

LET'S DO IT RIGHT

A Guide for Firearms Instructors

By Todd Rassa

I have the opportunity to travel the country teaching and being taught firearms and officer survival related subjects. During these travels, I meet thousands of cops and military personnel, and have learned some interesting things: no matter the agency size or region of the country, professional problems and hurdles are the same. As an example:

- We will never have enough money to do what we want.
- We will never have enough time.
- Our trainees will not, for the most part, appreciate our efforts and some will think they know more than us and that they should be teaching the class.
- Our supervisors could care less about what we're trying to do and probably have no interest in firearms/survival training. In fact, they are probably only interested in making sure we don't spend any money on overtime, and that nobody gets hurt.
- Our agencies most likely look at firearms/survival training as a necessary evil and always will until someone gets involved in a deadly force encounter that becomes controversial. Then, and only then, will these supervisors become interested, and everything you've ever taught (or failed to teach) will become scrutinized.
- Every agency has a core percentage of poor shooters.
- Our equipment is for crap.
- Our ranges are falling apart.

While all are valid problems and need to be addressed, notice that they are all blame-based ("it's their fault"—or "it's because of these problems that I can't get ___ done"). We've allowed them to become excuses. Sometimes I wonder how many are actually that hard to overcome? Maybe we've taken what are really mere irritations and allowed them to grow and become reasons for our inaction.

If we are going to solve these issues, real or imagined, we must first look within. I see our jobs as police officers as the *second* most important in society. That's right—the *second* most important! Lets make sure we're all on the same page—we are charged with protecting the citizens of the United States of America. We are the paladins of society, we are the protectors, the sheepdogs and the knights in shining armor.

To take it a step further, those reading this who are trainers have even greater responsibility—we have *the* most important job. It is our job, no our duty, to protect the protectors. We do this by giving quality instruction. How do we ensure that we are giving quality instruction? We research our subject, we study it, we have an interest in it and we submerge ourselves in everything that has anything to do with it. We do it by hard work!

I cannot tell you how many people I encounter who are assigned to the range because the department didn't know what else to do with them. I cannot count the number of firearms instructors who will secretly tell you that they work the range because of the predominately daylight/weekends-off hours and/or that they got the job because they were friends with the administration.

Then there is the other extreme, the officer who thinks all of his students are imbeciles and should be treated as such. They degradingly speak to their students—they forget what it is like to be a student and nervous, to be struggling and in need of guidance. They have allowed the fact that they have to argue with their commanders for money or for bullets or range time, to poison them. They have allowed the managers (notice I didn't say leaders) to beat them into submission. (It is really hard to look up to your bosses when they are too busy keeping their ears to the ground.) They have grown so accustomed to the favorable shift and the advantages to working inside that it has made them afraid to argue their points. They are so concerned with being politically correct, they won't do anything in a training program that requires the student to put forth real effort.

This trainer is the one who has forgotten what it was like to be a recruit and have your job on the line if you fail to qualify (recruits are probationary, they can actually be fired if they can't shoot). It is this same instructor who needlessly chides and yells at a struggling recruit because it is easier and takes less patience than actually helping them. This trainer is probably the same one who thinks they know it all. "I was in SWAT," or "I have been doing this for 20 years." Those things may be true, but it doesn't make them a good instructor and it definitely doesn't mean that they know it all. I know a lot of people who have a lot of real-world experience but have no people-skills and certainly can't teach. Some are so boring that they lose the students in the first hour of the class. They could have given the entire class the answer for world peace but none of them would have heard it over the snoring.

I wonder when was the last time this person did anything to refresh their vast knowledge base? When was the last time they were a student in someone else's class? This same instructor is the one who paints all of the student officers with the same brush. They will focus on the 10% who are the troubled shooters (it probably is really that low of a number) and become so frustrated and fixated on these few that they will eventually begin thinking that everyone in the agency is that bad.

These instructors use the hurdles placed in front of them by their small budgets, their supervisors and the public, and their ill-conceived notions about the abilities of their students as excuses for why they shouldn't do things instead of reasons why they should. What this instructor has forgotten is the zeal and excitement that they had when they first became an instructor. What they have lost sight of is the fact that their students, their customers if you will, are cops! They are coworkers and there is a good chance that one day they may be backing them up on a traffic stop.

Good instructors are salesmen. We sell tactics and techniques, but most importantly we sell product confidence. No matter if you are a firearms instructor, an ASP or Taser instructor, or a defensive tactics