



SECURITY SERVICES COUNCIL

Newsletter

March, 2013

Key elements of a successful training program

It's said that good teachers are made, not born. But just because you might have 20, 30 or more years of experience in your field, that alone does not make you a teacher or trainer, let alone a good one.

As a NJ State Police-certified Security Officer instructor, I've been asked to make presentations to the NJSP's last 4 annual classes of Security Officer instructors on how to be an effective instructor. I'm also approached by other Security Officer instructors at various professional meetings who ask me questions about how to keep the students interested, engaged, and even awake during their presentations.

So what else does a successful instructor need besides experience?

Enthusiasm – if you don't care about what you're teaching, why should your students? I once sat in on a security officer training class where the instructor simply read the material to the students, in a deadpan monotonous tone, without explaining what it meant or how it would relate to what they were doing. They were perfectly capable of reading the material themselves; what they needed was interaction, interpretation and/or clarification.

In order to keep yourself from getting bored and to keep that enthusiasm high, you might want to create several variations so that *delivery* of the material is not the same for each class; for example, changing the presentation order of the material (from a morning presentation to afternoon) or, if using Power Points, change the background. In some cases, you might want to change the order of the topics within the lesson – it might lead to a smoother presentation, especially if you did not develop the lesson yourself.

Relevance – Make sure what you're teaching is relevant to what the student needs to learn. In one "train the trainer" training session, a presenter spoke in jargon, told "insider" jokes, and did not tell his audience anything about why he was making the presentation. The presenter assumed that everyone had some basic knowledge of his topic, which was certainly not the case for many of the attendees. *Students should come away with an understanding of not just WHAT to do, but WHY they're doing it.*

When speaking to your students, make sure you're speaking at the student's level of understanding. Your students may not have the keen grasp you do of the topic – after all, isn't that *why* you're teaching? Don't use a four-dollar word when a twenty-five cent word will do. Jargon is considered to be inappropriate, especially when used to show off. And if/when you tell war stories to make your point, make sure your students can relate to what you're saying.

It also doesn't hurt to find out why people have come to your training session – are they there because they *want* to be, or *have* to be, or both? You may have to convince your reluctant student of the benefits of the training you're about to provide and how he (or she) can use that training to his advantage.

Know your material – It's perfectly all right to refer to your notes, but to read the *whole* presentation? There's no faster way to lose your audience. Audio/Video can be extremely effective. Microsoft Power Point is an excellent tool; I use Power Point as cue cards during many of my lessons so I don't have to read from my lesson plan. When I do read portions, I make sure to look up at my students as much as possible. Doing this not only maintains that personal touch, but I can also gage their level of understanding and expand on an explanation, if necessary.

Speaking of that personal touch – Eye contact with your students while you're talking to them is invaluable. Using war stories is one way to drive home a lesson, especially when you poke fun at yourself. Using humor is a great way to get a point across.

Videos are a great teaching tool – but they shouldn't be the *only* teaching tool. Intersperse them with lectures – or better yet, intersperse your lectures with videos. Discuss what the videos have shown; ask for questions or observations about what was viewed.

Handout Material – There's no way your students are going to remember everything. They may not be able to absorb anything if they're focused on trying to write down what you're saying. Make it easier for them by handing out training material for them to keep, which they can also use for reference and independent study after the course is finished.

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Key elements of a successful training program (Continued)

Patience – If your student doesn't understand your first explanation, rephrase it. Give examples with your explanations so that the student can relate and then understand.

Respect – Security Officers are not only asked to protect people and/or property, but to do so with a sense of pride. *That sense of pride starts with the instructors.* When security officers come in for initial training or refresher training, give them the respect they deserve.

I've had students who've come to me for refresher training for their security officer certification tell me about nightmare instructors they've had in the past, like the guy who took cell phone calls in the middle of the lesson – without even an apology for the interruption – and conducted other business while his students sat there. Or an instructor who gave off the attitude that security officers are second class citizens because they are in the private sector, or they are "wannabees." Is that how *you* would want to be treated?

If you ask a question and get an off-the-wall answer, don't embarrass or belittle the student - that will shut down that person along with everyone else. Who wants to be embarrassed in public, or be made to feel like a fool?

Quizzes – Conducting a brief Q & A after each topic helps to make sure students understand the material. Give them a chance to ask questions if they didn't ask previously. Sometimes, explaining why an answer was wrong will give the student a better understanding of the material.

Timeliness – Make sure the time span doesn't exhaust you or the students. A twenty four hour class spread out over three 8 hour days, or a forty hour class over five 8 hour days should result in better retention of material, and less fatigue for everyone than two 12 hour lessons or four 10 hour classes. Even if you split the training between two - or more - instructors, you still need to consider student fatigue and retention.

Ask for feedback – former NYC Mayor Ed Koch was well known for his tag line: "How'm I doing?" An evaluation form after your presentation asking some basic questions can tell you just how effective your training was. Questions should include:

- ◆ Usefulness of information presented;
- ◆ Was the presentation level too detailed (or too easy) for you;
- ◆ What was your favorite (or least favorite) part of the seminar;
- ◆ The presenter's responsiveness to questions;
- ◆ Would you recommend this seminar to a friend or colleague; and
- ◆ Any other suggestions or comments to help improve future seminars.

More specific questions can be found on-line, if you Google "evaluation questions for a seminar."

Conclusion - Training represents the front line of quality control in the Security industry. If you've spent time to try to train someone and the student comes away with nothing, or negatives, then you've wasted everyone's time and accomplished nothing.

Allocating time, resources and intellectual capital to your training department can protect your business – and your bottom line. A firm with strong training programs may find it has (a) lower insurance costs, (b) lower unemployment tax costs, (c) lower turnover and (d) better client retention.

With almost every state now establishing the criteria as well as minimum standards by which training programs must be taught, every security service provider has the opportunity to create unique and dynamic training programs. Do you want yours to be one of the standouts, or just one of the ho-hum sessions one must endure?

About the author: Fern Abbott is a NJ State Police SORA-certified instructor, a licensed private detective, a certified polygraph examiner, and has been in the security field for over 30 years. She is currently a site security manager in Northern NJ, is the director & chief instructor at AFI Security Training Institute in Metuchen, NJ, training security officers for SORA certification, and is the author of various articles.

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