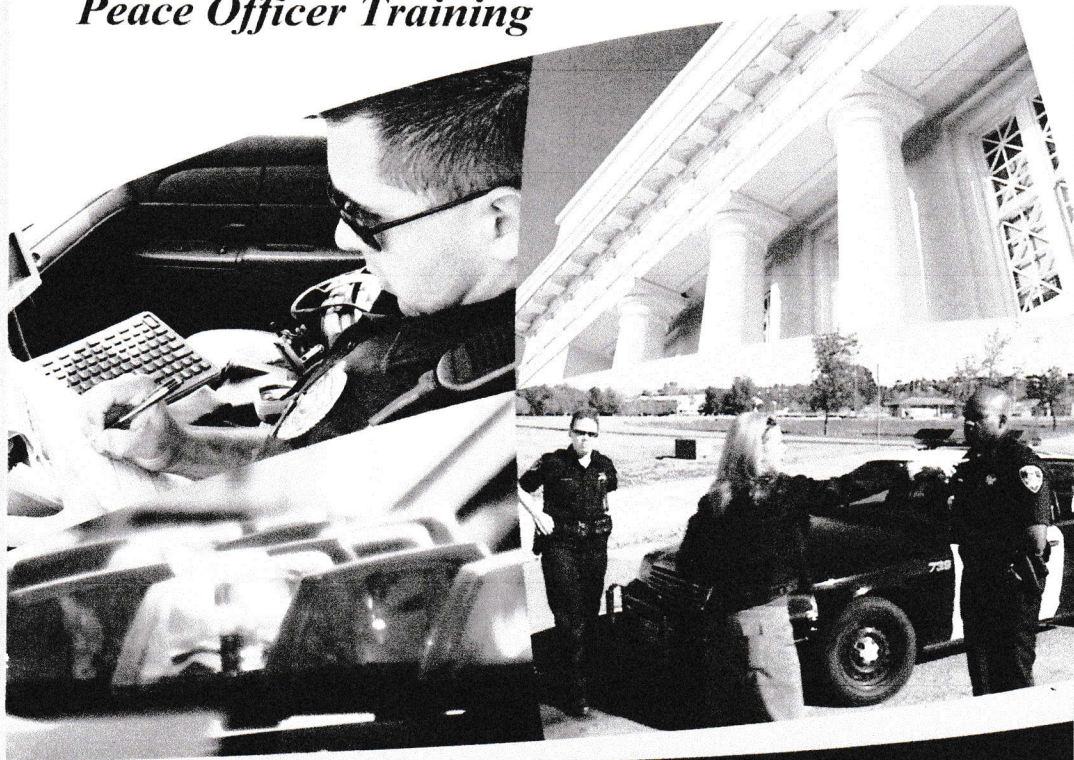


Becoming an Exemplary Peace Officer

*An Introduction to
Peace Officer Training*



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PART FIVE

Aspects of an Exemplary Decision

Every day, peace officers make decisions with great consequences. Poor decisions can jeopardize lives, destroy relationships, and undermine careers. A major objective of your Academy and field training will be to improve your critical thinking, judgment, and decision making.

THE QUALITY OF A DECISION: ACCEPTABLE TO EXEMPLARY

Policing decisions can be ranked as poor, acceptable, good, and exemplary. At the Academy you will be taught the differences to help you avoid poor choices and make good and exemplary decisions.

All decisions must have at least three dimensions:

1. **They must be legal.**
2. **They must be ethical.**
3. **They must be effective.**

The distinction between an acceptable, good, and exemplary decision is found in its level of effectiveness. Acceptable decisions are minimally effective because they accomplish only the primary policing purpose (e.g., making an arrest or disarming an enraged citizen).



Good decisions accomplish the primary policing purpose and avoid unintended and/or undesirable consequences.

Exemplary decisions require a critically thoughtful appraisal of the possibilities of a situation so the tactics employed will accomplish as many mission elements as possible. The objective of an exemplary decision is the Best Possible Result (BPR).

Poor Decision	A poor decision is unacceptable because it is illegal, unethical, and/or ineffective.
Acceptable Decision	An acceptable decision legally, ethically, and effectively accomplishes only the primary policing purpose.
Good Decision	A good decision legally, ethically, and effectively accomplishes the primary policing purpose without causing unintended and/or undesirable consequences.
Exemplary Decision	An exemplary decision employs expert knowledge, excellent skills, and exemplary judgment in performing all tasks.

The Legal Dimension of a Decision

The first requirement of every policing decision is legality. **A decision is legal if it complies with the Constitution, state and local statutes, and agency policies.** You must have a substantial working knowledge of the law and the ability and desire to find out what you don't know. This is an aspect of proficiency.

The Ethical Dimension of a Decision

A decision is ethical if the results and means are consistent with ethical principles and professional responsibilities. Thus, all your decisions must be filtered through your various ethical obligations contained in the Six Pillars of Character, the Five Principles of Public-Service Ethics, and professional ethics codes.

The Effectiveness Dimension of a Decision

An effective decision safely and efficiently accomplishes its purpose. A decision is more effective if it also avoids unintended negative consequences. It is most effective if it accomplishes the BPR.

Safely: Safety is an important consideration in all policing decisions. An effective decision reduces the risk of injury or danger to victims, bystanders, perpetrators, suspects, and officers.

Efficiently: An efficient decision accomplishes its goals using the least amount of time, effort, personnel, and money.

Purposefully: This means the officer has a particular objective in mind related to the policing mission. An effective decision accomplishes the objective without causing unintended or undesirable consequences.

ACHIEVING THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULT

The essence of an exemplary decision is the ability to identify and achieve the best possible result in terms of the four key elements of the policing mission:



1. **Protect and Serve the Public:** The primary policing purpose is to protect and serve the public by enforcing laws, protecting life and property from criminal or negligent human conduct and natural forces, and preserving peace and public order.
2. **Enhance the Quality of Life:** An important secondary policing purpose is to foster an environment where people feel free, safe, secure, and well-protected by preventing or discouraging crime, reducing the fear of crime, and solving community problems.
3. **Generate and Maintain Public Trust:** Policing actions should be carried out in a manner that generates and sustains public trust.
4. **Uphold Individual Liberties and Constitutional Rights:** Policing that violates Constitutional rights is illegal. Actions that disregard human dignity and moral rights to freedom, liberty, and privacy are unethical.

The first two elements of the mission describe the “what” of policing – the ends. The second two describe the “how” – the means.

In policing, the ends and means are inextricably intertwined. A decision that accomplishes either or both of the first two mission elements but creates widespread public distrust and disapproval because it violates either or both of the other two is usually counterproductive.

An exemplary decision-maker is always aware of potential negative public reaction. While this consideration should not dictate policing behavior, it may influence it.

Identifying the BPR

1. Devise and implement a legal, ethical, and effective strategy to deal with the core policing situation (e.g., disarming a man with a gun, making a required report, stopping youngsters from throwing rocks from an overpass).
2. Choose a method to handle the problem that demonstrates respect for human liberty, dignity, and Constitutional rights (e.g., be polite, professional, understanding, and compassionate).
3. Consider if the method would engender public support and trust if it were video-taped and played on the news.
4. Think of how else you could reduce discomfort or the fear of crime and increase a sense of security.

EXAMPLE

You are called to the home of an elderly burglary victim who fears the thief will return. The immediate task is to take a report but there is an important additional opportunity to reduce fear and increase the victim's confidence in and trust for the police. What could you do to achieve the BPR?

EXAMPLE

You observe a fellow officer making an inappropriate sexual advance toward a person being interviewed. This may violate the law as well as agency policy and is inherently disrespectful. What would the BPR be? What could you do to achieve it?

EXAMPLE

Officer O'Riley is flagged down by someone who says a gang war is about to erupt a few blocks away. O'Riley knows there has been racial tension in the neighborhood since a Hispanic boy was killed in a drive-by attributed to a black gang. The witness says youths have gathered and are exchanging insults and threats. Last month, an officer was shot in the same area during a traffic stop. What should O'Riley do? Should he call for back-up and approach the scene with a show of force, knowing a multi-car response might be unnecessary, inflame passions, and make the situation more dangerous? Should he drive by the area, observe how bad it really is, and see if he can disperse the crowd himself? Should he seek guidance from the watch commander? Should he accept the witness' description as complete and accurate? Whatever O'Riley does may trigger a chain of events that could make things better or worse.



