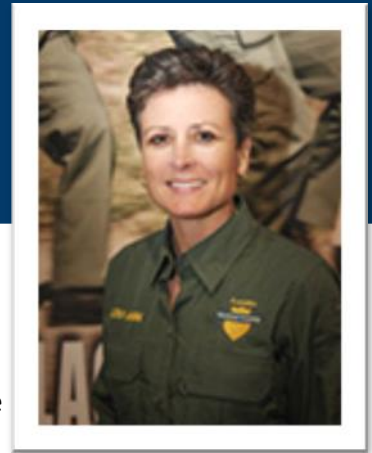


Building Warrior Women Trainings: Focusing on Recruiting for Hard Skills

by Lou Ann Hamblin



At the 2015 ILEETA conference a handpicked, panel-led discussion group delivered for the first time the "Building Warrior Women Trainers" presentation. This presentation was repeated in 2015 at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement High Liability Training Conference and again in 2016 through 2018 at the ILEETA conferences. The initial purpose was to identify and document the gaps that exist involving the lack of female officers with respect to the hard skill training areas. We identified the five "hard skills areas" as physical fitness, defensive tactics/combatives, emergency vehicle operations, combat casualty care and firearms, with firearms having the greatest disparity. Why is this such an important topic to discuss? Admittedly this has always been a focal point with our group. LouKa Tactical takes pride in having a diverse training cadre and mentoring other women in law enforcement but we understand the challenges that may exist for others. .

Factually, it is reported that there are cultural differences that inhibit potential females to become instructors. Should a female exhibit the potential for a training unit there can also be challenges in approaching and recruiting depending on a number of variables; career or personal timing, childbirth and other family responsibilities i.e. caring for aging parents compared to men in some cases. Over the years some female trainers shared that in many instances the cultural issues include training team personality and their inability or unwillingness to conform to that personality or culture. It is possible that females are not being 100% honest with supervisors as to why they lose interest also. One common comment is 'those guys (training unit) are too competitive for me.' Oftentimes women lack confidence and fail to see the positive attributes that they will bring to a unit. They sometimes focus too much on *what they don't know, or can't do* creating self imposed limitations.

Another notable barrier is that they lack role models. If female trainers are non-existent at the academy or the in-service level where does a female officer acquire such role models? And, how important is that? Ask Serena Williams and Tiger Woods. Both acknowledge the lack of

African American role models while developing as young athletes. However, at the 2014 U.S. Open tournament 9 of the top 14 ranked American women were African American, Asian, or Latina including Serena and Venus Williams. "Who knows if they would have played if Venus and I didn't. But we feel we had something to do with it." (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/tennis/2014/08/25/venus-williams-serena-williams-impact-future-chris-event-sloane-stephens/14559409/>)

While there are a host of reasons why there are so few female hard skill instructors one obvious reason is that the overall pool of candidates is still quite low. Simply there are not enough women being recruited and retained. Women in policing now make up approximately 13-14 percent of all employees as of 2013 according to the National Center for Women & Policing. (<http://womenandpolicing.com/>)

Full-time Law Enforcement Employees, by Population Group, Percent Male and Female, 2013

- Nationwide in 2013, 88.4 percent of full-time law enforcement officers were males.
- Nearly 61 percent (60.7) of full-time civilian law enforcement employees were females.
- Of the city population groups, cities with populations of 10,000 to 24,999 inhabitants employed the highest percentage (92.1) of male officers.
- Cities with populations of 1 million and over (a subset of the total Group I cities) employed the highest percentage (17.0) of female officers.
- Regarding the nation's full-time civilian law enforcement employees, cities with populations of 100,000 to 249,999 inhabitants had the highest percentage (74.0) of females.
- Metropolitan county agencies had the highest percentage (44.9) of male full-time civilian law enforcement employees.

(<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/table-74>)

Women...con't.

Short answer: Hire more women. Correct answer would include recruiting more women who are geared for, or gravitate towards, learning and eventually teaching in the motor skill areas. I recall delivering a "Teaching Female Shooters" class in 2004 in the State of Minnesota. During class, while discussing female officer fitness issues one participant inquired; "Unfortunately I am not involved in the recruiting process at my agency. But if I were, where would I find women who would have a baseline fitness level and aptitude for learning to shoot well?" My recommendation was to find himself at college athletic departments, ROTC programs and the closest military installation. There are certain physical qualities that many of these women have along with *esprit de corps*, leadership qualities, teamwork and physical skill sets that would transfer into public safety cultures. Both the Ann Arbor Police Department (MI) and the University of Michigan Police Department are perfect examples of this testament. Kathleen Vonk (Ann Arbor PD (ret.) currently a Sgt. with Nevada Highway Patrol and LouKa Tactical co-owner) has been a fitness, firearms and police cyclist instructor for 20 years. Working at both the basic academy and in-service levels she also served at the National Tactical Officer's Physical Fitness Chair. She describes women's involvement in the "Fab 5" (fitness, D.T, EVO, C3 and firearms) as "shifting" due to the growing popularity of CrossFit among women. The communal concept of CrossFit work outs as well as training for and running 10Ks and half marathons are two examples. Women tend to compare and share rather than contrast their physical activities and attributes. Both mentioned police agencies actively recruit college athletes for their student-athlete attributes including personal discipline, teamwork and have experienced high levels of intense competition. These attributes may lend themselves to developing law enforcement related skills sets, particularly in the motor skills arena. Having experienced positive coaching, formal mentoring and role models may also lead to the understanding of training others in a productive and performance enhancing manner.

I have asked my fellow trainers; "what do you look for specifically in potential female officers as trainers in the

hard skills?" Interestingly the number #1 answer is her own personal performance. In other words, can she walk the walk? Well, she should be able to hold her own with the instrument at hand. What else? Are there attributes other than running, shooting, driving, hitting that are necessary? Also, are you bringing her on just to help train other women? Similarly to asking for a female officer to perform a street pat down on another female because a male was never trained to do so? Is she respected by the receivers of information at every level of the organization? Is she a good social fit? Can she recognize and communicate to various learning styles? Is she knowledgeable and a practitioner of the area in which she teaches? Does she carry herself in a way that others would want to emulate? Is she approachable? Is she inspiring? Is she mature? Does she have a high level of emotional indigence? Is she hungry and passionate about the topic to continue to develop herself? Is she virtuous? Is she resilient during setbacks? Is she comfortable with the title "leader?"



Other questions I find myself asking supervisors of training units: What about the training unit and its staff? Is the team ready for her strong personality? Are there no strings attached mentoring avenues for professional

development? Is her peer group mature, patient and understanding of basic learning and communication differences? Do you have strong leadership overseeing the training division? Lastly, how is she openly treated by the cadre? This public display will greatly impact her performance as it sends a direct message to those in the training environment and beyond. This will also play a role in whether other talented females will seek to join the training division in the future.

We are in the human performance business. Team building through diversity in human resources is the number 1 commodity for training unit performance. However, seeking the right people with the applicable background and drive is paramount for everyone. There are other considerations that may inhibit a female's decision to join or stay in a training unit. Consider all variables in mind when identifying, recruiting, retaining and advancing female trainers in the hard skills.

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About LouKa Tactical

In business since 1999 it is the largest female owned and operated company of its kind. Co-owner Lou Ann Hamblin retired from law enforcement having served for 22 years working uniform and training as well as undercover to include a special assignment with the DEA. She holds a masters degree in Human Performance Technology from the University of Michigan. She specializes in instructor development, training specialty units and female officers. Lou Ann is a certified firearms and defensive tactics instructor in a variety of disciplines. Contact: louann@loukactical.com

