

A Field Training Officer Program in Wildlife Law Enforcement

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Abstract: The Field Training Officer Program is 1 part of the total wildlife officer selection process. This is accomplished by selecting experienced senior officers and placing them in specialized seminars where they are taught how to assist, direct, and evaluate probationary officers in the field. The primary objective of the Field Training Officer Program is to introduce the recruit to actual work-related experiences and to bring the officer to a level that allows him to work alone in a safe, skillful and professional manner. Secondary results are increased efficiency and supervisory experience for the field training officer, and data feedback that helps update academy entry-level criteria and standards.

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In the formative years, new wildlife officers were issued basic equipment, assigned to an area, and went to work with little or no training. Later, a standard training academy was established for new officers and in 1972, police standards established required structure guidelines for all state law enforcement officers. But new officers still found many pitfalls and obstacles in the field for which they were unprepared.

In the past, some officers received help from fellow officers and progressed to full potential, but there were many who did not.

Recognizing this training void and in order to ensure that all new officers receive the training and guidance that are necessary for success, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Division of Law Enforcement, implemented the Field Training Officer Program.

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Field Training Officer Program

The primary objective of the field training officer (FTO) program is to produce a wildlife officer who can work alone in a safe, skillful and professional manner with a minimum of time. The program is considered an integral part of the total recruit selection process. Completion of the basic recruit academy is an intermediate hurdle the recruit must successfully complete prior to entry into the FTO program. Successful completion of the FTO program and the full probationary period conclude the total selection process.

The program is designed to ensure that each recruit attains a high level of skill, professional behavior, and confidence. The successful recruit, therefore, will be prepared to enact the responsibilities of a law enforcement officer. The first weeks of the program focus on the refinement of basic skills taught in the academy and their application in the actual job situation.

In addition to the primary objectives specified above, 2 important benefits of the program include: 1) field performance data that can be evaluated to update entry level criteria and standards and 2) the overall performance of all field personnel can be improved.

The purpose of any training academy is to produce qualified law enforcement officers. However, it is unrealistic to believe that every recruit has absorbed, retained, and learned to apply every piece of information presented during recruit training. Since the consequences of an officer's actions can be very serious, the Bureau of Training has instituted the field training officer concept with 2 purposes in mind. First, by continual evaluation of a probationary officer's performance under actual field conditions, specific weaknesses or deficiencies can be identified and remedial training programs initiated. Second, by continual evaluation, those individuals who are unable to attain the level of proficiency expected of a wildlife officer may be identified and removed from the system.

After graduation from the academy, newly-appointed probationary officers are assigned to a region for duty. They then begin an 8-week, 4-phase training and evaluation schedule. During phases 1, 2, and 3, the trainee will have a different FTO each phase. During phase 4, he will be placed with the original Phase 1 FTO.

In order that the Field Training Officer Program be successful, FTOs must be carefully selected and trained.

The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission selected 100 of the most experienced officers and conducted in-service training seminars. This

method of selection and training produced consistency and standardized the program statewide.

The duty performance of each officer will vary from task to task and individual to individual, depending upon the probationary officer's ability to perform each separate task. Generally, the following sequence would apply:

1. The FTO performs the function.
2. The FTO performs the function with the probationary officer's assistance.
3. The probationary officer performs the function with the FTO's assistance.
4. The probationary officer performs the function without assistance and continues to do so until the field training program is completed.

At the completion of field training, a probationary officer is expected to be able to perform law enforcement functions in at least a "minimally acceptable" manner.

Phase 1 is a 10-day training and evaluation phase. The first 5 training days is "orientation week," used to familiarize probationary officers with their new surroundings. During this period, functions are performed by the field training officer. The probationary officer may assist the FTO in some cases, concurrent with his abilities. Each function, which has been performed by the FTO, will be discussed with the probationary officer to help him better understand what has happened and the reasoning for the actions taken. Attitude building topics will be discussed and, when possible, checklist items signed off.

The daily evaluation report (Table 1) of a probationary officer's performance will not be completed during the first 2 days of the orientation week.

After the first 2 days, the FTO completes a daily evaluation report with supporting documentation concerning the probationary officer's performance. The FTO develops and institutes remedial training where needed. At the end of each training week, the FTO and the probationary officer meet with the sergeant for a weekly training conference at which time the sergeant completes a weekly evaluation report.

After completion of the first phase, the probationary officer is transferred to phase 2 and assigned to a new FTO. Phase 2 is also a "training and evaluation" period. As in training weeks 1 and 2, the probationary officer is evaluated on a daily basis by the FTO. There is no orientation week in phase 2. Where weaknesses and/or deficiencies are noted, the FTO develops and institutes remedial training to correct the problem. At the end of each training week, the sergeant will conduct a training conference and complete a weekly evaluation report.

Phase 3 is also a "training and evaluation" period with a new FTO. Daily evaluations by the FTO are continued and remedial training is provided where

Table 1. Daily evaluation report form.

GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION DAILY EVALUATION REPORT NO. _____

Trainee Last Name, 1st Init.		IBM		FTO's Last Name, 1st Init.		IBM		Date	Hrs. Wkd.	FTO Week		
Rating scale		Not acceptable by FTO program standards		Acceptable level		Superior by FTO program standards		Reason for no evaluation				
1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7	N.O.	N.R.T.	R.T.			
—	1.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	1. Appearance
												General appearance
												Attitude
—	2.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	2. Attitude toward work
												Knowledge
—	3.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	3. Division policies
—	4.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	4. Florida Statutes/F.A.C.
—	5.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	5. Fish & wildlife I.D.
												Performance
—	6.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	6. Driving skills
—	7.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	7. Field performance:
												Non-stress conditions
—	8.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	8. Field performance:
												Stress conditions
—	9.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	9. Problem solving/decision making
—	10.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	10. Investigation skills
—	11.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	11. Interview/interrogation skill
—	12.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	12. Self-initiated field activity
—	13.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	13. Officer safety: general
—	14.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	14. Officer safety: suspects/prisoners
—	15.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	15. Equipment: operation/maintenance/care of
—	16.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	16. Outdoor observation
—	17.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	17. Reporting forms: accuracy/completeness
—	18.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	18. Report writing skills
—	19.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	19. Radio usage
—	20.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	20. Physical ability and agility
												Relationships
—	21.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	21. With citizens in general
—	22.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	22. With other GFC members
—	23.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	—	—	—	23. With other agencies
Total										—	—	—

NARRATIVE COMMENTS (use additional sheets if needed)

Most acceptable performance: _____

Table 1. Continued

Least acceptable performance: _____

Remedial training planned: _____

Additional Comments: _____

Recruit	Field Training Officer	Reviewed by
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RATING INSTRUCTIONS: Rate observed behavior. Comments on the most and least satisfactory performance of the day. Comment on any behavior you wish, but a specific comment is required on all ratings of "2" or less and "6" or above. Check "N.O." box if not observed. If trainee fails to respond to training, check "N.R.T." and comment. If remedial training is given, use the "R.T." box.

needed. At the end of each training week, the sergeant meets with the probationary officer and the FTO for a training conference, after which he completes the weekly evaluation report.

Phase 4 is a 10-day evaluation phase in which the original phase 1 FTO works as an observer/evaluator. The FTO still maintains supervisory control over the probationary officer and is responsible for his conduct and actions. It is the responsibility of the FTO to ensure that when citizen contacts are finalized, the results are in accordance with laws and policies of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. The FTO should not participate in law enforcement functions during this period when failure to participate is not detrimental to efficiency and/or public relations. It shall be the primary responsibility of the FTO to protect the rights of citizens and enforce the policies of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. When the FTO participates in law enforcement functions to ensure the efficiency of service to the community, the probationary officer may still receive acceptable performance ratings if evaluation guidelines and requirements contained in this manual are complied with.

Daily evaluations, weekly evaluations, weekly training conferences and the end of the phase report will be accomplished during this period.

In order to complete the field training program, the probationary officer must demonstrate during phase 4 the ability to perform "4" level work in all rating areas. Probationary officers who are unable to attain this level will be recommended for termination of employment or an extension of training.

By the end of phase 4, the probationary officer should be consistently performing at least "4" level work in all evaluation areas. If the probationary

officer has not attained "4" level performance, the training period may be extended for a period of 2 weeks provided that:

1. There is a specific, identifiable problem.
2. During the previous 8 weeks of training, the probationary officer has shown progress in this area.
3. There is a specific remedial training plan to correct the problem.
4. It is reasonable to believe that the remedial training plan should correct the problem within the period of 2 weeks.

If, at the end of phase 4, it becomes necessary to extend a probationary officer's training (and the 4 requirements listed above are met), the FTO will complete a "request for extension of training" memorandum and forward it through the field training chain of command to the regional captain for approval. If there is non-concurrence (on approval or disapproval) within the field training chain of command, the non-concurrence will be documented (in writing) and attached to the request. A probationary officer who has been granted an extension will be assigned on the basis of what FTO would best accomplish the goal of the extension. A probationary officer may be assigned to an FTO who has evaluated him during a previous phase if it is believed the FTO is the best qualified to accomplish the training. The FTO to whom the probationary officer is assigned may or may not have previously supervised the probationary officers training.

During an extension of training, daily evaluation reports, weekly evaluation reports, weekly training conferences, and the end of phase report will be accomplished as in the first 4 phases.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Field Training Officer

The field training officer is the essential means by which the goal of the program is achieved; specifically, the production of a wildlife officer able to work a solo assignment in a safe, skillful, productive and professional manner.

The FTO has 2 primary roles to fulfill: 1) that of a wildlife officer assuming full responsibility and 2) that of a trainer of recruit personnel.

His job responsibilities are clearly defined in other departmental publications including general orders and written guidelines of the Division of Law Enforcement.

In his role as a trainer, he provides ongoing instruction in the traditional sense utilizing innovative and practical techniques.

The FTO must have the requisite skills necessary to become a reliable evaluator of a recruit's performance. He is required to write daily evaluations of this performance and submit additional documentation as required.

During the recruit's first 2 days with the phase 1 FTO, the recruit will receive only verbal evaluations and suggestions from the FTO. This "limbo

period" is designed to allow the recruit to become familiar with his new surroundings without the stress of daily written critiques.

On a weekly basis, the FTO gives a verbal and written report on the relative progress of the trainee, presenting this report to his supervisor, the lieutenant and the training coordinator.

During phase 4, the recruit will operate in a quasi-solo capacity. He will operate the patrol vehicle and perform all activities without direct supervision of the FTO. The FTO shall accompany the recruit during this time but will be in the car only as an observer. He shall avoid interfering with the recruit's performance except in emergencies or in situations which have developed beyond the recruit's ability to control.

Finally, the FTO is charged with the responsibility for recommending termination of a recruit when the prospects for retention no longer exist.

In that his performance is also subject to evaluation, the FTO's professional and personal conduct should be exemplary. An FTO should possess and recognize the need for possessing a high sense of idealism. The FTO understands that the effectiveness, image and future of the department are substantially decided by the quality of its personnel.

Daily Evaluation Reports

The daily evaluation report, completed by the FTO at the end of each shift, provides essential information to ensure administrative control over the relative progress of each recruit officer. Observations made by the FTO are entered on the form along a 7-point continuum from "not acceptable by FTO program standards" (1) to "superior by FTO program standards" (7). Mid-point on the scale is "minimum acceptable level" (4). Specific narrative comments are required for all ratings of "2" or less or "6" or more.

Acceptability or non-acceptability "by FTO program standards" is evaluated in terms of satisfactory novice solo officer performance. For rating purposes, a satisfactory novice solo officer is a recruit who can work safely and skillfully by himself after the academy and FTO program training.

The daily evaluation report form includes 23 measurable behavior areas. These standardized evaluation guidelines are on the following pages. It is important for the recruit to note that these are all performance observations and are designed as such to measure the recruit officer's ability to perform in the field doing standard wildlife officer tasks.

The training sergeant's weekly evaluation report is an additional means of administrative control over the relative progress made by the recruit.

Using the weekly evaluation report form, the sergeant is required to compute the rating for each of the 23 behaviors rated by the FTOs the previous week. Additionally, the sergeant is required to specify the "most acceptable" and "least acceptable" areas of performance. The sergeant will comment on whether the recruit's progress to date is either acceptable or unacceptable. The sergeant will note the remedial training carried out, planned or recommended

for the recruit. If the recruit has been formally counseled by the sergeant, it will also be noted on the form.

The recruit will be encouraged by the sergeant to discuss freely his performance and feelings regarding the Commission, FTO program, his FTO, and sergeant. Any personal weakness he perceives that are not being resolved with the present training program will be discussed and, where possible, remedial training planned. This report will be filled out weekly by the sergeant. It will be signed by both the sergeant and the recruit, and forwarded to the regional office for review by the lieutenant. It will then be forwarded by the training coordinator in Tallahassee on a weekly basis.

Prior to the recruits' moving from 1 FTO to the next, all FTOs the recruits are rotating through may meet for a group session when needed. During this session, the FTOs will discuss the training progress of their recruits and provide the recruits' next FTO with a profile on the recruit. These group sessions provide another means for the FTO team to follow the relative progress being made by the recruit officer.

In those areas where remedial training was given by the FTO or special testing used, a brief description of such will be documented on the daily evaluation report for presentation. If the FTO wishes to recommend special training, this will also be documented on the daily evaluation report.

The FTO will also make a judgment as to what level the recruit officer is actually in (performance wise) to compare the chronological week of training. This will assist the FTO team in identifying and providing remedial training as soon as the need surfaces.

It is important to remember that this program is not designed to terminate, but rather salvage the officer. When the FTO program is properly applied, it will eliminate the undesirable employee, but its greatest potential is helping the new officer reach his potential faster and in a more professional manner.

Remember, the officers employed and trained today are the custodians of the future.