



Total Training:

Correct Methodology To Progressively Develop Competency

By Richard Kay

The primary role of tactical instructors is to prepare officers for the reality of violent confrontations. This should take into account physical, legal and emotional safety – ‘total training’ – to give the officer all the requisite skills and knowledge they require to do the job.

The components of total training are as follows:

- Theory involves ‘knowledge acquisition’ or ‘when to do’. It includes operational guidelines and tactics, or circumstances under which they can apply their skills. Officers should clearly understand the parameters within which they operate, as they do not want to be hesitating due to uncertainty during a violent confrontation.
- Practical involves ‘skill acquisition’ or ‘what to do’. It includes the fundamental technical skills, and is generally conducted under safe, controlled conditions so officers have a chance to learn the basic skill sets relative to their operational requirements, in a slow, safe manner.
- Simulation entails ‘reality acquisition’ or ‘how to do’. It includes role plays, tactical scenarios, protective suit drills and NLTA (non-leave training ammunitions) drills. This final aspect of use of force training is critical, as it unites the various skill sets together in an operational context, and allows an officer to self-assess and be assessed as to how they perform under simulated realism. Called stress inoculation, it is a crucial aspect to properly prepare officers for operational reality.

A professional instructors’ sole focus is the survivability of the officers they train. As such, the more information they share the better, and officers should be encouraged to develop what works for them, within operational parameters. There is no right or wrong way to do things, only pros and cons of some things working better than others for different people under different circumstances.

Methodology

To develop autonomous survivability, instructors should understand the sequence of improvement:

- Imitation involves students ‘copying’ the instructor, who becomes the role model for correct and successful application of techniques and strategies. This is why it is so important for the instructor to demonstrate properly, and avoid the urge to ‘show-off’ to students.
- Improvisation involves students ‘adapting’ key skills, either individually or with guidance from the instructor, developing ideas and strategies to suit themselves. It is crucial for officers to ‘own’ the techniques and find what works for them.

- Innovation involves students ‘absorbing’ skills and developing new strategies of their own creation, based on established principles. At this stage, techniques are truly their own, and are the most likely to be expressed under stress.

An instructor who focusses on sharing information and encourages adaptation by officers should recognise this process and use it in training. Correcting students for minor variations in technique, simply because it is not the way the instructor does it, is not placing the interests of the officers first.

To make training accessible for students to understand and use, the aim is to deconstruct technique. To facilitate this, there is a 3-step methodology:

- Concept teaches the basic technique. The instructor explains the reason for the technique (why), the possible circumstances it may be used (when) and demonstrates key aspects of the technique (what). Students then practice the technique for skill acquisition.
- Application involves the use of drills, where students take the basic technique and examine possible practical applications. This process can be set by the instructor, or it can be more of a fluid exploration between students, within safety guidelines.
- Exploration involves applying the ideas in operational scenarios, which are fluid, dynamic and involve stress inoculation. If you want officers to develop ‘survivability’ skills and mindset, take the officer out of their comfort zone using simulations designed to build confidence and adaptability.

Progressive Training

Skill acquisition should be progressive in nature. The progressive format is designed to ensure that participants gain competency. Each segment is structured to set a deliberate pace of instruction.

Progressive training has three elements:

1. Step-by-Step breaks the technique into individual stages of movement, presented in a step-by-step sequence as an introduction to the skill.
2. Slow for Form allows the techniques to be executed as a system of movement but concentrates on form, not power or speed, in delivery.
3. Full Speed and Power incorporates the previous segments and adds the dimensions of speed and power in the execution of techniques.

Students often get excited by learning new concepts and skills, and usually want to progress quickly from stage 1, rush through stage 2 and get to stage 3, where they can display their ‘power’. This is an

ego-based response to learning, and often results in incorrect technique. Without proper progression through the key phases of skill acquisition, students will not learn the technique properly, which means that they will amplify mistakes and the technique is likely to fail under operational stress.

Drills for skill acquisition can be divided into four categories – static, active, dynamic and simulation:

- Static drills are primarily used for acquisition of new skills. They can involve solo or partner work, allow for safe, focussed training and for instructors to observe students during drills.
- Active drills are intermediate between static and dynamic drills, and are primarily used for application of new skills. They may involve working singularly or with partners, but are not simulations. Rather, they allow students to explore ideas, concepts and techniques in a more spontaneous yet safe manner.
- Dynamic drills are ‘moving’ drills, and are primarily used for fluid and unrestricted practice of core skills. They add key factors of movement and fatigue, to assess skills in a safe, simulated drill. They are not scripted scenarios or simulations.
- Simulations are reality-based training exercises, which involve knowledge/skill transference from the ‘clinical’ training environment to operational reality. They are dynamic and fluid and involve all aspects under stress in an operationally real environment and situation.

UOF Learning Process

The process for learning use of force is as follows:

1. Learn – basic knowledge/skill acquisition phase
2. Practice – hone skills to familiarise body to responses (‘train the mid-brain’)
3. Master – unconscious competence (‘autopilot’)
4. Functionalise – place in operational context (‘stress inoculation’)
5. Maintain – regular, appropriate, realistic training.

Most people are content to cover stage 1, and maybe 2. However, without stages 3-5, it is unlikely officers will be properly prepared to survive a violent confrontation. Each stage is progressive and necessary for the next, and only by adequately working the various stages

in a natural, progressive manner will officers absorb, adapt and fully utilise the skills we train them in.

Instructors should incorporate these stages into the training, to make it progressive and appropriate to the officer’s operational environment. Constantly refreshing basic skill acquisition does little to prepare officers for operational reality. In fact, continuous repetitive training in theory and practical only, with no stress inoculation, can actually develop false confidence in officers. Skill acquisition is the start. From there, officers need tactical development drills that develop operational readiness.

Levels Of Mastery

The levels of mastery are as follows:

1. Unconscious Incompetence – The lowest level. People ‘don’t know that they don’t know’. The first step in learning is to create awareness of the training need.
2. Conscious Incompetence – This is where people ‘know that they don’t know’. Students are easier to train when they are at a level of conscious incompetence.
3. Conscious Competence – This is where people ‘know what they know’. They do the right thing, but they have to think about it. Training at this stage is programmed into the forebrain, the part of the brain responsible for logical, rational thought. This is fine for many tasks, but for tactical skills in violent confrontations under stress, it is not good enough.
4. Unconscious Competence – This is the highest level of mastery, where people ‘don’t know what they know’. The aim is to ‘learn it until you forget it’, to perform without thinking, so that you operate on autopilot under stress, responding correctly without hesitation or conscious thought of skills. It involves repetitive training under realistic conditions, to program skills into the midbrain, the part of the brain responsible for survival under stress.

New trainees will most likely begin at level 2. If they are open about their need to learn and realistic about their initial level of competence, then the instructor can usually get them to level 3 reasonably quickly. If instructors are to properly prepare officers for operational reality, they need to get them to level 4 as soon as possible. However, the instructor cannot do this alone. The officer has to make a commitment to their own development and survivability.

Training Scars

A training scar is any behaviour permitted during training that would be dangerous or inappropriate operationally. It is an instructor’s responsibility to eliminate training scars while maintaining training at the highest possible level. Training scars can occur in any training situation and will vary based on the particular training program.

Although instructors need to correct training scars, not all training scars are detrimental to an officer’s survival. An instructor should devote time toward correcting the most dangerous scars, while prioritising to maximise training time. If an officer has never received training then obviously the officer has no training scars, and probably minimal ability to safely survive a violent confrontation. The lack of training is perhaps the single greatest detriment to any officer’s survival.

Just like skill acquisition, consistency and reinforcement are positive and crucial factors in tactical training. Officers who safely survive violent confrontations do so because they perform the way they were trained. For example, firearm training is not about qualification, or shooting a ‘perfect score’, but learning to survive with a firearm.

Do not presume you can eliminate all training scars, but it is important as an instructor to be able to identify them and take corrective action in the training program. Most training scars can be corrected if instructors admit they allow them to happen during training. Instructors must take responsibility to keep officers safe during training and stop presuming they always know the proper way to do things. Additionally, if the instructor caused a training scar, they need to be the remedy that reduces the blemish and promotes officer safety.

Instructors must keep up-to-date with the most recent training ideas and philosophies. What the instructor was taught at ‘instructor school’ 10 years ago may now cause a training scar. Training is an evolutionary process and instructors must evolve with the process. ■

Richard Kay is an internationally certified tactical instructor-trainer and dynamic force-on-force simulation trainer. He is the founder of Modern Combatives, a provider of realistic operational safety training for security and public safety agencies, nationally and internationally. For more information, visit www.moderncombatives.com.au