

## [Exploring New Methods for Instructing](#)

by **Andy Ryan, Butler University Police Department - 9/3/09**

I have just returned home from the annual International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILETTA) Trainers' Conference and Expo, which was held April 20-25, 2009 in Wheeling, Illinois. The conference, attended by over 700 international law enforcement trainers was a show case of who's who in the law enforcement training arena, with presentation by Phillip Messina, Larry Smith, Dave "Buck Savage" Smith, David Spaulding, Brian McKenna, Bob "Coach" Lindsey and the 2009 ILETTA trainer of the year, Jeff Chudwin. There was a wide variety of instructor certification courses offered and subjects discussed and toiled over in the areas of defensive tactics, officer survival, use of force, firearms, EVOC, and a plethora of other police focused topics.

Throughout the conference one could see and hear terms such as "defensive mindset," "officer survival," "liability reduction," and "sharpening the sword," as they relate to the training environment and students. I had to ask myself what are we as trainers, doing to "sharpen our sword?" Sure, we may be exposed to a new training program, defensive tactic or method or how to deliver a skill to our students, but what are we doing as instructors to improve ourselves?

Teaching law enforcement professionals can be extremely challenging. Not only are we dealing with the adult learner, but we are teaching Cops. Cops who learn for a wide range of reasons and who bring a wide range of experiences into the classroom. Cops who ask the questions "what am I going to get out of this training?" And "why is this training important for me?" These very questions are the same questions we as trainers need to be asking ourselves before we walk into the classroom. And that brings me back to the question, "what are we as trainers doing to sharpen our sword?" I want to touch on a few "teaching points" that I am sure we were taught when we first became instructors, but through time we may have forgotten as we journeyed through the instructor life.

**As trainers, are we instructing the same material in the same way as we always have or are we updating our presentations?**

This is a trap we must avoid. If we continue to teach the same material year after year without updating how we present the material, we run the risk of becoming stale with the material, and the presentation. Put yourself in the place of the student. This is especially important when teaching the dreaded annual in-service training. As an instructor, what can you do to make the learning experience an effective one?

### **Do we develop training objectives for our classes?**

Sure we do. We conduct a needs analysis first to determine the areas we need training and then we develop training objectives around the areas we need training. Training objectives are the foundation in which we build our lesson plans. Training objectives (also referred to as performance objectives), are the desired outcome for our classes. It is what we want our student to be able to do or exhibit after the completion of our classes. We train in order to bring about a long term modification of behavior or performance.

However if this is true, the first thing we must do is tell our students what the performance objectives are. If we as trainers follow this model then we develop training objectives. We develop training objectives that are measureable and testable. However, the question is as instructors, do we do this consistently when we develop curriculum? Do we let our students know what we expect them to do after they have attended our class? I believe as instructors, the concept of training objective development is nothing new, but do we as instructors consistently adhere to this practice?

### **Are we using different modalities when we teach?**

This is a subject that is not new to instructors. As a trainer of new instructors I always ask them to tell me about the best training they have been involved with. Quite often, they mention training that involves multiple modalities that reach all types of learners. As instructors we need to ensure that we are building different ways of teaching in order to reach our students. This can be even more important to the “veteran” trainer who has been presenting the same material repeatedly.

### **Are we studying other instructors?**

One of the best components of attending a conference like ILETTA is having the opportunity to watch other instructors teach. As trainers, it is important we are conducting self-assessments of our teaching, and one of the best ways to do that is by observing other instructors. We need to take notice of what works in the classroom and what doesn't. We then need to incorporate those findings into our presentations. It is important to remember we can all learn something in the classroom, be it from another instructor or one of our students.

### **Are we asking for honest feedback on how we perform in the classroom?**

As instructors we all must strive to improve. If something works in the classroom continue to use it. However, we need to be open and honest with ourselves and solicit feedback from our students. Perhaps the PowerPoint presentation was not effective. Maybe, it was rushing over a teaching point leaving the student confused. Maybe it appeared the instructor wasn't adequately prepared for the presentation. All of these

issues can be drawbacks to an effective presentation and the only way to find out is to ask the question.

### **As instructors can we teach outside of the box?**

This goes without saying. As instructors, we must always be looking for new and inventive ways to help our students learn. While this is a challenge for the new instructor who has been assigned one of those “annual in-service” classes, I feel it is even more of a challenge for the veteran instructor. So here is the challenge. As instructors we too must continue to “sharpen” our sword. By attending a conference like ILETTA, as instructors we can do just that.

*Andy Ryan is the assistant chief of the Butler University Police Department and a regular contributor to the The Indiana Law Enforcement Journal.*