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Column



Properly trained investigators not only conduct better interviews, but are more likely to have the information contained in them be accepted as courtroom evidence. (Photo Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates)

and far between. If you were lucky enough to work with one you might be nurtured to learn skills honed over a career, but most of us were not that fortunate. Clearly, mentoring can be an extremely effective tool if the mentor is competent and able to communicate to his charge.

Thirty years ago, it was difficult to bring new ideas, tactics, and equipment without going outside the department since they were more stagnant with little input from outsiders. The rookie was taught what was done and change was slow to come because ideas from outside the organization were slow to come. One of the first major changes to police work was brought by O.W. Wilson. Highly educated and innovative Wilson brought change to every department he worked with. His books *Police Records*, *Police Planning*, and the highly influential work, *Police Administration* brought change to departments across the country. It was years later before another sweeping change of ideas, community policing, rocked the way business was done in police work. This change moved more rapidly since there were training classes, associations, and gatherings where ideas could be exchanged and police departments became less stagnant environments. New ideas were adapted and the college educated officer was the exception, rather than the rule.

As the world changed the institutional police departments saw the need to train in an increasingly complex world. The laws changed, personnel became better educated, and technology required increasingly sophisticated people to operate it. There were also the issues of liability and the associated costs of insurance requiring policies and procedures to control the actions of employees.

As the professionalism of departments increased managers recognized the need to certify the police department's preparedness to deal with a variety of different situations and its operational consistency. An independent organization was required to assess a department's preparedness to deal with the complex world of investigation, training, and employee

Certifying Competence

Examinations and credentials

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It wasn't so long ago that most training occurred as a result of having a mentor nurture the individual skills in a particular task. The mentor used his considerable skills to mold the new officer into an effective crime fighter. The idea of having an academy to train professional law enforcement officers isn't really that old so many remember the "days."

Unfortunately, good mentors were few and far between. If you were lucky enough to work with one you might be nurtured to learn skills honed over a career, but most of us were not that fortunate. Clearly, mentoring can be an extremely effective tool if the mentor is competent and able to communicate to his charge.

relations.

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was born for this very purpose. CALEA's website says:

"CALEA provides credentialing services for law enforcement agencies, public safety communications agencies, and public safety training academies. The CALEA Accreditation Process is a proven modern management model; once implemented, it presents the CEO, on a continuing basis, with a blueprint that promotes the efficient use of resources and improves service delivery — regardless of the size, geographic location, or functional responsibilities of the agency."

There is no question that the policies and procedures put in place during a CALEA accreditation process reduce an organization's problems when litigation occurs as a result of an officer's actions. There is also a considerable savings on insurance policies as providers recognize the lower liability as a result of the department's preparation and planning.

Other areas of the department also benefited from a certification process. There are a number of programs to certify departments evidence technicians, photographers, Breathalyzer operators, polygraph examiners, and other specialized personnel within the department.

One area that has been conspicuously absent until recently is the interviewer/interrogator. It is odd a core competency such as interview and interrogation would be ignored for so long. Interviews and interrogations resolve more investigations than all the forensics combined. The crown jewel in any prosecution is an admission from the suspect confessing his crime, but still many departments limit training in this area.

Change in this area began as a result of several high profile child abuse investigations which floundered as a result of interviews conducted with the young children. In the aftermath of these investigations it was clear specialized training was needed to deal with interviewing children. Many states enacted legislation to require specialized training and protocols before someone could interview minors. Specialized training in how to question and deal with small children helped to develop better information and prevent some of the systemic problems occurring in the most notorious cases.

Change continues in adult interrogation with the advent of DNA. There has been an influx of cases where individuals have made false confessions to crimes they did not commit. The DNA recovered from the victim or crime scene has helped establish and reverse these miscarriages of justice. More recently defense attorneys have moved their challenges from asserting the confession was false; to it was coerced by the interrogator using psychological ploys that overcame the free will of the defendant.

As a result of these defense challenges and false confessions, a number of states have passed laws requiring the videotaping of the interrogations. Now police department managers have to deal with the reality of what is being said in the interrogation room and it being played in an open court of law. Defense attorneys are hiring experts to view the tapes and identify supposedly coercive components of the interrogation which they assert overcame the voluntariness of the defendant.

The next step that has occurred in the growth of professionalism is to certify detectives in the interview and interrogation process. Being able to testify one is a Certified Forensic Interviewer will bolster the police officer's testimony. A Certified Forensic Interviewer (CFI) has to pass an independently administered examination covering fifteen essential core

knowledge sets to become certified. *The Center for Interviewer Standards and Assessment* created the certification examinations based on extensive surveys of practicing interviewer/interrogators and what they thought was the necessary knowledge to become an accomplished interrogator.

Over 1000 surveys were sent to interviewers across the country to determine what those in the field thought were essential knowledge for an interviewer to know. The surveys were analyzed by Applied Measurement Professional, a nationally recognized testing firm, to identify the importance of information and construct questions for the examination. The firm then conducted extensive research to remove bias and analyze answer selection before identifying the final passing score.

The bases for the questions were seminal textbooks covering all aspects of the interview and interrogation process. Using these books, over 40 item writers from both the public and private sectors constructed test questions to explore the knowledge sets identified from the 1000 content surveys. Before a question was used in the examination, it underwent numerous revisions and psychometric tests to insure it was measuring the content correctly. Today there are officers from the federal, state and local departments who have received the CFI designation.

Whether a department chooses to certify its officers in any of a variety of specialties it benefits not only the community, but also the officers who serve it. Certification does not necessarily assure proper interview performance, but it does establish the officer knew and understood the basic material important to that particular skill set. In addition, it provides a credential for testimony and fits with the objective of an accredited department.

Mentoring an interviewer gives inconsistent results, which is why training programs were developed to ensure the same message was conveyed to each and every officer. Certification of the interviewer establishes the officer's grasp of the knowledge and his search to ever increase his professionalism in his chosen field.

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