

## How to Train Critical Thinkers

By Sue Pivetta

In Emergency Communications, we have this goddess of common sense. If a trainee doesn't make it, we often attribute this to - lack of common sense. I see this attitude as a lack of common sense in training.

Common sense is defined as the ability to choose the correct when presented with a decision. Now, I have common sense in answering a 911 call, working the emergency radio - but do I have common sense when it comes to money? Not really. Is common sense something we have that is 'topic' directed. Can we have common sense in one thing and not another?

I believe you can increase a person's common sense ability if you increase their UNDERSTANDING of what they are doing. For example, we can only teach someone how to do the work of a call taker - but to teach someone to "think" like a call taker involves an entirely different approach.

Traditionally, we say "You watch, I show. Then you do, and I'll watch and correct." It's my belief that the trainee is learning to mimic - to watch not to think. Here are some ideas on how to teach common sense, to teaching thinking.

### 5 Ways To Increase Common Sense

1. As a trainer, think out loud. Instead of reacting to events or complex situations - let the trainee hear what you are thinking - walk them through how you thought. "It's important to let the sergeant know this call is holding, I don't see anyone I can clear and nobody offered up. This call can't wait - maybe he has some ideas."
2. Make sure that you teach what is underneath a way of doing things. For example, why you repeat back or echo on the radio. If trainees understand the reasons behind the actions, they are more likely to do the action when allowed to perform independently.
3. Ask them what they think so you can find out if there is 'stinking' thinking going on. Don't tell too much, ask. Play Columbo, you know the answer - but you ask the question as if you don't. For example: "What just happened there between those two officers?" "What types of ICS statements did you hear on the last call?" "Why did I go to that card on that abdominal pain?"
4. Stop saying, "We all do it different." You don't, you just think you do. And if you do, you need to have a meeting and figure out what it is you all do different and choose the best practice and adopt it. If indeed there is no harm in doing it different (for example saying thank you on the air) then tell the trainee that they have discretion in this area. Less confusion - trainees want the best practice. Trainees do not want to have the burden of figuring out if

Bob, or Jane or Bill do it best so they can then also do it best. They are not equipped to determine this.

5. Add simulation to your training. In all other professions, especially Public Safety, trainees are allowed to practice. Practice is necessary to common sense learning. You learn by doing - we all do. It's time we make sure we include simulation in our training and teach new people to handle complex situations that we create in a safe atmosphere.

## **Conclusion**

Take a moment to consider breaking down the learning into small bite sized pieces. Make it very clear to your trainee that you are doing things for a purpose, not that it's your style - it's what works. Put yourself in a position of learning something entirely new and recall the confusion, frustration and determination that you had to master the subject. Then take a moment to reflect on how a trainee at a Com Center must feel faced with complex work, emotions, challenges and change. Only then will you be able to relate to your trainee in a way that allows them to feel safe to learn and apply what they learn. That is common sense in training.

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