

## Top Five Leadership Principles Every FTO Should Know

By Wayne South



Field Training Officer's (FTO) have a tremendous impact on new officers which starts during their first interaction. This interaction between trainer and trainee sets the stage for the culture of the organization and creates "buy-in" to the organization from the trainee. But how much training as an agency is provided to our FTO's prior to leading a new officer to success? I am not talking about training on hard skills such as driving, firearms, or defensive tactics, what I am talking about is leadership training and those soft skills that make FTO's, and their trainees, successful. Although there are numerous leadership principles, there are five I think all FTO's should know.

### 1. Leadership is not about me

Leadership is about people and the ability to influence behavior to achieve personal and organizational goals. The ability of the FTO to effectively communicate and engage the trainee in the learning process is essential. The inability to communicate with a trainee only leads to frustration, mistakes, and the failure of a new officer. I think what a lot of FTO's fail to realize is that training takes teamwork. The old style of training where the training officer did not talk to the trainee did not work then and it does not work now.

Leadership is all about influencing human behavior to achieve personal and organizational goals. FTO's should constantly work on improving relationships with those they work with, their interpersonal skills, and how they can improve at FTO's.

### 2. Honesty

An FTO is a role model for a new officer. The FTO must always be honest above reproach and have those difficult discussions with their trainees when performance is not acceptable. The same honesty we employ in our personal lives should also reflect in our profession. A leader's communication, oral or written, must always be honest, forthright, and avoid minimizing or exaggerating the topic at hand.

Honesty is courage. The courage to respectfully voice your opinion to a person of a higher rank and be very direct when needed. Honestly is essential in any healthy training program and building trust.

### 3. Listen

Active listeners should listen more than they talk. If you slow down and truly listen to what someone is saying it is amazing what we can learn. Most of us listen with the intent to reply. By

learning to listen, pause and formulate a reply, then speaking, we not only learn the intellectual intent of the message but the emotional side of the message. A good leader should strive to understand both.

#### **4. As a leader we need to be human**

We make mistakes. Rank, whether positional or referent, does not make us perfect. A good leader, and a good FTO, uses these mistakes as learning opportunities. Leaders who are honest about their shortfalls start earning the respect of those they work around.

I was a field training officer for a long time. I sought to learn from each trainee. We all want to be the best training officers and leaders we can be, but sometimes the trainee will know more about a topic than we do. Learn from it....

#### **5. Never stop improving yourself**

A good leader never stops the learning process. Always seek out information which will improve our ability to better influence behavior (i.e., leadership). To improve ourselves professionally we should know the departments mission statement and organizational goals. Personally, and professionally, we can improve ourselves by reading, listen to podcasts, take classes, attend leadership training.

Leadership is a lot of work if you want to do it right. Most of us are not born leaders, however with just a little effort you will start seeing results and being more confident in your role.



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