



Training vs. Education:

Why Both Are Needed to Succeed

BY SID HEAL

Many concepts are more different in degree than in kind. Some of them, like command versus control, information versus intelligence, or sectors of fire versus fields of fire, clearly lie within the discipline of tactical science. Others, like constraints versus restraints or reactions versus decisions, have broader applications. Such is the case with training versus education.

In simple terms, *training* is best understood as a method for increasing technical skills to increase a skill or perform some task. Performance is relatively easily measured because it tends to be quantitative. The elapsed time for running a given distance, the score on a test, or a demonstrable ability to disassemble and reassemble a weapon or piece of equipment, are all examples. Understandably, training tends to have a comparatively narrower focus than education, with the primary objective of creating or increasing proficiency.



As personnel gain experience and are assigned more challenging duties, judgment and knowledge become increasingly important. With experience and advancement, knowing how to do something is not nearly as important as knowing what to do and why.

Education, on the other hand, is a process intended to increase knowledge and judgment. These are considerably more difficult to assess because they are qualitative. Moreover, the methods of measurement are appreciably more subjective and so must be judged rather than measured. A demonstrable ability to adapt to changing circumstances, a capacity to incorporate disparate ideas into a cohesive course of action, or an aptitude for succeeding under adverse circumstances, are typical examples.

As can be seen, training tends toward the practical aspect of things, while education is more theoretical in nature. While training and education are different, they both play a vital role in preparing someone for a specific task or role. Training is the most common method of preparation for entry-level assignments. In law enforcement, for example, subjects like defensive tactics, handling firearms, report writing, and developing physical fitness are essential skills that must be mastered before an officer is capable of working without constant supervision. Much of this training is “hands-on” at a firing range, gymnasium, or role-play-

ing, and under the tutelage of experienced trainers. Like doctors, pilots, and other skilled labor, these same students will eventually be taught while experiencing real situations in the form of on-the-job training.

As personnel gain experience and are assigned more challenging duties, judgment and knowledge become increasingly important. With experience and advancement, knowing how to do something is not nearly as important as knowing what to do and why. These are particularly critical when roles change, especially with promotions. Unfortunately, gaining knowledge and acquiring sound judgment is far more difficult than teaching skills. While skills can be objectively analyzed and taught as procedures, judgment is highly subjective. No longer is there a “size small, fits all” model. The capabilities for these new assignments tend to require more initiative, decision-making, and exploration rather than obedience and compliance.

Not only must the curricula change, so too must the methods for developing and enhancing these core requirements. Instead of strict adherence to rules and procedures,

satisfactory performance in these more complex assignments requires knowledge, discernment, and sound judgment. For example, is it more important to do a thing right or do the right thing? Similarly, is it better to go fast or in the right direction?

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Complicated tasks are not amenable to standardized procedures, techniques, or rules. There are simply too many variables and permutations to provide for consistency. Success in these conditions will require abilities to recognize the factors and influences in play, coupled with a thorough understanding of relevant concepts and principles. There are no rules, procedures, or algorithms that will prepare a person to satisfactorily perform in these more demanding circumstances for the simple reason that rules and procedures are context-specific, meaning that they were developed and perfected for a particular task in a given context.¹

Education is the primary method for preparing people for demanding assignments that involve confusing situations, uncertain priorities, or actions that do not always conform to expectations. While it is unrealistic to train 10,000 responses, teaching the principles that will lead to an appropriate response is not only possible but practical.

Education differs from training not only by the subject matter but how it is taught. Instead of the simulations, drills, repetition, and memorization commonly used for developing skills, education requires reading, discussions, exercises, reviews, games, and similar methods, to develop a repertoire of relevant experiences, along with the wherewithal for understanding and appropriately responding when they occur in real life.

Education is more qualitative than quantitative in that success is difficult to measure and instead must be judged. Depending on the circumstances, a correct answer for one situation might be disastrous in another. Moreover, in any given situation, there may be more than one right answer.² “Correct” solutions may not be determined by an instructor but rather judged by peers and experts. Teaching is often better achieved with mentors, advisors, and consultants than with instructors or subject matter experts. Reading, thinking, and discussing are highly individualistic and will require far greater personal effort.

Training and education complement each other. In developing courses for preparing someone for any assignment, both training and education will be required. How much of each will be a result of both the quality of the students and the nature of the assignment. Because training is easier to design, provide, and measure results, there is a propensity to favor it. Notwithstanding, while skills are important, there are nearly no law enforcement assignments that will not require education to supplement training. For example, the knowledge that a situation is going

TRAINING	EDUCATION
Practical application (specific tasks)	Theoretical oriented (general concepts)
Create skills and increase proficiency	Expand knowledge and improve judgment
Can be quantified (fundamentally objective)	Inherently qualitative (subjective in nature)
Easily measured	Must be judged
Narrow perspective	Broad in scope and perspective
One or few suitable answers or methods	Multiple appropriate resolutions
Common for entry-level roles	Common for complex or advanced roles
Context specific	Categorical with wide application
Usually taught with “hands on” and OJT	Learned by reading, exercises, or discussions

to require lethal force to survive is not much help without the marksmanship and weapons handling skills to survive it.

ENDNOTES

1. The U.S. Army refers to this context in three parts: task, conditions, and standards. The task identifies the duty to be performed; for example, move a wounded officer to a position of safety. The conditions refer to the context and setting under which the task is to be performed; for example, nighttime, rain, fog, or under fire. The standards identify how well the task is performed; for example, in a given time or without increasing injury.
2. This phenomenon is especially problematic since some are inclined to believe that there are no wrong answers, just some that are better than others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles "Sid" Heal retired as a commander from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department in 2008 after nearly 33 years of service, more than half of which was spent in units charged with handling law enforcement special and emergency operations. He retired from the Marine Corps

Reserve after 35 years and four tours of combat. Heal is the author of "Sound Doctrine" and "Field Command," as well as more than 160 articles on law enforcement subjects. He is a graduate of the FBI's National Academy and the California Command College and has taught at the U.S. War Colleges for nearly 20 years.

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