



National Association of Field Training Officers Indiana Chapter

The Role of the Training Officer

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Training officer is a term we in law enforcement are very familiar with. Every police department has them. We all had one as a partner at the beginning of our careers and many of us have been one. What does the term really imply? What is the role of a training officer and what effect does he or she have on the trainee, the Department and the community?

Certainly the training officer is a teacher who takes an academy recruit and turns him into a functioning police officer. An important job and most do it very well. However, there is a much more critical aspect to the role of a training officer and yet few officers would even mention it in any description of their duties and most departments spend little time discussing it.

A training officer's most important job is one of example. He sets the new officer on an initial course, starts habits that can last a lifetime and sets the tone for an entire career. A training officer sets or influences attitudes towards the community, minorities, supervision and discipline. He makes clear the values of law enforcement: that it is an honorable profession, one of service to others and the community as a whole; and that there is an expectation of honesty and integrity

Honesty is a refusal to lie, steal or deceive. The key word is refusal; not just an unwillingness to do so, but a firm refusal. Integrity is a firm adherence to the code of ethics, and active regard for the standards of the profession. Integrity mandates that police officers have an obligation to tell truth, even if they themselves were wrong. It requires that they follow all the rules, even the small inconvenient ones. Integrity also precludes taking home anything but the salary and benefits provided by the organization. Recruit officers must learn at the onset that accepting gratuities and using the position or badge for personal gain are serious breaches of integrity.

A training officer must teach personnel courage; not just physical courage, but the courage to face tough decisions, peer pressure, and remain true to the profession. He must teach work ethic that everyone must give eight hours of honest work for eight hours of pay. He must develop an attitude of, "I must do my best," rather than one of, "It's good enough".

A training officer must put into perspective a trainee's place in the organization, his relationship to other officers and those above him. He must convince the trainee that he

doesn't know everything yet, but he can achieve a long and distinguished career through hard work and determination. He must emphasize that there are two kinds of survival: surviving on the street, and surviving 20 years or more in the system and being able to reflect back on a long career of not only service to society, but of providing for a family and retiring with dignity and honor.

A training officer's job is much more than teaching how to search a suspect or write a report. The role of the training officer is the future of law enforcement. He has the greatest opportunity to imbue in a new officer a life-long personal regard for his department and the profession. He must instill in his trainee a burning desire to not only do things right, but to do the right thing because it is the right thing. The trainee must develop those values intrinsic in all individuals who want to be cops, values that all cops stand for, and with that an impenetrable shield for those values as he makes his way down his career path. It is not enough to call law enforcement a profession, its members must be professional in their daily actions, and it is up to the training officer to set the example. It's his job.

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