



HRCJTA TB 2025-2

DATE: September 8, 2025

TO: Hampton Roads Criminal Justice Training Academy Member Agencies

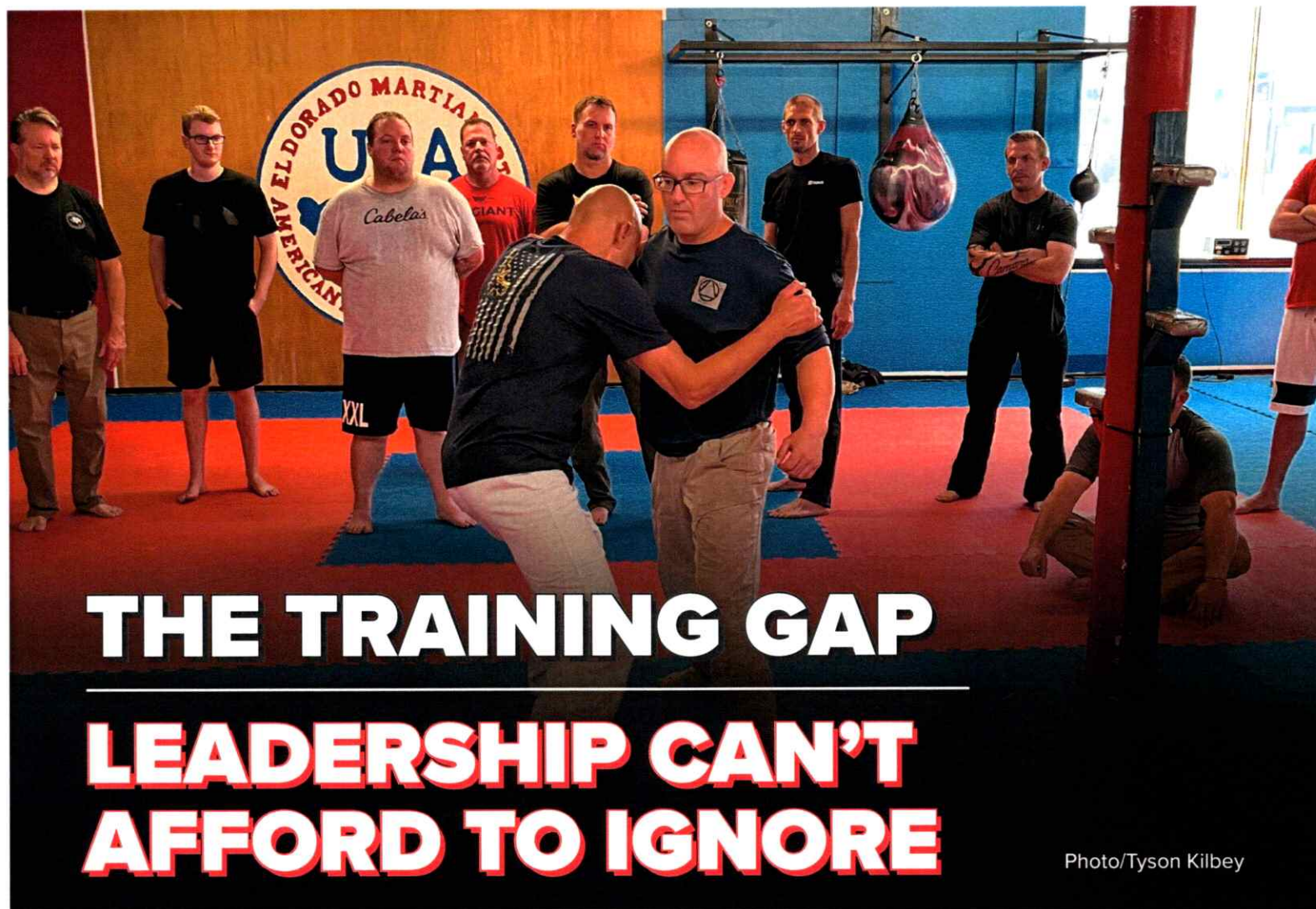
FROM: Scott Barlow, Executive Director

SUBJECT: HRCJTA Training Bulletin 2025-2

“Police1’s “What Cops Want in 2025” survey reveals critical gaps in police training.”

Police 1, with the cooperation/sponsorship of Safariland conducted a nationwide survey to determine what street cops feel they need in police training and what are critical gaps in the current police training they are receiving.

The HRCJTA is sharing this information in this training bulletin, and we recommend trainers read the entire document found on Police1’s web page: <https://www.police1.com/>, and attached to this TB 2025-2



Photo/Tyson Kilbey

THE TRAINING GAP

LEADERSHIP CAN'T AFFORD TO IGNORE

WRITTEN BY
Tim Dees

Officers are clear: they need more realistic, frequent and effective training to stay safe. But agency priorities, budgets and politics are leaving critical gaps — and putting lives at risk

Police1's [“What Cops Want in 2025”](#) survey revealed a clear throughline: officers don't feel adequately prepared for the threats they face

on the street. From defensive tactics to firearms proficiency to simulation-based training, the message was consistent — what they're getting isn't enough. This analysis digs into those concerns, spotlighting the training gaps officers say are putting their safety at risk — and what agencies can do to close them.

PERCEPTION VS. REALITY: WHY HOLLYWOOD FIGHTS DON'T MATCH STREET ENCOUNTERS

The survey dedicated a section to the state of defensive tactics (DT) training. The results indicated that DT training isn't a disaster, but officers were hardly enthusiastic about what they were getting.

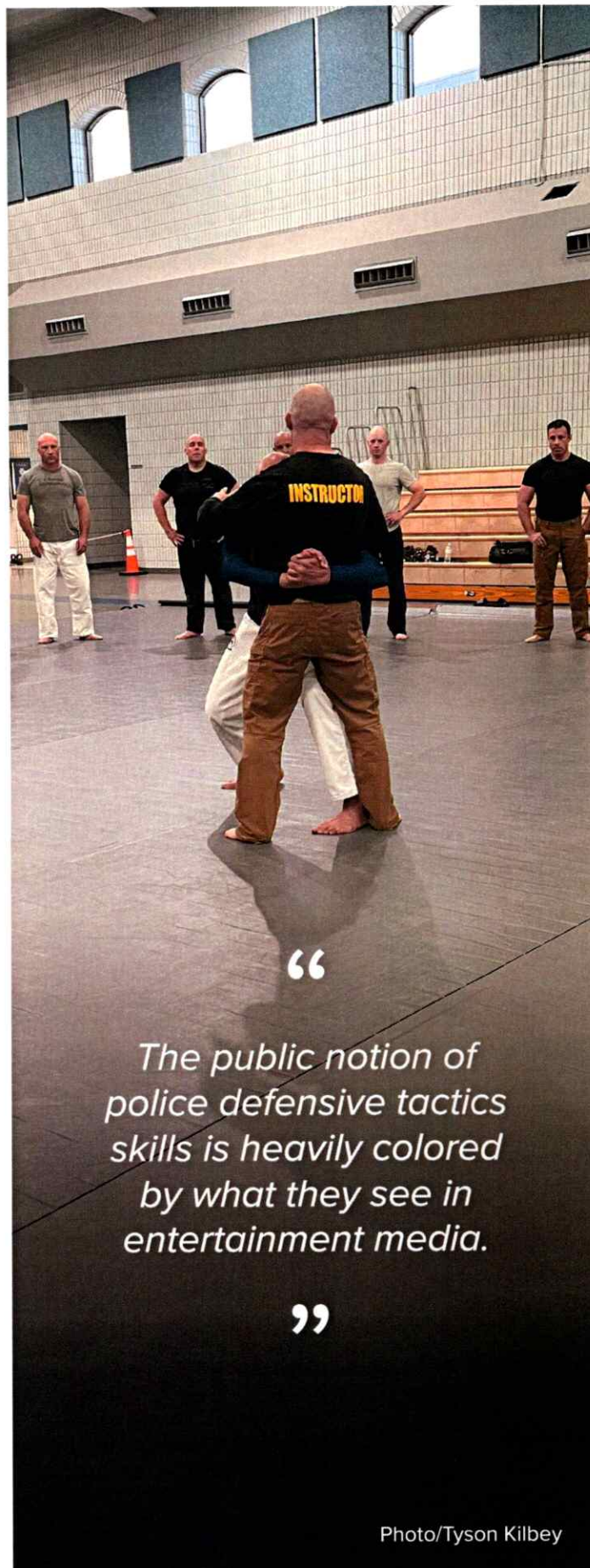
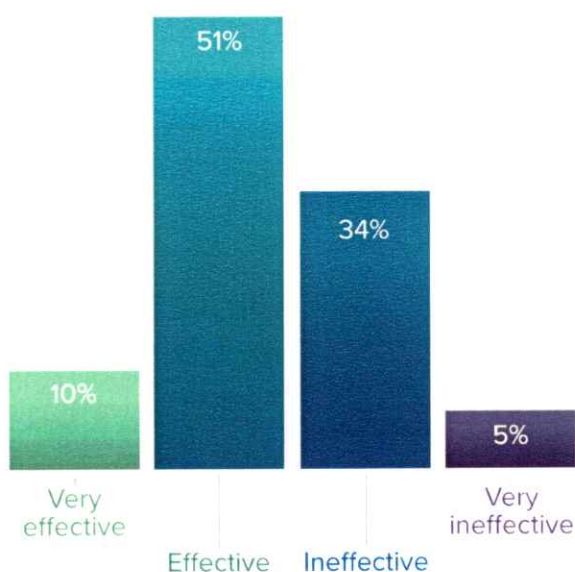
NOTE: In all statements here where the proportion of responses are cited, numbers have been rounded for brevity and may not total 100%.

The public notion of police defensive tactics skills is heavily colored by what they see in entertainment media. When the police on “The Rookie” or “Law and Order” arrest a combative suspect, the fight seldom goes on for more than a few seconds. Even when the physical sizes of the arresting officer and the suspect are mismatched, the cop uses some magical technique to get them into handcuffs within seconds. The viewer comes away thinking, “How hard can this be?”

Viewing arrest sequences on reality shows like “COPS” or “On Patrol: Live” reveal a different truth. Just getting the suspect’s hands behind their back can take a full minute or more, even when there are multiple officers working on the same person. This often happens after the primary officer has been in foot pursuit of the suspect and is physically spent.

All this often causes the public to view a real-world use of force as “police brutality,” since the TV cops can overcome suspects so much more neatly than the real ones.

How effective is your defensive tactics training at preparing you to repel real-life resistance or assaults?





Photo/Tyson Kilbey

EXHAUSTED AND UNDERPREPARED: THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

Most people have no idea how exhausting it is to fight someone. A common police academy exercise is to give a recruit a baton and tell them to repeatedly strike a designated target, such as a heavy bag or a plastic garbage can. To complete the exercise, all they have to do is keep it up for a full minute. Most are gasping for air after 30 seconds.

The lesson is clear: the bag or garbage can't fight back. If the adversary was a suspect who was desperate to get away, could you overcome their resistance? Could you even protect yourself from being disarmed? How important is your physical conditioning?

Physical conditioning and physical fitness is always going to be a component of DT, as you have to be in reasonably good shape to prevail in a fight, regardless of how good your tactics are. Casual observation tells us that many officers are obese and unprepared for a physical confrontation. The problem is that many of the cops are too tired to exercise sufficiently, don't have time to exercise, or lack proper facilities. This was borne out clearly in the ["What Cops Want in 2024" survey](#).

BALANCING RISK AND LIABILITY: THE DILEMMA OF DT TECHNIQUE SELECTION

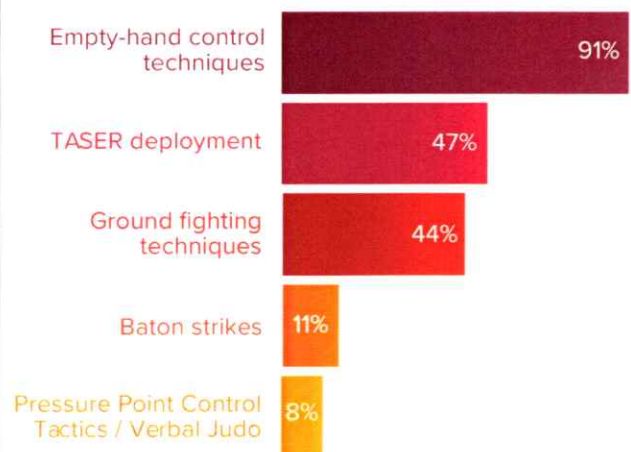
Police executives must balance their choices of authorized DT methods between being easy enough to learn, effectiveness and defensibility in civil court.

In the 1980s, the carotid control, also known as the lateral vascular neck restraint or the more

pejorative and inaccurate "choke hold," was a commonly taught and used technique. Officers could learn it, and it worked very well to render people momentarily unconscious while handcuffs were applied. Unfortunately, people under the influence of certain drugs of abuse that were popular at the time didn't always wake up without medical intervention, and people died. The carotid control was banned or put at the level of deadly force in most agencies, and some states outlawed it by statute.

Effectiveness of DT techniques is a concern for the cops included in the survey. Only about 61% characterized their DT training as "effective" or "very effective" at preparing them to repel real-life assaults. The remaining sample said their training was ineffective (34%) or very ineffective (5%).

Which of the following DT techniques have you used most often in the field? (Select all that apply.)





Photo/Tyson Kilbey

In their own words

"I am an academy level subject control instructor in Ohio and find the instructor manual jam packed with techniques that have about a 1% chance of working in the real world for boots on the ground. I advocate for a simple to learn and deploy systems approach to subject control. I believe we need to get away from the terminology we have been utilizing for years (defensive tactics) because it doesn't line up with what officers are actually doing. Most times when an officer gets a subject under control while actively resisting, the officer actually is on the offensive. This is what needs to be promoted in the world of law enforcement when an officer is responding to resistance."

The basic methods are still the most widely used: 91% of officers said that empty-hand control techniques were their most common DT methods, followed by TASER deployment (47%) and ground fighting techniques (44%). Only 11% said they used baton strikes, with 8% citing DT skills such as pressure point control tactics and verbal judo. Less-lethal devices cited included pepper spray or [pepperballs](#), [mace](#), the [Bola Wrap](#) and, in one case, a likely unauthorized "punch to the face."

While the baton was the most popular less-lethal tool for generations of cops, it has fallen out of favor. This may be because few cops carry full-size batons, opting instead for collapsible models that are less cumbersome to carry on their duty belts. It may also be because baton techniques are not emphasized as much as they used to be in academy training, and because the skills that recruits do learn are perishable. Few agencies train regularly in baton techniques.

In their own words

"I think there are plenty of tools and tactics. The issue is that officers are afraid or prohibited from using them. There is no substitute for a real encounter and officers are not supported during simulation training. As they say, force never looks good, and officers get hurt when they don't use enough force to stop the encounter quickly. Ground fighting is a fad and not the place to be when you are an officer. Get up and disengage to utilize the tools provided."

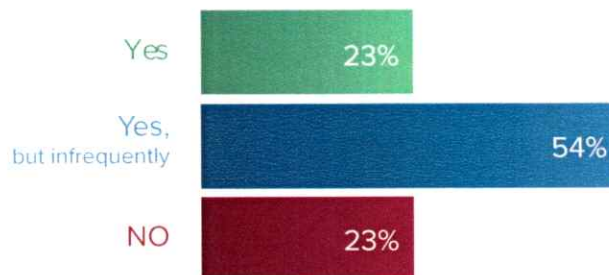
WHEN TACTICS DON'T STICK: WHY MOST DT SKILLS ARE PERISHABLE

Baton skills are not the only ones that are perishable. Most DT skills are perishable because they're seldom used, and when the officer needs a technique to work, he or she can't execute it effectively. DT training doesn't have to be prolonged, but it has to be frequent.

Many agencies reserve DT training for day-long sessions where people get fatigued and injured. Practice sessions of a few minutes, possibly

associated with briefing or roll call, might be more beneficial when done frequently.

Do you receive regular simulation-based training?



SIMULATION WORKS — SO WHY AREN'T MORE OFFICERS GETTING IT?

The surveyed officers favored simulation-based training, but they don't get much of it. An overwhelming 82% of respondents agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (35%) that simulation-based training helped them recognize high-risk incidents, with only 15% saying they were neutral, disagreeing (2%) or strongly disagreeing (0.5%) with that statement. Even so, only 23% said they get regular simulation-based training, with another 54% saying they got simulation training, but infrequently. Twenty-three percent said they got no simulation-based training at all.



Photo/Tyson Kilbey



In their own words

"I have found that no matter what DT program our state adopts, the officers will never become proficient unless they train daily. Wrestlers train a lot and still forget/stall under pressure on the mat. Officers cannot forget or stall when on the street."

Officers also believe that simulation training has a positive influence on their ability to de-escalate potentially violent encounters: 23% said they "strongly agree" or "agree" (45%) that they were better at de-escalation as a result of simulation training; 25% were neutral on this statement, and only about 7% disagreed with the statement.

In their own words

"Most defensive tactics training is based on compliant subjects. No one seems to realize all that goes out the door when the suspect throws the first punch. We need to develop programs to address actual fights."

Simulation-based training helps me recognize high-risk incidents.



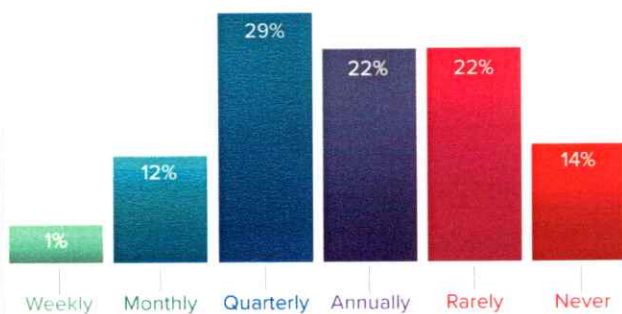
FIREARMS TRAINING: RARE, UNREALISTIC AND OFTEN TOO EASY TO PASS

The survey respondents were more critical of the firearms training they received. When asked if the firearms training they got adequately prepared them for high-stress incidents, only about half agreed (34%) or strongly agreed (18%) that it did. The remainder were neutral (25%) or disagreed (23%).

A common problem is that there is not much actual training with firearms after the academy. Officers are required to qualify with their firearms periodically, but this often means shooting a 25- or 50-round course and calling it a day. Worse yet, if an officer fails to achieve the required marksmanship score, he or she is just sent through the course again until they get it right.

Ammunition is expensive, and firearms training requires taking officers off the street and sending them to the pistol range, which may be some distance from their patrol area. This is all costly, and many agencies forego it to save money and maximize personnel availability. Officers responding to the survey reported they participate in firearms training separate from qualification annually (22%), quarterly (29%), monthly (12%), weekly (1%). A total of 22% said they rarely get firearms training, and 14% reported they get none at all.

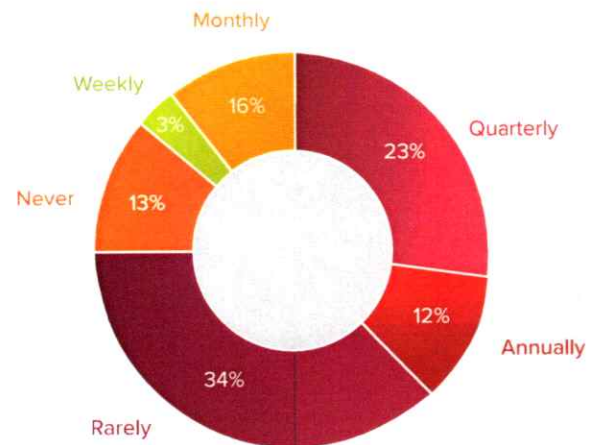
How often do you train with your firearm outside of standard qualification?



Police in the United States are relatively unique in that they are empowered and even encouraged to carry their firearms while off duty. Despite this, they don't get much training in handling off-duty situations involving deadly force; 12% said they get annual training in off-duty firearms training,

while others reported the frequency as quarterly (23%), monthly (16%), or weekly (3%); 34% said they get this training rarely or never (13%). With both on- and off-duty firearms training, the survey did not break out whether this training was something provided by their agency or that they pursued themselves. To their credit, many officers purchase their own ammunition and practice on their own time. A few agencies will provide ammunition to officers who come to the range to practice while off duty. An exceptional few officers take vacation time and use personal funds to attend firearms proficiency courses.

How often do you receive training on handling off-duty firearm situations?



One training aspect that came up in the comments was the lack of kinetic firearms training as opposed to standing on a firing



line and shooting at a stationary target. A casual examination of videos of actual police shooting incidents reveals that officers and their adversaries are seldom stationary when shooting. The officer may be retreating from an assault, and the suspect may be either moving to further the assault or trying to escape. Shots are seldom aimed using the gunsights. Point shooting is commonplace, and the most likely reason that [most bullets fired by police don't hit the targets they were intended for](#).

In their own words

"I believe that moving targets are essential whether it is live fire or virtual reality training. We have done a lot of stationary training, but I do not know many situations where an assailant will remain stationary."

Asked, what kind of DT or firearms training they would like to see or see more of, the responses varied considerably. Jiu-Jitsu and other martial arts styles like Krav Maga and Muay Thai were mentioned. Basic empty hand/bare hand tactics were among the desired types. It was clear that the cops aren't confident in the DT skills they have been taught.

STREET SURVIVAL STARTS WITH BETTER TRAINING — NOT BETTER OPTICS

Training is usually the first victim when budget cuts and shortfalls happen. Institutional knowledge has failed to acknowledge that cutting back on training eventually costs more because employee injuries and sick time, lawsuits and awards from lawsuits, and employee attrition increase. All of this is more costly than the training that was eliminated, but because it occurs over time and drains different funds, the association isn't made. The lesson is that training needs to be given a higher priority, and that the people getting the training are often the best advocates of what training to provide.

In an era of rising assaults and shrinking resources, training isn't optional — it's survival. Agencies that ignore that reality do so at their own risk. [1](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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WHAT AGENCIES SHOULD **PRIORITIZE NOW**

1 Increase training frequency, not just duration

Short, regular sessions (e.g., during roll call) can build real retention better than infrequent, all-day events.

2 Shift from compliance-based to resistance-based scenarios

Most real-world encounters involve some form of resistance — training should reflect that reality.

3 Invest in scenario-based and simulation training

Officers overwhelmingly value it, but too few receive it. Simulations improve both decision-making and de-escalation.

4 Reinforce perishable skills with ongoing refreshers

Firearms, DT and less-lethal tactics degrade quickly — agencies must treat them like critical competencies, not one-time qualifications.

5 Support officer fitness with time, access and culture

Fitness directly impacts survival. Agencies should remove barriers — not just preach wellness.

6 Train for movement, not the firing line

High-stress, dynamic firearms training — live or virtual — is essential for real-world readiness.

7 Listen to your officers

They know where the gaps are. Involve them in shaping what training gets prioritized and how it's delivered.



Photo/Tyson Kilbey