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## More Women Trainers Needed

Written by Farnam, Vicki

Five of us were gathered around the [LouKa Tactical](#) vendor's table at the 2014 [ILEETA](#) conference. We were taking full advantage of the opportunity to actually have time for a conversation instead of the usual few brief words between classes. For me, that conference time is about the only time each year I have a chance to talk to other women trainers. The conversation took a serious turn, however, when we realized most of us have been in this training business for many years. Some of the group are now retired from their law enforcement jobs but have continued as trainers. Others of us are still working as trainers in our own companies or as individual instructors in firearms or defensive tactics as we have for over 20 years.

Figuratively looking over our shoulders, we began to wonder who was coming along behind to continue as women instructors in the hard skills. And that observation led us to the question of why there aren't very many women doing just that.

Lou Ann Hamblin suggested the five of us join together, with a couple of other experienced instructors, to see if we could find the answer. The

result was a panel discussion at the 2015 ILEETA conference. Members of the panel have between 20 and 30 years of experience each. They have all taught hard skills such as: firearms, defensive tactics, emergency driving, ballistic shield, chemical weapons, as well as instructor development. Some are also authors of books and articles on training of the hard skills.

The two sessions of the panel discussion were well attended. It became very clear immediately as the audience participation began, that this was a topic that has been on the minds of many in law enforcement. However, as is often the case with challenging topics, it is rarely discussed publicly. They were glad to speak about it openly and to hear or share some observations and solutions.

One of the first questions was, “Do you seek out women in your department to become trainers and what do you look for in those potential trainers? The response from the audience first was that in many departments the pool of potential women trainers is small because the percentage of women officers is small.

Second, the success rate of women in the hard skills still tends to be lower than for men. Many in the audience have seen women officers who had very bad experiences and marginal success in hard skills training in the academy have no interest at all in joining the ranks of the instructors of those skills in their own departments.

A woman officer in the audience shared with us that when she started as an instructor 13 years ago, she really shouldn't have. She realized she knew so little of the skill she was teaching, but she stuck with it and became better because she decided she wanted to learn. That officer is the exception. More than likely, if a woman doesn't think she is competent in the skill, she isn't going to voluntarily step forward to be an instructor in that skill.

The next question was if there are perceived or actual cultural barriers to women being instructors. Again, the audience was eager to address even this potentially sensitive question. Of course, there were both yes and no

answers. Perceptions is the key word here. There were three male officers, all trainers, from one department in the audience and their frustration level was very high as they reached out to the panel for answers.

The department they work for has five women officers. These three trainers had repeatedly tried to recruit one or more of the five women to be trainers also. The women all refuse to even consider the request. Why? Here was a specific request to recruit one or more of the women officers to be trainers and yet they wouldn't even consider it. The panel offered various possible reasons for the refusals but of course had no definitive answers. It could be that none of them thought themselves competent. Or they previously had bad experiences in training. Or because in spite of there being a direct request, they thought they would not be readily accepted as part of the instructor cadre.

The negativity could have come from just one of the women or all of them. In any event, it is so frustrating when positive motives are met with a skeptical attitude. So, yes, both perceived and actual cultural barriers are still in place, but the audience helped with the answers. First, ask the woman officer if she has ever thought about being an instructor. Let that idea roll around in her head for a while. Tell her you have noticed her ability to grasp the instruction she receives in a way that makes you think she would be good at teaching others. She doesn't have to be the best shooter or the best at defensive tactics or any of the other skills. But she does need to have the ability to communicate the information.

Find her a female role model. There may not be anyone in your own department, but find another woman who is already an instructor who can be an example of the success a woman can achieve as a trainer. Look for a woman who has been successful as a trainer in another department. ILEETA would be a useful resource.

It was agreed by everyone that having a mentor is perhaps the most important factor for encouraging and developing women instructors (or any instructor). But it was also agreed that mentors for developing new

women instructors do not have to be other women. Mentors can also be male. Mentors who are true instructors and have the best interest of their students in mind look for others with the same attitude. Mentors set an example to follow and are available to provide continuous support and knowledge.

Finally, when you find that woman officer and you encourage her to become an instructor, remind her she now becomes a role model and eventually a mentor. That she too should always look to expand her own skills, join trainer organizations, and help bring along those who will follow in her footsteps.

### **Members of the Panel Discussion at ILEETA**

Lou Ann Hamblin: Retired, Van Buren Township, Mich. Police and Owner, LouKa Tactical

Patricia Thompson: Retired, FBI Special Agent

Sarah Ahrens: Retired, Rockford, Ill. Police

Diana Rathborne: Owner, MKG Martial Arts Products

Chelly Seibert: Retired, Dayton, Ohio Police

Marie D'Amico: Attorney/Prosecutor/Trainer/Consultant

Vicki Farnam: Instructor, Defense Training International

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