



National Association of Field Training Officers Indiana Chapter

Field Training Officer Certification Course: Job - Specific

by Sergeant Bill Welcher
Evansville (IN) Police Department

When you hear the term "FTO" what comes to mind? It could be several things, some good and some not so good. Almost every one, however, will think of two things: a teacher and an evaluator. Regardless of what model is used, every field training officer (FTO) program should have training and evaluation at its core. The field training officer is expected to teach new officers certain basic skills then evaluate and report on their progress. A supervisor, board of review, or administrative arm of the agency commonly uses the field training officers' reports in retaining or releasing a new officer.

Proper training of new FTOs is critical if we are to produce the quality of officers our departments need. In October 1990, the Evansville (IN) Police Department conducted its first FTO Certification Course. Almost a year later, in August of 1991, the department needed more FTOs to handle an influx of new officers and to fill vacancies created by personnel transfers. With the new class starting, the decision was made to reevaluate the certification process.

In our original course, the emphasis was on producing FTO role models who performed tasks in a prescribed manner. A great deal of time was spent teaching FTO candidates basic police skills, how to use the rating forms, and discussing the standard evaluation procedures.

After the first group of FTOs were in service, several things became apparent. One was that the instructional skills of the FTOs were not as good as we felt they should be. Another problem that surfaced was that FTOs were not uniformly trained in using verbal and written critiques as a means of instruction. Finally, FTOs were not properly using the Field Training Guide and the Standard Evaluation Guidelines when evaluating a recruit's daily performance.

All of these problems became topics for bi-weekly training meetings and over several months the problems were corrected. The FTOs improved their teaching skills, they uniformly used verbal and written critiques as a means of instruction and they started using the Field Training Guide and Standard Evaluation Guidelines for evaluations. The decision was made to change the certification course to deal with these training needs up front in the classroom rather than later in the field.

Training Curriculum:

The curriculum was changed to fit the department's philosophy of performance-oriented training and the topics of instruction were chosen to address specific issues. The topics are listed below followed by a brief explanation of each.

- * The Role of the FTO
- * Principles of Communication
- * Learning
- * Lesson Planning
- * Methods of Instruction
- * Overriding a New Officer
- * Use of the Field Training and Standard Evaluation Guidelines
- * Student Evaluations

Role of the FTO:

The Role of the FTO defines the department's concept of a field training officer as instructor, mentor and role model as well as listing specific goals and objectives of the program. The mandatory conduct policy for field training officers and a list of critical tasks for FTOs are introduced and discussed.

Principles of Communication:

This block of instruction deals with transactional analysis, aids to effective feedback, writing reports in a keep-it-simple style and listening skills. Good communication skills are the foundation for good instructor skills. Recognizing nonverbal signals helps the FTO identify potential problems the new officer has not put into words. Teaching the candidates to write reports in a simple, conversational style helps make the documentation of training more usable. It also improves the student's ability to demonstrate the department's preferred style of report writing.

Principles of Learning:

This topic allows the department to define learning as it applies to field training. It is defined as two concepts: knowledge or skill acquired by study or instruction, and modification of a behavioral tendency by experience. This definition helps encourage students to accept the idea of giving new officers homework as assignments and written quizzes to check their knowledge. It also helps the students understand one of the methods of learning - learning by mistakes. The original FTO group had been quick to bail new officers out of trouble and were not taking advantage of a possible learning experience. It took some work to convince them that allowing the new officers to flounder is okay, as

long as the end result is positive. By teaching them in the beginning, the FTOs are better prepared to use this practice. Instructor characteristics and motivational techniques are also included to help the students present the material.

Lesson Planning:

When the topic of lesson planning was presented, performance objectives were introduced as the centerpiece of the learning process. The students learn that once the performance objective of a task is identified, explanation, demonstration and evaluation fall into place. Lesson planning also resulted in the development of the Training Brief as a tool for the FTO. Practical exercises in writing performance objectives complete this block of instruction.

Methods of Instruction:

This class introduces the three primary methods of teaching: lecture, coach-pupil, and question-and-answer. Strengths and weaknesses of each method are discussed as well as how to use training aids to enhance the teaching process.

Overriding a New Officer:

Teaching the students how to over ride the decision of a new officer is a critical task in this course. Training scenarios are used to give the students practice in using override techniques.

Field Training Guide and Standard Evaluation Guidelines:

Using the Field Training Guide and Evaluation Guidelines correctly is important in maintaining the credibility of documentation. The issue of liability is introduced in this block of instruction along with performance errors. The training guide and guidelines are used to help explain how to correctly document performance.

Student Evaluations:

Everything is tied together in this block of instruction. The students are introduced to techniques of written and verbal evaluation, counseling, and use of the rating forms. Instruction on writing performance standards and preparing written and verbal evaluations is covered. Students prepare lesson plans and give a ten-minute presentation to the class. The presentations are verbally critiqued by the students and written critiques are prepared by the instructors.

This certification course takes five days to complete. At the conclusion, the students are given a written examination over the material covered during the week. The eight major topics of instruction are aimed toward one objective: Producing a field training officer who can serve as an instructor and evaluator as well as a proper role model for trainees.

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