



# Instructor Responsibility

## Structure Training To Achieve Positive Results

By Richard Kay

The responsibility of a use of force instructor is to prepare officers for that aspect of their jobs that has the potential to put them in harm's way; that is, to prepare officers to survive violent confrontations.

This survival preparation has several factors, which should be addressed during training:

- **Physical** – skills that enable officers to protect persons and control violent subjects.
- **Legal** – knowledge that enables officers to make correct decisions within lawful parameters.
- **Emotional** – strategies for managing the stressful aftermath of a violent confrontation.

A critical aspect of fulfilling this obligation lies with assessing competence in all aspects required for effective operational duty. This can be expressed as *safety, survivability* and *consequence*.

### Competency Obligations

If officers have good physical skills, but do not understand their operational guidelines or the lawful parameters regarding when and how they may use these skills, they are not operationally competent as they do not possess the complete range of required skills. Likewise, if they have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the legal and procedural aspects, but their physical skills are not up to the required standard, they are also not operationally competent as, again, they are missing an essential part of the required content.

Further, if they have good skills and knowledge, but do not possess the ability to make critical decisions within the context of violent confrontations, or the proper character to make correct decisions (demonstrating a callous nature during training, disregarding safety guidelines and showing no remorse for the consequences of their actions), are instructors not remiss in



their duty to those officers, other officers and the public if they certify them to operational status to lawfully use force?

The basis for operational decisions made by officers is training and experience. If they are not ready, or their demeanour deems them unsuitable, the instructor has an obligation to make the decision to deem them as not yet competent, pending remediation or, in the circumstance of attitude, counselling. A use of force capability is a huge responsibility, and that starts with instructors.

On a relative scale, the variations between officers, instructors and instructor-trainers looks like this:

The majority of officers fall into the 2/10 range. This has nothing to do with their ability to operate

a violent confrontation:

- the *tools* to prevail
- the *skill* to prevail
- the *will* to prevail.

Employers provide officers with the tools for the job (for example, batons, handcuffs, firearms) relative to their respective operational role, and instructors provide training so officers know when to use those tools, how to use those tools, and to be ready to use those tools under realistic conditions.

But what about the actual will to use those tools? Is it a good thing to have the tool and the skill, but not the will to use it? Of course not, because someone who does have the ability to harm may take that tool away from the officer

reason, should probably not be working in an operational role that has the potential to place them in a violent confrontation. To do so would be to put not only that officer in danger, but also other officers, support personnel and innocent bystanders who may be directly or indirectly involved in the confrontation.

Relate this to duty of care as an instructor. It is not a simple issue, but one that should be considered and addressed by all professional use of force instructors.

### 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 the body to responses (train the midbrain).
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. However, without the other four stages, it is unlikely officers will be properly prepared to survive a violent encounter. 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 they are trained in.

Discretionary training is based on the presumption that officers have received previous instruction on legal issues pertaining to use of force. Officers should experience situations that involve discretionary decision making. This is usually done during scenario training, but can also be used during dynamic drills. It is important to demonstrate through training that officers understand their force response choices, and they can justify their decision to use a certain level of force under the conditions presented. The student will make all decisions about the use of force, when it is justified and what is the appropriate level of response to gain or maintain control. Discretionary decisions are as much about when to use force, and to what level, as they are about when not to use force. This is a critical factor in determining lawful validity and justification for the training process.

Instructors should endeavour to incorporate

Instructor Standards		
Level	Role	Attributes
1 2 3	Officers	Average standard = 2/10 = average knowledge/skills. Able to apply competently in the workplace. Commitment to safety, survivability, defensibility.
4 5 6	Instructors	Average standard = 5/10 = good knowledge/skills. Able to communicate, motivate and facilitate learning in officers. Commitment to continuous improvement.
7 8 9	Instructor Trainers	Average standard = 8/10 = excellent knowledge/skills. Able to communicate, motivate and facilitate learning in instructors. Commitment to unceasing professional development.
10	The 'ideal' to strive for. No one is perfect, but never stop trying to be so.	

professionally on duty; it is simply a reflection of the average person's ability with regard to physical training and use of force. Of course, some officers will fall into the 4–6 range, and even some into the 7–9 range. These officers will easily adapt to the demands of training. But the aim is to make the training accessible to the *most* officers, not the least. To be accessible, training should be targeted at the level of the *average* student, who generally receives minimum training and re-training.

It is also a common mistake for instructors to set training expectations at a level that suits them, rather than to what is appropriate for the students. A good instructor should have knowledge and skills beyond the level of the average officer; after all, students are coming to instructors to learn, so instructors need to be able to guide them and answer their questions accurately and appropriately. The training has to be accessible to all officers, not just those who can easily adapt to the learning process.

### Skill versus Will

There are 3 'ingredients' for operational safety in

and use it on him or on innocent bystanders. If, at the moment of truth, an officer cannot or will not use the tool, then all the training and equipment is wasted.

If officers are going to carry tools of their trade, they must have knowledge to know *when* to use them lawfully, the skill to know *how* to use them effectively, and be *willing* to use them if required. The key factor in developing and assessing the capability of students to be actually able to make this decision lies in realistic scenario training involving stress inoculation.

However, even then, no one can truly know how an officer will react in the reality of an actual confrontation. After all, no matter how real training appears, officers still know, in the back of their minds, that it is still training and that their safety and wellbeing are not really threatened. However, instructors should aim to provide the best preparation for officers that they can.

What if an officer demonstrates an unwillingness or inability to use the tools in training? An officer who is uncertain whether they can use force against another person, whether it is empty hand, baton or firearm, and for whatever

these various stages into training, to make it progressive in nature and appropriate to the officer's operational environment. Constantly refreshing basic skill acquisition does little to prepare officers for the reality of violent encounters. In fact, continuous repetitive training in theory and practical only, with no application under stress, can actually build 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 skill mastery are as follows:

**1. Unconscious Incompetence** – This is the lowest level. People do not know they are lacking knowledge and will not admit it. The first step in making them better is to get them to admit that they need experience and practice.

**2. Conscious Incompetence** – This is where people know they lack knowledge but will not admit it. Often males who undertake firearms training are convinced that they are experts with a weapon. The instructor's first task is to

educate them of their ignorance. Often, women are easier to train because they know they need to learn, and they are willing to listen; they are already at a level of conscious incompetence.

**3. Conscious Competence** – This is where people do the right thing, but they have to think about it. The training at this stage is programmed into the forebrain, that part of the brain responsible for logical, rational thought. This is fine for many tasks, but for force response skills in violent confrontations under stress, it is not good enough.

**4. Unconscious Competence** – This is the highest level of mastery. The aim is to 'learn it until you forget it', to perform without thinking, so that officers operate automatically under stress, responding correctly without hesitation or conscious thought of their skills. It involves consistent training under realistic conditions to program skills into the midbrain, the part of the brain responsible for survival and that takes over under stress.

Instructors will most often train officers who are either at levels 2 or 3. New students will most

likely begin at conscious incompetence. If they are open minded 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. Ultimately, if instructors are to properly prepare officers for the reality of violent confrontations, the aim is 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 his own development and survivability.

The only substitute for operational reality is realism in training. Personal safety is personal responsibility, but instructors need to provide total training that is progressive in nature to prepare officers for operational reality in a safe, positive training environment.

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