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Training Your Future Partners

Training new recruits to deal with the stresses of working in law enforcement is a must and begins day one of the academy. Most law enforcement academies are moderate to high stress paramilitary institutions and are intended to be overwhelming, stressful, and shocking to the system. For many recruits, the first few days at the academy are the most physically and mentally demanding days they have ever experienced. The training officers (TOs) at the academy often serve as a recruit's first mentors into the profession. Their job is to challenge the recruits and push them to the limits, yet encourage them to succeed.

While it is important that recruits learn to cope with and remain functional within a high stress/high workload environment, neither the academy nor field training should be viewed by training staff as a "weeding out" process. While it is true that some recruits will not complete training, the approach of the trainers, or style of mentorship, will make a significant difference. Some recruits quit or fail because they simply are not cut out for the job, while others are made to believe they are failing. This is a failure of the training staff to properly train and mentor the recruit. It is also a disservice to the agency that has invested a lot of time and money into trying to provide its force with quality candidates.

One such contradiction to mentorship I have witnessed is often among older TO's who consider it a contest to "wash out" as many trainees as possible.

Some TO's believe trainees must earn their place and will engage in certain practices that are demeaning and do not foster a learning environment. Such practices include not allowing the trainee to sit at the briefing table, making them eat alone, and not allowing them to speak unless spoken to. The trainee is often overwhelmed by being made to take everyone's reports, then belittled for taking too long to complete those reports. It is often a significant challenge to change the training practices of those TO's whose goal is to keep the trainee stressed out, anxious, and overwhelmed. These TO's often justify their actions by stating, this is how I was trained and I turned out fine.

My station has made great advances to move beyond this mentality and has established a well-rounded training program. The trainee rotates between different teams and different TOs for each phase. This provides the trainees with greater exposure and the opportunity to experience different policing styles. The trainee sits toward the head of the briefing table and is responsible for reading all new bulletins such as Be On the Lookout (BOL) notices and extra patrol requests. The trainee also debriefs their significant calls to the team and often will present at least one session of line-up training during their training phase. While the trainee is still earning their place as a member of the team and is not invited to team gatherings, the trainee is not purposefully made to feel excluded. Typically, the trainee will become a member of one of the teams they have conducted phase training with. There is a greater incentive to provide good effective training and to foster a mentorship with your trainee when that trainee may soon become your beat partner.