

Role/Expectations of Field Training Programs

The Field Training Program and the collaborative field training regulations are intended to support a competency-based training system. Trainees need to develop competencies relevant to their position as new patrol officers. The program helps trainees achieve specific objectives in order to be successful in their new organizational role and to develop skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes at a personal and professional level, in this program, competency includes behaviors that demonstrate effective (acceptable) or superior performance. These behaviors may not always include specific knowledge (i.e. an exact penal code reference) but do include learned or practical experience or the behavioral application of knowledge that produces a successful result. Competencies are not necessarily specific skills but, rather, the application of skills that produces a successful result.

Departments will determine their own levels of acceptable performance and the **competent standard of a solo patrol officer**. Competencies have several components. Many of these are addressed in the hiring process; however, its usually only in the field training program, when these components actually have to work and come together, that potential success and true competence is revealed. The field training program staff has the responsibility to evaluate that competence and the success of each trainee. The future of the department rest in their hands.

Role of the Field Training Officer

Field Training Officers (FTOs) have significant additional responsibilities over and above their law enforcement duties when assigned to train a new officer. In addition to performing in an exemplary manner, while trainees closely watch, FTOs must slow their pace to review the purpose and detail of every new encounter. FTOs must guide trainees through a comprehensive curriculum that requires the blending of knowledge and skills, and the good judgment of when, where, and how to apply them.

The essentials of the FTO's role are that he/she applies the techniques of coaching by providing a role model to follow and giving encouragement and direction to the trainee to apply what has been taught. The FTO must follow that up by giving feedback on the trainee's performance. It is important that this assessment have a positive impact on the performance of the trainee. The FTO's appraisal of the trainee's abilities should always be followed with positive reinforcement and encouragement to continue good performance or an adjustment of training techniques and methodologies to meet the needs of the trainee in rectifying any performance deficiencies.

The system that effectively identifies and selects qualified personnel to be FTOs will more often produce technically competent and active officers because patrol supervisors and commanders generally focus on these attributes and recommend officers who have them. It follows that the system will select FTOs who not only set very high standards for themselves but for the trainees as well. In discussing the role of the FTO, although high standards are desirable, the trainee must measure up to the ' standards that the department sets for the field training program, not higher standards set by the FTO.

FTOs must be flexible and able to change as the challenges change; otherwise, the trainee, the program, and the department will suffer. A bad FTO can disrupt the entire training process and potentially destroy the department. A great deal of trust and responsibility go with this assignment and good FTOs can make major positive impacts within their department.

Expectations of Field Training Officers

Teacher/Trainer

Any officer who becomes a Field Training Officer must have a passion for teaching. The most obvious function of the FTO is that of a teacher. In most cases, this teaching will occur on calls for service and during self-initiated activity. Other times teaching may occur over a cup of coffee or during casual conversation. Teaching may also occur in a formal classroom environment using lesson plans and audiovisual aids. FTOs are often selected for their subject matter expertise (formal training and education) and their practical experience. FTOs must understand the learning process and teaching methodologies and work hard to develop and maintain their skills. As teachers, FTOs should be willing to accept the responsibility for the progress of the trainee, or lack of it, until they can identify any other uncontrollable factors that are the cause of the trainee's performance.

FTOs should recall how they felt when they began training and, consequently, they may appreciate the trainee's state of mind. The trainee's problems and fears can be dispelled by the FTO through a genuine display of concern about the trainee and his/her success in the program. The trainee should not be pampered but should be treated in a professional, realistic, objective, friendly, and empathetic manner.

FTOs should immediately establish a positive relationship with the trainee. There should be a clear understanding of the FTO role and the trainee role, and it should be

explained to the trainee. The sooner trainees know what the training program expectations are, the less apprehensive and more responsive they will be to the agency's field training program.

It is incumbent upon the program staff and the FTO to work, within acceptable limits, to individualize a training approach for each trainee. Sufficient flexibility has been built into this field training program so that the individual needs of the trainee and the organization can both be met. It is expected that the trainee has the necessary qualities to succeed and, with effective training, he/she will successfully complete the field training program.

FTO training methods should be conducive to producing a successful trainee, ineffective training methods can seriously alter a trainee's self-image. The use of loud, profane speech or humiliation tactics is not acceptable conduct. These methods do not contribute to the learning environment.

FTOs should reinforce positive attributes and accomplishments instead of downgrading weaknesses. Trainees respond more quickly to positive statements than to negative ones. Above all, within the limits of good judgment, FTOs should use realistic and established training methods that are conducive to the trainee's temperament, needs, and development as a patrol officer.

FTOs must conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. They must teach and reinforce department policy and procedures. FTOs who focus on values and teach real life lessons will have a profound impact on the trainee's success. They should remember that trainees will be a product of what they are taught and of the behavior that is demonstrated to them. FTOs should attempt to set the highest standards in all areas of their performance. FTOs with a true desire to teach are often more concerned about their contribution to the success of each trainee and the program than any compensation or recognition they might receive.

Role Model

FTOs must be positive role models! They must lead by example exhibiting integrity, honesty, and ethical behavior. Maintaining a professional demeanor and appearance; adhering to department rules and regulations; supporting the department's vision, mission, and values; adhering to program guidelines in terms of policies and confidentiality; and having a positive attitude toward the department, the training program, the job, and the trainee accomplish the best aspects of role modeling. FTOs dedicated to the goals and success of the field training program will be respectful of, and respected by, trainees, peers / co-workers, and supervisors.

During the orientation process, and each time a trainee is introduced to a new FTO, the FTO should establish a friendly, open, and professional rapport with the trainee. Learning is enhanced through effective communication. Rapport is important to communication because trainees are not likely to share their ideas, questions, or feelings unless they feel their FTO is open or empathetic to them.

FTOs should also convey an attitude that trainees can succeed in the training program. Trainees are not likely to develop when they feel or are told that success is not possible. Trainees need to believe that their FTOs want them to succeed and that the FTOs will help them achieve success. There is nothing more disconcerting than facing a “stacked deck.” Everyone needs to know that they have a chance to succeed. FTOs should expect trainees to succeed.

It is particularly important that FTOs maintain a positive and objective attitude when assigned a trainee who has not performed well with another FTO. The subsequent FTO must give the trainee every opportunity to succeed in that:

- 1) the trainee should not be stereotyped or be discriminated against, and
- 2) judgments should be based on independent observations, not on the comments of others.

It is entirely possible that the change of FTOs and the application of a positive attitude by the subsequent FTO may be sufficient to elicit an acceptable performance from the trainee. The emphasis should be placed on developing a competent, proactive solo patrol officer, rather than on finding a way to discharge the trainee.

What FTOs expect from their trainees and how they (the trainees) are treated largely determines the trainees' success in the program. Trainees, more often than not, perform at a level they believe is expected of them. The expectation of an event can actually make it happen in field training. FTOs cannot avoid the cycle of events that stem from low expectations by merely hiding their feelings toward the trainee. It is virtually impossible to do this in that messages are constantly being conveyed through actions, mannerisms, expressions, tone of voice, and omissions. FTOs will often communicate the most when they think they are communicating the least. To say nothing, for example, may be viewed as coldness, anger, or disinterest. What is critical in the communication of expectations is often not what the FTO says but how the FTO behaves.

The goals of the program, the department, the trainee, and the FTO can be simultaneously achieved through open, honest, professional, and positive attitudes.

Evaluator

FTOs are also expected to be evaluators. They must develop and use skills to determine if learning is occurring and whether or not remedial training is necessary. Evaluation skills are of primary importance to the field training program. FTOs must give critical feedback and clear direction to guide the trainee to an acceptable level of competence. If FTOs cannot evaluate, they cannot train. Evaluation is accomplished by the use of Daily Observation Reports, Standardized Evaluation Guidelines, Weekly Training Progress Reports, End of Phase Reports, and through the use of worksheets, remedial training, evaluation sessions, and verbal feedback. The principle element of effective evaluation is objectivity. Use of Standardized Evaluation Guidelines (SEGs) when completing the Daily Observation Reports (DORs) and frequent field training staff meetings are several ways to ensure standardization of evaluations in the training program.

FTOs should not discuss their trainee's progress with other department personnel, other than those who have a need and right to know. Supervisors involved in evaluations should ensure that positive as well as negative aspects of a trainee's performance are discussed and documented. They should also ensure that the comments are based on direct observation and not on speculation.

FTOs are expected to exhibit evaluation skills that assess performance with fair and impartial feedback and that provide objective and honest documentation.

Leader

FTOs should exemplify the department's vision, mission, and values in the program and the community. FTOs should share responsibility with their trainee, delegating through problem-solving, and training him/her to engage in pre-planning. The FTO must develop and utilize multiple resources.

FTOs are expected to take charge. They are often the most proactive officers in the department. They should motivate and support the trainee while holding him/her accountable for his/her own success in the training program. Trainees will want to succeed because of the FTO's leadership.

Role of the Supervisor / Administrator / Coordinator (SAC)

The role of the Field Training Program Supervisor/Administrator/Coordinator (FTP SAC) is to ensure that the standards and objectives of the department's field training program are adhered to. To meet these requirements, the FTP SAC must monitor the training activities of the FTOs and seek periodic feed-back on the newly assigned officer's training progress. In administering the program, the FTP SAC is responsible for ensuring that the department's program is in compliance with minimum standards. FTP SACs must be trained in the various components of the program and should have influence within the department. The FTP SAC is expected to protect and promote the department's field training program through the following:

Expectations of the Field Training Program SAC

Observation

While it is not necessary to routinely respond to calls that are assigned to a training team, a FTP SAC should, in the course of his/her duties, observe the trainee perform. Since the FTP SAC is responsible for providing feedback to both team members, the interaction between the trainee and his/her FTO should also be observed.

Feedback

Direct feedback from a FTP SAC to the trainee can have a significant impact (sometimes officers can recall these incidents throughout their entire careers): therefore, it should be done judiciously. To praise a trainee, or both the trainee and the FTO, openly for an incident of good performance, will serve to positively reinforce the program. Negative comments on the trainee's performance should be made to the FTO privately, while giving support to his/her role in bringing the trainee's performance up to an acceptable level.

Counsel

Just as a FTP SAC would assess and guide officers in their other law enforcement duties, he/she must often counsel the FTO through the training process. A personal style that the FTO has may have an adverse impact on trainees, or other issues such as a personal relationship, favors, or a serious conflict with a trainee must be detected and remedied.

Trainee Assignments

The FTP SAC should have an overview of the training progress of each trainee in the program and the assignment status of each FTO. To effectively manage trainee assignments requires planning and a working knowledge of vacation schedules, special assignments, or training courses that the FTOs could be assigned to during a training cycle/phase. The FTP SAC should also be in a position to cross administrative lines (shifts, platoons, etc.) for the purpose of making FTO/trainee assignments that meet the needs of the trainee. To maintain the integrity of the program, the assignment of trainees to FTOs should remain with the FTP SAC.

Extending/Terminating Trainees in the Program

Based on the recommendation of the FTO and a review of trainee performance and evaluation reports, the FTP SAC should have the authority to extend field training for a trainee who is responding to remedial efforts. Conversely, the FTP SAC, in accordance with the department's policy, should make a recommendation for termination of employment for a trainee who is not responding to remedial training efforts.

Program and FTO Evaluation

The FTP SAC has the responsibility to seek feedback from trainees who are participating in or who have completed the field training program. The feedback should encompass both the program and its FTOs. Meeting with the trainees and/or reviewing evaluation instruments can accomplish this. The FTP SAC must ensure that FTOs understand the FTO evaluation policy. The FTP SAC shall provide (at least annually) a detailed evaluation to each FTO on his/her performance as a Field Training Officer.

FTO Selection/Deselection

Selection, training, and supervision of FTOs are key elements to successful field training programs. FTP SACs are expected to develop, maintain, and oversee the selection process for FTOs in the program. Administrative guidelines should be established and set forth by the department in a policy directive. Minimum qualifications and a department specific selection process should be included in the directive. Details of how candidates are evaluated, selected, approved, and certified may also be included. The process of deselection or decertification for FTOs who are reassigned, who no longer wish to participate in the program, or who have demonstrated unacceptable performance, as a trainer, should also be explained.

Academy Liaison

In order to closely ally field training with the Regular Basic Course (Academy), the FTP SAC should carefully analyze how both are organized, administered, and evaluated. A more detailed orientation may be required for departments that rely on regional training centers for new hires. Insight on special training needs of individual trainees can be gained by contacting academy staff.

Departments are encouraged to develop a system whereby FTOs and FTP SACs can monitor academy training techniques. This would be intended to ensure continuity and relevance between the academy and the department's field training program.

It is suggested that the FTP SAC establish liaisons with people involved in other aspects of the program and profession such as the D.A.'s Office, Parole, Probation, Public Works, Mental Health, etc. It serves as an invaluable resource to have an established liaison within each of these areas and more.