



HOW TO EXCEL AS A 9-1-1 COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING OFFICER

BY DIANE BEATTY

Are you really as good as you think you are? As a public safety telecommunicator that is. How good do you have to be? Perhaps you're thinking about becoming a trainer and are wondering if you have what it takes. Maybe you're already a communications training officer (CTO) but want to know if you're doing the job as well as you could be. So what does it take to be an effective CTO?

When thinking about how to become an effective CTO, it's important to ask yourself a few preliminary questions. What made you want to become a 9-1-1 communications training officer in the first place? What might have made your own learning experience better? Are there any CTOs who made a great impression on you?

If you really want to know, read on, keep an open mind and be honest with yourself.

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QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR

When I got involved in this profession, I was shocked at the requirements and, even more so, at the lack of training that was provided. Fortunately, times and expectations have changed, and more attention is given to meeting our training needs.

It takes a special personality to be a public safety telecommunicator—and even more so to be a CTO. I believe we can all agree that most in this profession have a *type A* personality. Those who have joined the ranks of trainer could be said to have *type AAA* personalities.

One must wonder why a person—even one with a AAA personality—would want to put themselves into a position of such responsibility. Perhaps you inherited the position because you had the most experience. Maybe the more you watched others providing the training, the more you believed that you could do a better job. (*We can sometimes be*

a critical group of individuals can't we? A tendency toward a critical nature is not all bad, as long as we remember it can be a double-edged sword.) Some people want to be in a position of authority. Perhaps you were motivated by the extra money a trainer earns. (Of course, this last reason comes into play only if you work at an agency with a compensation plan that includes trainers. Yes, there are still agencies that don't compensate trainers or provide very little compensation considering the magnitude of the responsibility a trainer has undertaken.)

At this point let it suffice to say that no matter what motivated you to become a trainer you have become one of the “Best of the Best.” Being selected for CTO is an honor and privilege that holds a considerable amount of responsibility.

There are some qualities that should stand out in an exceptional trainer. Some may be difficult to

CTO Training Webinars

The CTO Training Webinar Series will cover the following topics:

- Establishing and maintaining a standardized training program: training policy; structure; standardized guidelines; standard of care; and commitment of agency heads and CTO to program.
- CTO responsibilities: establishing and presenting a CTO Code of Ethics and training beyond a trainee.
- Liability.
- Staying focused and moving beyond—Attitude readjustments.
- Skill building: verbal communications, including coaching; feedback; bridge building (liaison and intervening); counseling.
- Understanding the DOR Part I: Standardized Guidelines for Evaluation.
- Understanding the DOR Part II: Rating.
- Understanding the DOR Part III: Written communications.
- Understanding the DOR Part IV: Writing an action plan into your comments.
- Paper or plastic (Manual DOR documentation vs. expectation software documentation).
- Covering all bases—use of agency-specific task lists.
- Training for success.

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master, but all are important. What are some essential qualities for an effective trainer? Honesty, objectivity, kindness, courtesy, compassion and understanding, patience, empathy and courage.

These are good qualities for anyone to possess and much more so for a successful trainer. Maya Angelou once said, “One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous or honest.”

In a nutshell, it takes courage to be a good and effective trainer. Without the courage to be honest and true to your trainee and your agency, your capacity for excelling greatly diminishes.

HOLD UP A MIRROR

What kind of trainer are you? How do your co-workers see you? There’s always someone watching those in authority. Are they watching to learn from you or to see if you really are the “Best of the Best”?

As a qualified CTO, you must understand

that you play a vital role in the development of qualified public safety communications personnel. Whether you’re training someone or not, you are influencing your work environment by your actions or inactions because of your CTO status.

And what a work environment it is! No matter how large or small your organization is, there’s no doubt that the comm center and the people working there exist in a world of their own. The feelings you experience working in a comm center could be likened to riding a rollercoaster, and being on a merry-go-round all at the same time. As a CTO you have been charged to train effectively in this environment.

Think about it, if you were to ride a rollercoaster all day long, day after day, the excitement would eventually wear off and get old. The same could be said for the comm center. With high-speed ups and downs, round and round day after day, adrenaline highs and lows occur as you perform your duties.irate callers, high-speed pursuits, grouchy officers, complaining co-workers and even a lack of information

from management can send morale into a tailspin. Through all of this you cannot lose sight of the fact that you are a CTO, with a responsibility to your agency, the training program and to yourself to perform as a professional and lead by example.

Will your actions be a catalyst to help create a working environment that promotes professionalism and is conducive to learning? Think about these questions as you consider your daily work habits:

- Would someone watching find you in the midst of a gossip session or ready with a response that would deter the gossiping and refocus the conversation?
- Would you be seen as part of a fault-finding group that’s always complaining or as an individual who points out the positives and directs the identification of a fault into a workable solution?
- How would you be seen using your discretionary time? Would you be hard at work helping someone become better at their job,

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learning new things, working at becoming better in an area that you are not strong in or would you be busy surfing the Internet or playing computer games?

- If you're between trainees, will your past trainees and co-workers see you following the policies and procedures that you stressed during training or will they see you freelancing?

With all of the challenges a CTO faces it is imperative that to remain or become an effective trainer you make a daily commitment and strive to be the best you can be.

Staying focused on the performance instead of the person (objectivity) is a skill that may also take time to master. You, as a trainer represent both the agency and the industry to your trainee and they will look at you to provide what they need to succeed. To a trainee, you are everything, and the qualities above must be ingrained into your very core to be the most effective trainer.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Instead of thinking or complaining about how poorly someone does their job, look for opportunities and ways to help them improve.
- Instead of becoming discouraged and falling into the mindset of things never change, get off the merry-go-round and look for ways to effect positive changes in your work environment.
- Look for ways to build your knowledge, skills and abilities; don't wait for your agency to provide you with learning opportunities; seek them out for yourself.

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

To assist you in this endeavor to become a more effective CTO, APCO is developing a CTO Web Seminar Series, which will run for an entire year. These one-hour Web seminars can be taken as a group or individually, and are very affordable.

The goal of the series is to provide support and a comprehensive sequential program that will afford comm centers and

training officers the ability to build and support a quality standardized training program comprising effective trainers who make a difference.

These one-hour, monthly Web seminars are scheduled for the third Tuesday of every month throughout 2010, which gives you plenty of time to put in your requests to participate.

Join us as we strive to be worthy of being called the "Best of the Best." **||PSC||**

DIANE BEATTY has been in public safety for more than 20 years. She started out as a dispatcher and worked her way through the ranks to supervisor, trainer and operations manager. She is now the training manager for Allegheny County 9-1-1 in Pittsburgh, which has more than 200 employees staffing 63 dispatch positions for 130 municipalities and the city's 88 neighborhoods. There are more than 200 volunteer fire departments, including some paid services, more than 20 EMS agencies and the county police and sheriff's departments. Beatty has been involved with APCO Institute since the inception of the APCO Institute Online and participated in the first APCO Institute Online class.

◆ CDE #26378: THE EFFECTIVE CTO

1. **An effective trainer is one who:**
 - a. Sees the position as a step up the career ladder.
 - b. Needs no extra training.
 - c. Has his or her own agenda.
 - d. Requires professionalism.
2. **Possible motivators for accepting the role as a trainer include:**
 - a. Longer hours
 - b. Pay raise
 - c. Accountability for others' actions
 - d. More stress
3. **An effective trainer is one who should be seen:**
 - a. In the midst of a gossip session.
 - b. On a fault-finding mission.
 - c. As a freelancer.
 - d. Looking for solutions.
4. **As a trainer, you represent _____ and _____ to your trainee:**
 - a. The public and private sector.
 - b. The agency and the industry.
 - c. The law, fire and EMS responders.
 - d. Yourself and your philosophy.
5. **All trainers receive fair compensation for training.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. **CTOs have a considerable amount of:**
 - a. Responsibility
 - b. Privileges
 - c. Power
 - d. None of the above
7. **CTOs have a responsibility to:**
 - a. Their agencies
 - b. Their trainees
 - c. Themselves
 - d. All of the above
8. **CTOs must create a work environment that is:**
 - a. Stress free
 - b. Fun to work in
 - c. Conducive to learning
9. **The virtues that make an exceptional trainer are:**
 - a. Somewhat important
 - b. Not very important
 - c. Difficult to master
10. **CTOs should use their discretionary time:**
 - a. Text messaging
 - b. Surfing the Internet
 - c. Looking for ways to build their skills, knowledge and abilities
11. **Effective trainers do not need to worry about their inactions and can do what they want when they do not have a trainee.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
12. **To be an effective trainer a CTO must have the virtue of courage.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
13. **It is the agency's responsibility to provide a trainer with learning opportunities.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
14. **As a CTO you can:**
 - a. Help create positive changes.
 - b. Improve morale by refocusing critical conversations.
 - c. Help identify positive solutions to problems.
 - d. All of the above.

Using the CDE Articles for Credit

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1. Study the CDE article in this issue.
2. Answer the test questions using this form. Photocopies are acceptable, but don't enlarge them.
3. Fill out the appropriate information section(s), and submit the form to:

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Questions? Call us at 888/APCO-9-1-1.

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