

## **Utilizing the “Do-First” Technique to Engage Adult Learners: Teaching the Importance of Psychological Testing of Police Officers**

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### **Abstract**

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*Psychological testing of police officers should occur from beginning to end, from the point of being hired to the end of the officer’s career. Thus, the testing aids to better serve both police officers and the general public. In fact, wherever there is a crime committed, you will almost always find that the first responder is a police officer. The volatile nature of the day to day calls constantly places undue stress on police officers, a direct result of their constant and extremely high state of readiness. Consequently, law enforcement officers never know what to expect once they respond to a call. No matter the countless number of hours on the job, officers must be prepared for the unexpected; there is no such thing as a routine call in law enforcement. It is widely known and accepted that officers make life or death decisions at a moment’s notice. More importantly, police officers are required to apply law, administered medical assistance, and diagnose individuals that may pose a danger to others. Taken together, the latter must be done without violating someone’s civil rights. Furthermore, at least some understanding of all these elements needs to be present in a new recruit police officer. Officers need to possess a certain mental make-up in order to become an effective law enforcement officer. The psychological profile has to be one that is aimed at the constitution required of police officers. However, teaching this content may be challenging due to the multiple conceptual ideas outlined. Therefore, this presentation is aimed at employing a new way of knowledge attainment called the “Do First” methodology. The “Do-First” approach teaches the student to use five foundational principles of knowledge acquisition, which helps the student achieve the course learning outcomes. The five steps include (a) tell; (b) show; (c) do; (e) review; and (f) ask.*

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### **Introduction**

In the law enforcement culture, there is a veil, a brotherhood and sisterhood that is an emotional culture that acts as a safe haven. That special society offers protection to officers without the fear of judgment. This honor code of silence among law enforcement personnel again prevents an officer from giving statements that may go against another officer. When infractions occur, most officers are willing to keep secrets indefinitely rather than tell supervisors. That internal code of honor is often misunderstood by the public, but at a closer glance, this code is no different from the code that some people have about helping law enforcement solve a crime or protecting family. (Wester et al., 2010) The only people that really understand the pains, hurts, and joys of being a part of a prestige historical profession are others with similar employment, such as police officers and members of the military. Law enforcement agencies know and expect the mental stress of the job to take a toll at some point during an officer’s career. The daily routine of dealing with highly charged and stressful situations will have an everlasting and overwhelming effect on the mental states of officers. (Wester et al., 2010)

The mental stress of losing a fellow officer in the line of duty and the impact of that death could be devastating. Years of emotions that have not been properly dealt with during the course of the officer's career have a tendency to appear in times like this. Many agencies pay tribute to their fallen law enforcement officers by hanging pictures of the deceased. The constant reminder of death every single day simply adds to stress related and physical health conditions (Plaxton-Hennings, 2004).

The culture that dominates most law enforcement agencies tells officers not to complain when the job gets tough or when the stress is extremely high. Protect the shield at all cost, which is a constant thought often caused by the nature of being in law enforcement, which is sometimes thankless and always dangerous. The culture of law enforcement, the "we take care of our own" concept, is one where police officers live a life of isolation (Adams and Buck, 2010). However, there is a slow change to this philosophy, as seen in 2014 when then Joseph Crystal, Baltimore Police Officer, advised prosecutors that he witnessed his partner brutally beat a suspect that was handcuffed (Broadwater, 2016). The understanding of the law enforcement world and the people who comprise the culture is essential to the psychological profile for all law enforcement officers. The way that the agencies handle officers at the management level is key to the mental state of officers who find themselves constantly under high stress and in life or death situations. Studies have shown that it is not so much the stress of the calls that cause the posttraumatic stress, but how management level officers treats their officers. Based on the studies of the agencies response to the officer, making them feel isolated, unsupported, disempowered and ultimately, victimize. (Plaxton-Hennings, 2004).

Pre-screening those considering a career as law enforcement officers should be aggressively, especially psychologically. Measures should be instituted to provide the most complete analysis of individuals interested in becoming police officer. New recruits will be subjected to a battery of psychological tests conducted by licensed psychiatrist to gauge if the new hire is mentally strong enough to be a police officer (Adams and Buck, 2010). Law enforcement is not a typical 9 to 5 job; it places a lot of undue stress on an individual. Modern day law enforcement requires that a new recruits possess a particular mental toughness. Today, there is a movement to provide Stress Inoculation Therapy (SIT) to recruits so that they are prepared to handle stressful events (Khillah, 2017). The law enforcement profession is very similar to the military in this aspect, where people's lives depend on how the new recruits handle the stressors and a wide array of incidents. The enormous amount of stress a police officer endures is largely psychological stress and requires a person with a certain mental constitution (Weiss et al., 2004).

This is the main reason why it is difficult to become a police officer (Adams and Buck, 2010). The formation of new recruits is often crude, but effective, in that the recruit is essentially given a new way of talking, thinking, and even a new way of acting. It is important that everyone at that agency all think similar and usually without hesitation. The rigors of the job have the ability to slow the decision making of a new officer that might cause the lives of either citizens or the officer's partners. The psychological profile of the recruit must meet the criteria the agency is looking for as a whole. One element that is stripped away from a recruit upon being hired is the element of self. The idea of a lone ranger is viewed as a negative trait and thought to pose a serious threat to the very foundation of law enforcement. The stigma of having the lone ranger complex is also viewed by the general public as undesirable in law enforcement officers, as it means that no one is sure how they are going to act or respond to incidents (Adams and Buck, 2010). It is imperative police officer are held to a higher level than that of the general public because the amount of authority that officers are given (Atkinson-Tovar, 2003). People that have pre-existing MHPs will need to be screened closely to ensure that their actions will not cause harm or injury (Adams and Buck, 2010). Case studies provide a means of testing individuals whose mental state may not be suitable for law enforcement. When used properly by law enforcement, it has proved that the screening process actually works. The right individuals were selected to become candidates for employment in the field of law enforcement while other were denied employment based on the MHPs that were caught by the screening process (Weiss et al., 2004). Testing modules are being used, but they are not perfect. However, they have a very good probability rate when used to screen candidates.

This stripping of a new recruit's sense of identity has been deemed essential to the effectiveness of policing the communities in which they are charged to protect and serve. The damage done to the new recruit's mental psychic will likely have a major effect, based on the overwhelming pressure placed on the recruit. These measures are theoretically done to simulate the pressure that the recruit will encounter when dealing with actual police calls.

The constant berating and badgering of recruits has been known to cause some recruits to quit the academy, even though they have mere days until they graduate. It is the way of the instructors and trainers to break the recruit down and rebuild them up to fit an agency's profile (Atkinson-Tovar, 2003). The constant molding and shaping the recruit's mental constitution will over time cause the recruit to bond to their fellow police officers and the command staff in the agency. Having a measuring stick to measure new recruits before being hire is a must, in order to protect the public as much as it is to protect the agency against a recruit that has a history of mental illness (Wester et al., 2010).

Law enforcement officers that are willing to serve and protect communities must know they are making a big sacrifice in their lives. The changes they are asked to make are needed ones to promote an image viewed by society to be one above approach (Atkins-Tovar, 2003). The constant and repetitive stories about the worst incidents concerning victims who have actually been traumatized by criminals create police officers who are sometimes hardened to the situations they encounter. The law enforcement profession as a whole has softened its approach to dealing with new recruits. This particular has to do with selecting candidates based on the psychological profile at the time of hiring (Adams and Bucks, 2010). The pre-screening process has also changed in such a way that gives the individual department more control over who is hired and why the person was hired. To be a law enforcement officer, unlike many job opportunities, it involves far more information than just completing an application. The compressive background and tests are designed to identify the most qualified officer (Discover Policing, 2017). With these extra responsibilities, high ranking officers in departments are also charged with the well-being of the departments. With departments now understanding mental illnesses that concerns their officers, a level playing field for all parties involved has been created. This comes at an important time, as law enforcement is being viewed in a negative light. The pre-screening process allows departments to get it right at the very beginning of an officer's career, placing more focus on character, honesty, integrity, and accountability of the new recruits. All these things will ultimately raise the ethical standards across the country (Plaxton-Hennings, 2004). This is an area that law enforcement cannot afford not to act quickly on. Getting individuals with the aforementioned qualities saves the department in so many ways in the public's eyes; they now have an image of being professional, educated, respected, and effective in the way that they perform the job. The departments also "save money as it decreases the absenteeism, employee high turnover rate and un-ethical practices" (Atkinson-Tovar, 2003).

The unique characteristics needed to be a police officers are fragile and must be handled in a sensitive matter as not to cause "harm" to the officer. It is indeed important to strip a new recruit to mold in the way the department would have the officer to be. (Papazoglou-Manzella, 2013) It is just as important to build that police officer back up with integrity, honor, and sense of brotherhood. Emphasizing these qualities will preserve law enforcement for the future.

### **Literature Review**

Research has been conducted worldwide to find a more productive and beneficial method of identifying individuals with a Mental Health Problem (MHP) (Weiss et al, 2004). Being able to pinpoint individuals that will cost the agency time, money, and its reputation is well worth the time and effort involved with the testing. Divorce, depression, alcoholism, schizophrenia, and suicide are all mental illnesses that plague Americans, including law enforcement officers (Tovah, 2003). The Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) has made many law enforcement officials take notice, in part due to how the superior officers view the need for change (Papazoglou, Anderson, 2014). The experts have found that one method that may be useful in battling mental illnesses is "Empathy" Silverstone et al, 2013). These in depth studies were conducted to better understand the mental strain police officers encounter in the line of duty. The traumatic stress disorder has been identified by experts in the field of psychologies. Officers are trained to be in control of situations at all times, and be silence about things that they may not be able to fix (Yzermans et al, 2010).

The constant impact of repeated exposure to trauma, murders, suicides, assaults, rapes and vehicular accidents with serious injures all are triggers. Triggers that are the causes for MMPs that are found in police officers over their careers (Atkinson-Tovah, 2003). The expectations placed on police officers are as simple as they once were in the law enforcement profession. "The central roles of the police are to maintain public safety, provided services to citizens, and respond to accidents and injuries" (Sellers et al, 2005). Studies have also shown that male officers are more than likely to suffer from the illnesses listed above and display the mental issues suffered by male officers (Wester et al, 2010).

In the last 30 years, research on police officers, social stressors, and strains has given a very interesting look at police officers' emotional sides. It has been well documented that law enforcement personnel tend to have an 'us versus them attitude' (Adams, 2016). This mindset allows for police officers to bond because their actions determine whether or not their partner returns home at the end of the shift. It is not meant as a negative way to refer to those that are not in law enforcement. Those considered organizational outsiders include members of the public, such as those who may be victims as well as the criminal element believed to be the offenders. The social stressors come into play when the police officers are required to deal with both friends and foes in the same matter in the line of duty (Adams, 2016). These stressors are the most troublesome for police officers, as they have to separate themselves as police officers and perform their duties, regardless of who they are dealing with. That interaction between police officers, victims, and offenders is not as cut and dry as some might think, as there is a constant reminder of officer safety as well as the protect and serve concept. All these notions are being deliberated under extreme mental duress of the responding officer (Adams, 2016). The concept To Protect and Serve, has been ingrained into policing since the 1829, when Sir Robert Peel developed the London Metropolitan Police force (Nazemi, 2018).

Most MHPs surface as aggression, which is an indicator of poor mental judgment on behalf of the police officer called on to use discretion. The officer's witness more trauma and tragedy than the average person may see in a lifetime (Kleber et al, 2010). It has been discovered that 7% of the tested individuals used in case study performed by Kleber et al. suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, and another 34 % of the same case study officers suffered from various types of MHPs (2010). These findings were also used to monitor job performance and confirmed that these police officers were a liability for the agencies (Atkinson-Tovar, 2013) Research has also shown the impact of repeated exposure to traumatic events during an officer's career can be traced back to the violence encountered during calls. The continuous monitoring of MHPs within law enforcement is important to both officers and the public (Kleber et al, 2010). The confusion and conflict that officers experience in the line of duty stem from MHPs as well. The MHPs stigmas that police officers have are deeply rooted in the officer's beliefs as police officers (Wester, 2010). Take a close look at male police officers and stigma associated with counseling, in hope that officers will open up to co-workers, supervisors and other individuals charged to report problems.

There is a small percent of police officer suffer from MHPs brought on by the rigors of the profession (Kleber, 2010). It is likely higher than what actually has been reported by law enforcement personnel. The Dutch study was a comprehensive nationwide questionnaire survey of 3, 272 Norwegian police officers. In that control group, it was found that 11.2% of the police officers suffered from severe anxiety symptoms, while yet another 8.2 % of the police officers in that same control group had signs of severe depression. The same control group of police officers yielded another 30.5 % suffering from a moderate to severe form of PTSD (Kleber, 2010). Most experts will agree that, with mental issues like the ones that have been studied and documented, it would be very difficult to function in certain jobs. These MHPs would manifest themselves in many different ways, none of which would benefit any of the players involved. These individuals would suffer from poor job performance, absences from work, and most importantly, impaired judgement.

Mental illnesses can be found in any segment of America's population, and as first responders, police are the first ones to come in contact with those individuals. Most research indicates that law enforcement needs to be trained in awareness of mental illness in order to be better at detecting when someone suffer from mental illnesses (Papazoglou, Manzella, 2010). To ensure a safe outcome on calls involving the mentally ill, the officer's training should be as realistic as possible, using multiple life-like training situations involving actors portraying mentally ill individuals and carried out in a control environment. The need for this training cannot be understated, because the ongoing training puts officers in a better position to be successful in dealing with calls that have individuals with mental illness issues (Plaxton-Hennings, 2004).

Unfortunately, the law enforcement profession as a whole is slow to change, and as such, the push should be made from within the law enforcement community (Papazoglou, Manzella, 2013). The study of the mental illness has also yielded a grey area where most law enforcement officers feel as if they are not adequately able to deal with people suffering with a mental illness (Tucker et al, 2008). The law enforcement community is extremely pro-active when it comes to safety issues and methods of saving of innocent lives. However, there are few law enforcement agencies that understand the benefits of training their officers to identify and successfully deal with the mentally ill before being considered ready for duty (Tucker et al, 2008).

The Crisis Intervention training correlates directly with the “Protect and Serve” motto of the law enforcement profession. Methods learned on how to identify people with mental illness could revolutionize Law Enforcement in many ways. The revolutionary ways could reduce the number of arrests and the number of lives lost when dealing with the mentally ill. One of the most important issues learned is that mental illnesses diseases are directly connected to the violence of the mentally ill. The mentally ill can be extremely violent and volatile in their psychiatric episode (Hnatow, 2015).

In a few sectors of the law enforcement community, there have been some changes made to help combat issues that will aid law enforcement officers in fulfilling their duties (Silverstone et al, 2013). Crisis Intervention Officers are given more training in the area of identifying the mentally ill. These officers are assigned to what known as the Crisis Intervention Team. The Crisis Intervention Officers are dispatched to calls that involve the mentally ill, and they have shown a great deal of success, which is measured by the number of lives saved. Crisis Intervention Officers are certified through hours of training in addition to the hours of training mandated the governing authority. But any changes made must be embraced by front line officers who understand the overall missions for Law Enforcement. The universal concept shared by most Law Enforcement to Protect and Serve the communities with best methods for all involved (Atkinson-Tovar, 2003).

Police work is very demanding; the training is no less important than any other tools used in police work, such as the vehicles, guns, hand cuffs, flashlight, and other tools (Papazoglou, Manzella 2013). Police officers need to be trained to recognize their own signs and symptoms of MHPs (Atkinson-Tovar, 2003). The training need be ongoing throughout the officer's career and the recognition should come from those that work closely with the officer. Obviously this training will require that police officers also monitor each other to minimize the impact of repeated exposure to mental trauma (Wester et al, 2010). This assertion goes back to the very foundation of the law enforcement role of anticipating risk; there is no better way than to stand guard for the institution of law enforcement and the brotherhood. It is not a new concept to train police officers to assess the bad guys whenever contact made between the two (Silverstone et al., 2013). The very nature of these case studies dealing with the psychological testing of police officers are signs of changing of the times. The public stigma over years forced the hands of law enforcement superior officers and high ranking officials. (Wester et al, 2010) This movement started a conversation that will forever be a part of viewing officers inside of law enforcement agencies all around America. Taking away the stigma of asking for assistance when the stressors are interfering with the way police officers are performing their jobs. The greater perception is how the police officer feel about seeking help and then their receiving the psychological treatment needed. “Seeking psychologist for emotional or work related problems carries a negative stigma (Wester et al, 2010). That negative stigma has to be erased so that police officers want so isolated from others inside or outside law enforcement. Just knowing that there are no penalties associated with seeking psychological assistance. Acknowledging that an ammo clip needs more bullets is not a problem, the patrol needs a tune-up when it driving sluggishly, and boots needs to be exchanged when the boots are worn out. Police officers are no different, after many MHP derived from constant contact with violent acts in the line of duty.

It takes a certain individual to become a police officer; the profession is one of the most dangerous that one could choose as a career. The profession's major pitfalls are terroristic threats and physical aggression (Papazoglou, Manzella 2013). Research has shown that a small portion of law enforcement officers suffer from Mental Health Problems (MHPs) and the majority of the stressors come from high level supervisors. In diagnosing officers with MHP and without MHP researchers are looking at several areas of mental illness; the areas are severe anxiety, depression, hostility, and burnout symptoms, as well as sleeping disorders. Case studies have also been conducted which indicates that intentional violent incidents leads to higher levels of MHPs than non-violent incidents (Moore, 2010). All stressors are important to the mental health of law enforcement officers because of the nature of the job. Some are diseases, even though they are mental-based; all have possible deadly outcomes. The constant encounters with the criminal element takes a toll and can have some effect on how many incidents are played out. The time and effort used to research the MHPs is valuable to the welfare of all law enforcement officers (Weiss et al, 2004). Understanding of how the stressors affect officers could explain the various issues that each of them has, especially frequent aggression, other MHPs, and how an individual's work can be affected. Normal or everyday stressors are viewed as manageable stressors that should be handled as routine. Typical stressors such as divorce, vehicle accidents and family death are all stressors that should not cause the average police officer undue stress (van der Velden et al., 2010).

Both organizational stressors and everyday stressors have been studied in great depth. Modern day police officers are being trained to better deal with the job produced stressors. (Tucker et al, 2008). The clinical researches are being broadened to reduce stress, no matter the stressors. In understanding the stressors, police are better equipped to serve the public's interest while maintaining the safety of the officers. The stigma surrounding law enforcement resistance to change has made implementing the needed changing in the community more difficult. The mental fitness of officers conducting their duties will be helped by monitoring their MHP and other issues throughout the officer's careers. The goal of public safety is ensure all involved are treated professionally, respectfully, and just whenever police officers are involved. This outcome is the ultimate goal and is the purpose of tracking police officers MHPs (Wester, 2010).

When most police officers think of being 'fit for duty,' their first thoughts are being physically in shape to carry out tasks such as running, fighting a defendant, lifting someone, and being physically healthy. Police, on average, must be fit for duty to handle the potential danger of a physical confrontation with offenders at any point in the officer's career. The one element of the equation that is often forgotten is the MHPs of officers and the effect that different crises may have on an officer's psychological profile (Adams, 2016). The constant changes of emotional ordeals that play out within the minds of officers are not properly handled. Those emotions are kept locked inside of the officer's subconscious until there is an incident, which would then place the officer in a major dilemma. "Negative social interactions that are characterized by, discourteous and disrespectful behaviors but not involve physical violence are the very stress that often times push police officers over the edge" (Adams, 2016). One of the first things that needs to happen is that the officers and their agencies must agree that the officer has MHPs. This is important because the officer cannot be treated unless the problem has been identified and agreed upon by all parties. The emotional strategies module set in place to assist the officers and agencies in dealing with the officer's MHPs is very effective in handling the emotional issues suffered by police officers (Plaxton-Hennings, 2004). The mental health issues concerning police officers are factors in the law enforcement profession that all Americans have a stake.

### **Recommendations**

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is a psychological test used to gauge an individual's mental characteristics (Weiss et al, 2004). The test is designed to detect any mental health issues a person may be predisposed to. Law enforcement agencies should monitor an officer during his entire career, and this test should be very important to agencies when hiring an individual. The MMPI has played a valuable part in recent years in selecting candidates for employment at law enforcement agencies; the MMPI has a very high success rate that some agencies even use it to weed out good candidates from bad ones prior to making a job offer, with case studies showing an accuracy rate of 75% (Weiss et al, 2004). Individuals tested by MMPI and are shown to be the most qualified will make good officers and also be productive in discharging their duties.

The most recent update to the MMPI, The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, version 2 (MMPI-2), further proved that it was accurate in measuring the aggression of individuals who showed interest in becoming police officers (Weiss et al., 2004).. The MMPI-2 has been very beneficial in suggesting and implementing guidelines for hiring officers that were less like to abuse their authority, such as abusing suspects in an officer's custody. Officers who successfully passed these measures were also less likely to use excessive force against suspects who complied with orders. With the use of the MMPI-2, the termination of officers proved to have lied about their activities has been reduced dramatically because individuals who were shown to have more integrity and honor were being hired. The fact that the MMPI-2 testing works so well suggests that all hiring authorities in the law enforcement arena should embrace the system. The MMPI-2 can successfully detect MHP before the issues cause any problems, making the law enforcement profession better and stronger. By selecting better law enforcement officers, the MMPI-2 will select a candidate that is ready to be placed into action on day after successfully completing. This process will also all but cut out the physical abuse of suspects (Weiss et al, 2004).

Looking at the long term, the law enforcement profession would be better served by implementing MMPI-2 system of hiring individuals to work as police officers. The facts show that the MMPI-2 has a very high probability of selecting individuals that will be more productive and better suited mentally to perform as police officers. These will be the individual who are most likely to stay in the field longer, ensuring the money spent on training these officers will not be lost on individuals who are not willing to stay in the law enforcement field. (Kleber et al, 2010) Research has shown and proved that the officers selected using the MMPI-2's are less likely to fall prey to corruptions or other incidents.

The MMPI-2 evaluator has proven to be accurate at showing if an officer will be aggressive towards citizens, which officers will have poor job performance, and which officers are prone to be insubordinate towards superior officers (Yzermans, 2010). This technique is giving the agencies a chance to see the mental profile to forecast if this is the individual to invest it before hiring the individual. (Weiss et al, 2004). Also, the character and integrity of these individuals were higher than the individuals selected under the old standard methods. MMPI-2 will detect individuals that are overly aggressive towards citizens and other law enforcement agents. The amount of lives saved by this earlier diagnosis could be in the hundreds, if not thousands, as it decreases the amount of individuals who are unsuited for law enforcement career field and therefore more likely to instigate deadly incidents. Not to mention how much money each agency would save with the MMPI-2 method. Money being saved by the decrease of lawsuits, the money saved by training and individuals that want stay with the agency very long. Individuals do better when they are suited for a particular profession, enjoy what they are doing and without question most productive (Weiss et al, 2004). The pre-screening element of the MMPI-2 method will safeguard law enforcement against itself, allowing agencies to choose which candidates will best fit at their agency.

### **Conclusion**

The social problems of the world often fall upon law enforcement to deal with. For the average person, the typical, everyday activities of law enforcement officers would certainly prove to be difficult to perform. Is anyone honestly willing to take a life in order to save a life? Are they willing to die to protect a perfect stranger? Overwhelmingly, the responsibility of keeping others safe from the threat of danger is a huge endeavor. Social stressors and strains placed on law enforcement demands that candidates be thoroughly screened prior to becoming police officers. This is to ensure that everyone involved remains safe, because the social problems that are present in this day and age will certainly be affecting the actions of law enforcement. There will always be both good and bad employees in any profession that currently exists. The key is minimizing the number of bad employees that seek out law enforcement as a profession. Most law enforcement agencies usually recruit the best individuals possible in order to mold him or her into their ideal officer: the best in moral character, the best athletes, and the brightest individuals. Integrity, honor, and honesty are the virtues which agencies like to see in the people they hire in order to ensure these individuals will not succumb to the advances of bad influences.

However, with law enforcement officers being human, the constant stresses of the job would cause their minds to slowly erode over time, like with any other individual under stress constantly. One of the main reasons for potential mental breakdown could possibly be a result of the supervisors within law enforcement agencies. As the pressures of the job mount, the effects are often seen in an officer's reactions to conflict. The results of the pressure will trigger aggression, smoking, alcohol and depression, as well as other signs that point toward mental illness issues. These stressors could lead to excessive force, abuse of position, the use of deadly force and others extreme actions. Monitoring is important to the officers and agencies success because too many infractions could cost agencies dearly over a period of time. Every department should be very concerned when an officer's actions start to interfere with department's effectiveness.

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