





Choosing A Training Provider

Internal Versus External

By Richard Kay

Training managers are often put in the difficult position of getting the best training for personnel while working with a limited budget. Training budgets feel the economic pinch and there is often not enough money to send personnel to a lot of training. Many agencies lose personnel that are not replaced, putting a strain on staffing issues that do not allow opportunities for officers to do training. Training managers should seek high-quality training with the best value, meaning it is economically sound, and has practical application to the agency mission. This balance is not always easy. To determine the quality and value of an external training program, evaluate the trainer delivering the program.



The trainer's most important qualifications involve real experience and relevance. The trainer's experience is 2-fold: how much and how recent.

The first step in ensuring training is valuable is to research the agency's training needs. Find out what the training concerns are from officers in the field, and what problems are encountered on a regular or occasional basis. Speak to management and command staff for their perspective on the primary training needs or deficiencies in the agency. Once you have developed a good sense of what is needed, identify and prioritise the issues to address according to agency needs.

Internal Trainer

An obvious choice for agencies seeking training is an internal solution. Many agencies have skilled trainers within their ranks that can teach with competence. Some agencies have a tendency to stay internal for all their training because it is comfortable for the training manager. However, an overreliance on internal trainers may create an artificial 'bubble' around the agency resulting in a lack of exposure to better techniques, safer tactics or more current legal information.

While an internal trainer might be appropriate, there are other pitfalls to their exclusive use. The saying "it is hard to be a true prophet in your own land" means that everyone receiving the message already knows the messenger and all the stories associated with that person. This internal relationship can foster a feeling of familiarity between instructor and student that may interfere when trying to deliver critical curriculum points or assessing operational competence for field deployment.

Check with other training managers to see if they experience similar problems. Find out how they addressed the issue and get recommendations for internal trainers or external training providers.

External Provider

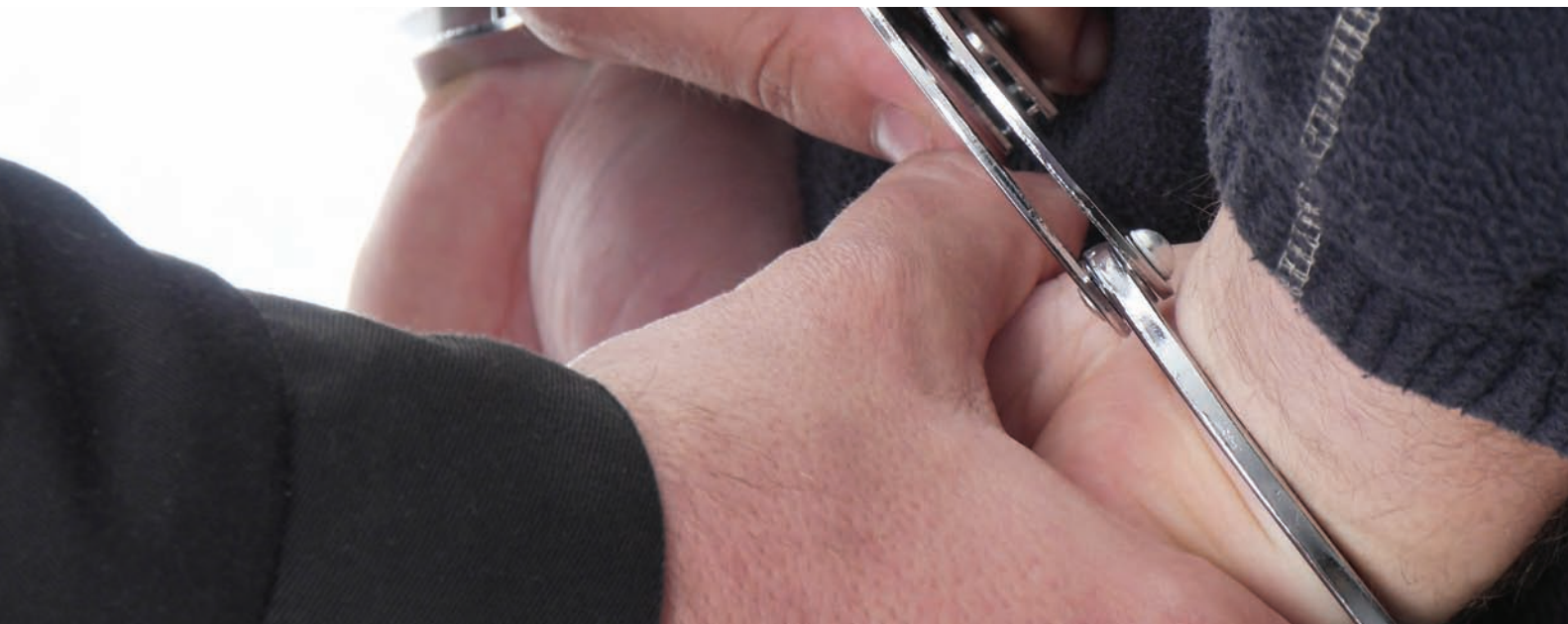
Providing quality training to the agency is one of the training manager's many tasks. Once training needs are identified, the next logical question is how to deliver the material. If an internal solution is not available or viable, an external training provider might be a very plausible answer. Choosing an external provider involves steps to ensure getting one that meets agency needs.

Conduct a thorough background analysis of the training provider and review the education and experience of the trainer(s). On initial contact, request a Curriculum Vitae (CV). Inform the trainer of the interest in using them, and that they will be contacted after a review of their CV. Take time to study the CV before re-contacting the trainer, as this document provides a map of the trainer's career. If they cannot or will not provide a CV, consider that a red flag, as the absence of a CV could mean the trainer does not have the proper credentials or the relevant experience to teach the course.

Once a potential external provider is identified that can provide training that is consistent with agency needs, schedule an interview with the trainer. Tell them exactly what the identified training concerns are, and how the issues were identified. The goal of the interview is to discover how they would address the issues. The interview should include what type of training they can provide, how they will deliver the training and what training they have delivered before, and with what results.

The next step is to audit the trainer's classes. The best way is to attend a course (full- or part-time). If a course is being offered nearby, ask the trainer to allow an agency representative to audit the course.

Once satisfied the trainer is qualified for training, the last thing is to determine the



cost. The temptation is to go with the typical 'low bid' with external providers, but this is generally a mistake. The axiom of 'you get what you pay for' is very true for training. It is recommended to invest more if the trainer is qualified and experienced, especially if the topic area is a high-risk area. In this case they should also have applicable experience in the training area in conjunction with appropriate education.

A training manager should look for several things in a training course before considering whether to send officers to outside training or bring a training provider to the organisation:

- The educational background of the trainer
- The validity and recency of the trainer's experience
- How relevant that experience is to the course topic

The educational background of the trainer in most cases is the least important aspect. There are trainers out there with very impressive titles and initials. A title is more important in some topics than in others, and just because a person has a list of initials after their name does not mean they are qualified to teach every aspect of training. It takes a special person to set their ego aside and admit they do not have the training in a particular area but will assist to source a person that does. When checking trainers with multiple certifications, spend time researching the organisations that issued the titles, including what type of work was needed and what type of testing process was required to receive the certification. Avoid trainers with credentials that were 'bought' without any effort.

The trainer's most important qualifications involve real experience and relevance. The trainer's experience is 2-fold: how much and how recent. Public safety personnel understand the importance of real experience. There are trainers that hide their actual inexperience with foggy phrases designed to draw a false conclusion about the real experience level. This is clearly an ethical issue with these trainers but one that goes unchecked unless questioned. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the training manager or participant to ask the appropriate questions related to the course topic. If the presentation is about defensive tactics, the trainer should have some recent real world experience in applying the craft in operational situations, not just in a training environment.

Relevance addresses how the trainer's experience relates to the topic being presented. If the trainer's experience is relevant, how current is it? Some trainers have experience in a particular area of training but their relevance has diminished because they have not kept up with current trends in the topic. This is particularly important in the area of tactics. Trainers should constantly adapt to the changing suspect population, as suspects adjust their tactics to defeat officers, so trainers must try to stay ahead of this curve. If the provider is teaching tactics that were 'adequate 20 years ago' there is a chance those tactics may compromise safety in a current operational environment.

A trainer can remain current in several ways

other than being deployed in the field. The trainer may have continued their knowledge level by researching the topic through journal articles or by attending courses taught by other practitioners. An example of relevance is in the area of tactical training. There are trainers that have a vast amount of experience in military operations offering courses to security personnel. The question of the relevance in the training of military tactics to civilian public safety personnel is fiercely debated, and there are strong arguments on both sides, but to not question the practical transferability of these tactics would be irresponsible.

Trainers should focus on those areas they are competent in (training and experience) and not promote expertise about something for which they are not qualified. A trainer should teach those topics they are qualified to teach. Training managers and officers seeking training should get to know the trainer before spending money and time on a less than professional training experience. Time and money are valuable; therefore, it is every participant's right and responsibility to know the trainer qualifications and background. If they are not suitable, choose another training provider.

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