

Testimony before the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing
February 14, 2015

Training Officers to Police in the 21st Century

Steve Winegar, Ph.D.
Center for Policing Excellence
Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training

Ms. Robinson, Commissioner Ramsey, Mr. Davis and members of the Task Force, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about an issue that I have committed my adult life to: policing. I began my police career over 40 years ago, and retired from policing in 2003. Since that time I have been involved in the training and education of police officers and police leaders.

My perspective on training issues is from that of a relatively small state, Oregon. We have less than 6000 certified police officers in the entire state, and all officers are required to attend a centralized basic police academy at the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training facility in Salem, Oregon.

The police face a challenge – we have to produce a product or service that has value for our constituentsⁱ. Policing learned what the public values from us when we met with our communities as part of our community policing efforts. In the city where I was chief in the 1990's we heard what the public valued came down to four factors or the best outcomes from the perspective of a member of the community:

- Not be a victim of crime
- Feel safe
- Have trust and confidence in the police
- The police use resources effectively and efficiently

I think these four factors are still relevant today. Our challenge in basic recruit academy training is to produce officers who can deliver on these best outcomes for our communities.

How do we prepare police officers for the 21st century? There are four important considerations for basic police academies:

Recommendation #1: Police academies need to include training that addresses the “how” and “why” aspects of the police profession.

Officers are policing people and communities that may not have the same experiences as the officers. Community culture and the history of policing may influence how a person perceives an action by a police officer.

Basic Academy training has traditionally focused on “what” a police officer needs to be able to do in order for the officer to perform his or her job – the knowledge of the law and how to apply it, police officer authority under the law, and the skills (like defensive tactics and use of force) that may be necessary to perform their job tasks.

Reported crime has decreased dramatically over the past 20 years, but the image or perception of the police has not changedⁱⁱ. To police society in the 21st century we need to train our new officers on more than just “what” a police officer needs to be able to do; training “how” best to do it and “why” it is part of a police officer’s role will be equally important.

The “how” includes efforts to establish the police as legitimate within society, so the people believe the police ought to be able to do their jobs, keep people safe, and maintain order through the proper exercise of police authority. The “how” relates to the process officers use rather than the outcome. Establishing this legitimacy requires the police understand and apply the principles of procedural justice.ⁱⁱⁱ

In order for the police to legitimately exercise their authority, they also need to understand the “why” of policing – that the police exist to assist in providing for a safe community where people are not victims of crime, and where the people and the police feel safe. Police officers need to understand the underlying tension that has influenced the relationship between government, including the police, and the people since before this country declared its independence – the balance between governmental authority and individual rights – because it plays out every day for police officers on the street.

In an effort to address these challenges, in the Oregon Basic Police Academy course we include segments on the history of policing, legitimacy, implicit bias, communication and ethics in an effort to address the “how” and “why” of policing.

Recommendation #2: Police academies cannot diminish the importance of the training new officers with the skills they will need to perform the tasks they will be called upon to perform.

We need to continue to provide training for new officers so they have the skills they need when they face the challenges of policing today. In June of last year in the city of Troutdale, Oregon a student brought a semi-automatic rifle and a handgun along with more than 450 rounds of ammunition for the guns to school. He shot and killed one student, wounded a teacher, and there likely would have been more casualties were it not for the two school resource officers who were at the school and responded in less than 30 seconds from the time the first call of shots fired was dispatched. The officers responded as they had been trained, and Chief Anderson of the Troutdale Police Department believes there would have been many more casualties if the officers had not responded as they did.^{iv}

The challenge for police academies today is to find the appropriate balance between training in skills and training in the “how” to do the job.

Recommendation #3: Police academies need to make use of the knowledge on the most effective training methodology, and incorporate those methods to produce police officers who can function in the 21st century environment.

We cannot rely on lecture and power point slides to train police officers. Police Academies need to incorporate the most effective training methodologies into their training approach; everything must contribute to preparing the new officer to do the job. In Oregon over half of our Basic Police Academy is spent on application based training, everything from hands on learning activities to scenarios in our 100 acre scenario village involving trained role players. We are utilizing more facilitated learning, and are piloting the use of I-Pads for the basic students to conduct research, analyze data, and access resources just as they will be asked to on the job.

Recommendation #4: Training needs to continue beyond the basic police academy. We need to ensure that police officers receive ongoing training to reduce the cynicism that can build and to keep their perishable skills fresh. In addition to the training of police officers in basic academy course we need to train field training officers, police supervisors, managers and administrators, to ensure officers are going to work in 21st century police agencies.

We cannot neglect the need for ongoing training for police officers. Officers need to keep their skills current in all areas. It is easy for a police officer to become cynical and lose motivation when they are dealing with the same problems day after day; one of the antidotes for this is regular training to expose them to new ideas and concepts that challenge their thinking. We need field training officers who understand what will be required to police in the 21st century, and their role in training officers to fill that role.

We need to ensure that supervisors, managers and executives are trained and familiar with the challenges of 21st century policing. In Oregon we have developed a

unique supervisory training that encourages supervisors to think about their jobs in a different way. We focus on the concept of how to produce a product that their constituents value through the use of tactics that have been proven to be effective and that address the four factors that create value from policing. As part of this course students are required to identify a crime or disorder problem within their communities and develop a response. We also offer a leadership development program that is proving successful.^v It is unique in its approach to developing leaders because it focuses on the study of leadership based in the humanities, as many of the challenges to exercising leadership today are not new. The purpose of these courses is to get police leaders to think in new and different ways in approaching the challenges the police will face in the 21st century.

Change is not going to happen overnight, but it will not happen unless there are people and forces pushing for change. Policing culture will take some time to change, but one of the best places to start that change is with the training provided in basic police academies.

ⁱ Moore, Mark H (2013) Recognizing Public Value. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

ⁱⁱ Fischer, Craig, ed. (2014) Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: A New Element of Police Leadership downloaded 06-04-2014 from

http://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Leadership/legitimacy%20and%20procedural%20justice%20-%20a%20new%20element%20of%20police%20leadership.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ See Tyler, Tom R (2004). Enhancing Police Legitimacy. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 593:84-99 and others.

^{iv} Personal conversation with Chief Scott Anderson, Troutdale, Oregon Police Department.

^v See <http://www.ipslei.org>