number one cause was favoritism by administrators.

Employee Intervention Process

Employee intervention programs are priceless when implemented with the objective of assisting officers to survive their career, rather than to be used as a tool for discipline. In addition to the statistical tracking of behaviors, training can help to establish an agency-wide mindset that when officers begin to exhibit misconduct, fellow officers are usually the only ones who have the opportunity to intervene and prevent them from destroying their career.

Make Character Highest Consideration For Promotion

Corporals and sergeants serve as the first line of defense against wrongdoing because they have the option and are in the position to either condone or ignore minor transgressions. By failing to address the minor issues that occur, these leaders promote a culture that is more accepting of major

misconduct. Drug agents, evidence custodians, school resource officers, SWAT team members and those assigned to work in high crime areas usually face additional temptations and dilemmas.

Demand Positive Leadership Role Models

Role modeling is the greatest single source for developing traits such as sincerity, loyalty, honesty, respect and dedication. Actions do speak much louder than words. It is impossible for any agency to have a culture of integrity if line supervisors are unethical, for role modeling can also be used to instill corrupt behavior.

Effective Career Survival Training

The mid 1990s witnessed a revolution in law enforcement ethics training. Before then, the only topics typically covered during ethics instruction were “gratuities” and the code of ethics. In addition, the only place it was taught was to recruits in the academy.

Because it is a much more accurate title, this section is referred to as “Career Survival Training” as opposed to ethics training. Some officers attempt to avoid “ethics training” because they think it will be a dry, boring philosophy-based lecture. The phrase “career survival” prompts some personnel to look forward to attending.

Training Approach

Career survival training should begin with a high-energy introduction that focuses on why integrity is law enforcement’s greatest training need and the fact that this type of training is actually non-tactical survival training. It should include:

- Facts about own organization derived from a needs assessment (information such as the number of officers in the last five years suspended without pay, fired or arrested),
- Customized instruction for those with specific assignments such as drug units, patrol officers, civilian personnel or general assignment investigators,
- Ethics Game Competition: (Ask questions that focus on learning objectives and create a fun atmosphere in the classroom.),
- Continuum of Compromise (Gilmartin and Harris),
- The Corruption Continuum (Trautman),
- Dilemma Simulation Training Video Tapes,
- National Disciplinary Research facts (Trautman),
- National Code of Silence Research facts- Academy Students (Trautman),
- National Code of Silence Corrections Officers Research facts (Trautman),
- Discussion of Anger, Lust, Greed and Peer Pressure,
- Ethical decision-making models,
- Video Case Studies, and possibly
- Live Role-Playing.

Conclusion

Moral heroism lies at a much higher level than even physical heroism, for those facing an ethical dilemmas usually have the time to understand the likely consequences they will endure if they select to “do the right thing.” In the end however, most officers have only one legacy to leave after they are gone... their integrity.

Ann Prevost, J.D., is the CEO of ETHICS NOW, a corporation specializing in the prevention of workplace misconduct. As a board member of the National Institute of Ethics, Ann is nationally recognized for her research, consulting and training in the areas of sexual harassment, wrongful termination and hostile work environment within law enforcement and corrections organizations.

Neal Trautman, Ph.D., is director of the non-profit National Institute of Ethics, America’s largest provider of police and corrections ethics training. As former chair of the IACP Ad Hoc Ethics Training committee and co-chair of the IACP Police Ethics Image Committee, Neal has authored eleven published books, instructed

over 500 seminars and conducted several ground-breaking research studies. He can be reached at nealtrautman@cableone.net.

Picture below ↓

Caption: Several thousand officers throughout Canada and the America have ended their careers behind bars and barbed wire, instead of enjoying their retirement.

