

NTOA COMMAND COLLEGE STUDENT PROFILE



LT. VINCE UPOLE MARYLAND STATE POLICE

Lt. Vince Upole is a 19-year veteran of the Maryland State Police. He began his career in 2001 as a cadet assigned to the Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division and is currently the commander of the Rockville Barrack, just outside Washington, D.C. Lt. Upole is a member of his agency's decentralized Crisis Negotiation Team, Level 1 Civil Disturbance Unit, and of the multi-jurisdictional Western Maryland Combined Negotiations Team.

Q: How do you envision the NTOA Command College benefiting you in your leadership role on your team?

A: I envision the NTOA Command College benefiting me in a leadership role on my team by giving me a better understanding of tactical operations. This will allow our Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT) and SWAT to be better integrated and focus on a more expedient and tactical resolution to high-risk incidents.

Q: You are currently a member of your agency's crisis negotiation team. How do you envision the NTOA Command College benefiting you in that role?

A: Although I am not a team commander or team leader, the skills I obtain will prepare me for a leadership role on the team. It will also help ensure the successful transition of leadership in the future. By having tools from both SWAT and CNT available to me, I will be better equipped to address situations that involve both tactical operations and negotiations. Essentially, a good foundation on both sides will help ensure a more positive outcome for everyone involved.

Q: You have had an opportunity to serve in a number of assignments. What qualities and skills do you think are most important for today's officers?

A: Trust, competence and autonomy. We need officers we can trust to carry out the mission of our organization. We need to trust they will do the right thing and rely on the skills we have given them in the academy. We also need to be able to trust them to ask for help if they are deficient in any particular part of their job and trust them to shoulder the responsibility for any mistakes they make. Competence is key to officers being able to successfully and efficiently carry out their duties. Competence comes from trust; being able to trust them to do the right thing and build their confidence will help them become more competent in their duties. Lastly, autonomy means being able to trust officers who are competent to operate on their own. We are faced with difficult situations, and officers cannot hesitate to make a split-second decision. When we can trust our officers to carry out their duties and work autonomously competently, they will make better decisions and be able to explain those decisions more thoroughly to the department, courts and media.

Q: You have had an opportunity to serve in civilian law enforcement and work for a variety of leaders. What consistent traits do you see in good leaders?

A: I have been very fortunate to have had several leaders who have shown me what type of leader I want to be. I've also had those who have shown me what I don't want to be. Integrity, respect, self-awareness and flexibility are consistent traits I have seen in good leaders. If the leader lacks integrity, everyone under that leader risks falling short on it. We cannot ask our officers to do things we will not. That means sticking to the values and goals of the organization and working to accomplish the mission every day, leading by example, and modeling the behavior we expect from our officers.

Respect is a mutual trait, and leaders should respect their peers and subordinates and earn their respect in return. To respect a position within the rank structure is one thing, but to respect the person who holds the rank is entirely different. This is where self-awareness and flexibility come into play. Leaders who are self-aware and know themselves can more competently serve in their position. Leaders need to acknowledge they may not be an expert in everything and stepping aside to allow someone more competent in a particular skill set will help us achieve the desired outcome. This does not mean the leader is deficient; they may not have a specific set of skills. Leaders must also be flexible and realize they cannot lead every officer the same way. Some officers may require a more direct approach, while others may require an indirect approach. A good leader can be both and realize when they need to be each.

Q: As a leader within your organization, what role do you feel you play in identifying and mentoring the next generation of leaders?

A: This is an important one. As leaders, we play a crucial role in identifying and mentoring the next generation of leaders. We need to ensure our officers are well equipped to handle the ever-changing world we live in. Recently, we had to adjust our approach to how we do our job every day. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and civil unrest around the country, we had to change tactics and adjust to what was happening. Our agency did an outstanding job providing the tools and training we needed to be successful. The leaders of tomorrow, and those of us who still have a lot of time left, need to be great communicators, flexible, and not afraid to

step out of our comfort zone. Whether it's being on the front lines with our officers or participating in an interview panel with a religious organization to help calm fears of being attacked, we need to be there to model the behavior we expect and to prepare for the unknown.

Q: What feedback would you give other NTOA members who are considering enrolling in the Command College?

A: When I discovered the NTOA Command College, I was looking to further my education and accomplish a personal goal. I completed it on my own time and at my own expense. The NTOA Command College was an excellent experience for me! I learned a lot about leadership, tactical operations and risk management. The residential portion at the NTOA Conference in Orlando was great. When we went around the room on the first day for introductions, everyone explained what their position was and what team they were from. When it was my turn, I got a lot of looks like, "Who is this guy?" when I explained, "Unlike you guys, I'm not a SWAT operator, I'm a negotiator." But those guys took me in and treated me like one of their own for that week. I learned a lot from them, and it's an experience I won't soon forget. The personal interaction, first-hand accounts, and lessons learned from the instructors and fellow students were phenomenal. The comradery between all the students and instructors was a great example of how people from different departments can come together as a cohort. It was also an honor for me to be the first negotiator to complete the program. I feel everything I learned from the NTOA Command College will benefit me in many different aspects of my job.

Q: You have already graduated from Module I of the Command College. Do you feel the course work is still relevant for your assignment on CNT?

A: The skills are relevant to my position as a negotiator and as a police officer in general. The course work focused on leadership, tactics, legal issues and risk management. I found the risk management part particularly helpful because I think it's something we don't typically focus on heavily. The course work and content have enhanced my skills and given me a better understanding of leadership, liability, training, and decision-making for what it takes to be a leader in this arena. The books, case studies and lessons from the NTOA Command College are a valuable resource.

Find out today if the NTOA Command College is right for you! Visit ntoa.org/academy to learn more.