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FIVE SIMPLE STEPS AN ADMINISTRATION CAN TAKE TO SET THE K9 UNIT UP FOR SUCCESS

DO MORE THAN THE MINIMUM IN SERVICE TRAINING

Industry standard says a K9 team must complete a minimum of 16 hours of K9 In service training that is documented, every month. If you do not provide this opportunity to your K9 handlers, you set yourself up to lose in court for negligent training and even worse in a bite case, to open yourself up to a lawsuit for negligent training and supervision. All training must also be documented in detailed training records, and your K9 vendor should explain to your handlers how to keep these documents, and what important information in terms of a narrative must be included in the records for each training session.

Many agencies set aside two 8 hour days a month for this in service training. However, dogs learn better with more sessions of shorter duration. In these eight hour days of in service training, dogs are not being trained for all eight of those hours, so in between these eight hour blocks, the handler must complete training on shift, after shift, and on their own time. Yes, they must do preparation for their job on their own time. Good officers, not necessarily K9 officers, on their own time, work out at the gym, train jiu jitsu or other hand to hand combat techniques, and go to the range, so they are better and more prepared on the job. K9 teams are no different. Sixteen hours is a minimum standard. No great team was ever trained on 16 hours a month. You are going to have to do some work every day to reach the pinnacle of this specialized unit.

GIVE YOUR UNIT PROPER DETECTION TRAINING AIDS

As a K9 unit, whether narcotic detection or explosive detection is your detection specialty, you are must have access to real samples of narcotics or explosives. Dogs cannot be certified on Pseudo or simulants; they must be certified on real samples of narcotics or explosives, thus making it imperative to train on real samples. Police agencies can obtain a DEA license by contacting the DEA and completing the paperwork, and the DEA laboratory will issue 28g of each odor for training. Agencies can obtain explosives by contacting the ATF and set up proper containment, and ordering explosive samples packaged for K9 training from a company like Tripwire Ops in Gettysburg PA (www.tripwireops.com). They can also advise you on the process of setting up containment as well.

It cannot be overstated, that if your agency spends the money to outfit a car, buy a dog, send the handler for training and certification, but does not offer proper support training on real samples of narcotics or explosives, the accuracy of your dog will suffer and your K9 team will not be efficient or productive. It will be money thrown down the drain. Once the team is operational, support is critical with proper training aids.



GIVE YOUR UNIT CONSISTENT TRAINING: INVEST IN A K9 UNIT TRAINER

If you have only one dog or one for every shift, or multiple dogs on every shift, in service training must be led by someone knowledgeable about the training of the K9s for both in service and in case some remediation becomes necessary. I highly recommend that an agency with a K9 unit, send one or more K9 officers through an instructor school, so they can learn modern training techniques. It important for administrators to know a few key facts:

1. Handlers are not trainers. In order to become a trainer, specialized training, and knowledge must be provided to a K9 handler no matter how many K9s he has handled. A firearm user can be a great shot, but he may not be able to teach people how to shoot and operate a wide variety of firearms. The same is true for K9 handlers, they are more or less experts in how to operate their dog, but they are most certainly not trainers.
2. Just because someone has been training police dogs for 30 years doesn't mean they are doing it well, or that they have moved ahead with the times. Too many "trainers" only know one way to work with a dog, and if your dog was trained by a police dog provider using more motivational methods, and you send your K9 team to a trainer using punishment based techniques, you will cause a tremendous amount of confusion for both your dog and handler going forward and can likely ruin a dog that just came out of school.
3. Dogs need consistent training. Techniques used in in-service must be the same as those used to train the dog. By having a unit trainer that knows the techniques used by your police dog provider, you will be in a good position to keep training consistent and keep a unit highly productive.
4. Buying every dog from a different vendor is a recipe for disaster. Every trainer uses different methods and if your unit has dogs all on the same sheet of music, in service training will go more smoothly, and the handlers will not be putting their dogs into training situations that will go against the training their dogs have had. All K9 training is not created equal, and if you find a progressive, sensible trainer to train your dogs, keep with that trainer, and argue with your purchasing department not to switch vendors because some other fly by night vendor is offering dogs at a few hundred dollars less. It will cost you more in time and remediation if you do.

Given these facts, sending a K9 handler or two to even a 4 or 6 week trainer school will ensure a more successful unit. Supervisors should also attend supervisor courses so they can better know what they can do to properly supervise and help their teams to be successful.

PROVIDE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT FOR CONTROLLED AGGRESSION

Every canine unit should have a variety of bite equipment, chosen in tandem with your police K9 vendor. Every piece of equipment is made for a purpose, whether it is to enhance grip (barrel sleeve), or to allow safe training of tar-



getting in the front (Belgian Sleeves), to mimic closely real bites (low profile hidden sleeves, suits, and muzzles). Too many departments do not buy the right equipment, and as such the dogs develop equipment fixations, poor grips, bad targeting, or learn to become “clothes rippers” because we provided them with equipment that doesn’t do the right job for your K9 to mimic real life deployments.

There are so many options available for equipment that it can be overwhelming. Suits should be French, cut, ring-type suits like “Demanet” and “Seynaeve” brands (for example www.demanetonline.com), not typical American “Kimono” style suits. Kimono suits encourage the dog to bite fabric and become clothes rippers. We want low profile (tight to the body and minimum protection - yeah it’s going to hurt when they bite you) hidden sleeves and bite suits you can cover with jogging suits and different kinds of shirts to mimic real clothes, and keep the dog from becoming equipment oriented.

Consult your trainer about what equipment to buy, and when and how to use each. Aggression work is the only part of training a police dog that we cannot train exactly as your dog will see it on the street. We can’t let the dogs bite us for real in training, so we need the best equipment to get the best results. If your trainer is wrapping newspaper and duct tape and twine around arms, fire him. This is 2014, and the equipment options we have that will allow us to properly train our dogs has improved a lot in the past 40 years. Trained instructors will know what equipment is needed in what situations, so if you have someone on your unit trained as an instructor you will have both the knowledge to get the right equipment and the ability to properly make use of it in training.

PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT

There are a few things you can do to protect your investment. Buy from a vendor interested in your future success, which provides both working and health guarantees. Beyond that there is another thing you can do to protect your agency, and that is by buying working dog insurance. Many agencies do not even know this exists. K9s killed in the line of duty can be insured so that the agency can collect a portion of the value of the dog if killed in the line of duty. These policies also cover catastrophic veterinary bills from illness or injury, such as being shot, stabbed, or cancer which is often not covered by vendor guarantees. Vendors should guarantee the dogs you buy, but

they are not insurance companies. Accidents can happen, as K9 goes to the most dangerous calls. You can find companies like Classic Canine Insurance (www.calssiconweb.com) that offer different policies to cover health and mortality for police dogs.

Another important step in protecting your K9 is to provide a good vehicle to the K9 officer. Often K9 units are given older cars, but K9s spend a lot of time in their cars in the summertime, and you do not want your dog in a car during a call to have the AC stop working. Too many K9 lives are lost to malfunctioning AC units. Beyond using newer vehicles, you should invest in a “Hot Dog” device for all your K9 cars. This device will set off the lights and siren, and automatically roll down the windows in the K9 unit (the K9’s cage will still contain the dog physically with the windows down) if the temperature begins to exceed a safe temperature for the dog. The unit will send an alert to the handler that the car is heating up. This is about a \$500 investment that will last the life of your K9 at a minimum. Companies like Criminalistics, Inc. (www.criminalisticsinc.com) sell these along with door popper systems as well. It is a small investment to make in the life of your K9. Overheating can happen in any town in the US no matter the climate.

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Tarheel Canine Training Inc. is a nationally renowned training facility for police service dogs, and has placed trained police dogs at federal, state and local law enforcement agencies nationally and internationally since 1993. Jerry is often a featured speaker at national police K9 conferences, and travels extensively giving seminars to police departments, the US Military, and sport trainers across the United States. Jerry has written a book, *Controlled Aggression*, which is rapidly becoming the standard text for understanding the fundamentals of canine aggression training for police service, personal protection, and competitive dog sports. Jerry also maintains a free blog at www.tarheelcanine.com.

Many of the training concepts mentioned in this article are covered in depth in published articles available on the Tarheel Canine website at www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/

Please feel free to make your handlers, trainers, and training groups aware of this resource.

