



National Association of Field Training Officers Indiana Chapter

Improper Use of the Training Officer Program by **Jack Molden**

The concept of field training recruit police officers has been around in the form of on the job training, mentoring or coaching for longer than most of us can remember. In its present FTO form, the concept has existed for 20 years, more or less.

Properly administered, a field training officer program is unquestionably one of the most effective management systems yet devised for training and evaluating recruit personnel. Problems occur, however, when the program is asked to do something for which it was not designed.

Let me briefly review the basic goals and objectives of the field training officers program as they were originally conceived and are currently understood and applied by most departments.

Four Basic Goals of Supervised Field Training

- To provide a structured, standard learning experience in preparation for solo patrol;
- To transfer and apply classroom training to the real problems and situations of an officer's daily patrol activities;
- To provide a mentor, guide, advisor and role model in the form of an FTO;
- To provide documented evaluation of recruit performance in order to: validate selection procedures; assist in retention/termination decisions; defend against false EEO and liability claims; determine readiness for solo patrol duty.

It is readily apparent that FTO programs were developed to train, evaluate and integrate recruit police officers into the department, following basic academy training, and before assignment to solo patrol. FTO training, organization, evaluation forms, field training guide and all other systems associated with the FTO program are geared to meet these goals.

While there is nothing sacred in the list of FTO program goals they are not cast in bronze. They are designed to accomplish a specific task and it is distressing to see programs bastardized by administrators who do not understand the harm that can be done by using a FTO program improperly.

Following are examples of improper use of the FTO training and evaluation system:

1. Recruits trained by FTOs prior to their attending a basic law enforcement training academy.
2. Untrained part timers and auxiliary officers processed through the FTO program.
3. New investigators and supervisors brought under the FTO umbrella for initial skills training in their new jobs.
4. Re-training (often of discipline problems) of veteran in service officers, ostensibly to raise their performance level. This is potentially the most serious violation of the FTO program intent.

FTOs are, or should be, highly trained specialists. Their specialties are patrol, and field training of recruit officers who have graduated from the basic training, to prepare them for solo patrol duty in as short a time as possible. They are not the department training officer, nor is the FTO program a cure all for any department ill.

With the exception of #4 above, there are some limited applications for a FTO like training regimen. Detectives and supervisors can be trained by a FTO, but the FM must be a skills specialist, i.e., a veteran detective or supervisor, who is also a trained FTO. There must also be specialized forms and systems developed. Great care should be exercised not to raid the field training staff and attempt to superimpose evaluation materials and criteria on other unlike programs. Each application has a different set of goals and problems and will not easily fit into an existing FTO organization.

A great disservice to an FTO is expecting him to work out of his element; training someone in skills in which he is not an expert, or asking him to retrain experienced patrol officers. Every FTO I have ever asked has recoiled from the idea of field training his peers. It is probably the surest and quickest way to destroy program esprit, the credibility of the FTOs, and the entire FTO program.

There is a legitimate need for the retraining of in service personnel. But it should be done within the normal management structure, not by field training personnel.

In sum, then, the field training and evaluation program, as originally devised, is not designed or structured to perform a myriad of departmental training tasks. It is recruit specific and its use for other purposes might seriously jeopardize its validity.

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