

THE

Tactical Edge®

SWAT | CNT | PATROL | COMMAND | CANINE | TEMS | FIRE/EMS



WINTER 2026

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 20 2025 CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS CONFERENCE
- 28 'SUB-CRISIS' ENTRIES IN HOSTAGE INCIDENTS
- 40 DEVELOPING A SOUND TRAINING OUTLINE
- 46 THE EVOLUTION OF A REGIONAL SWAT TEAM
- 84 WHY EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT OODA MAY BE WRONG

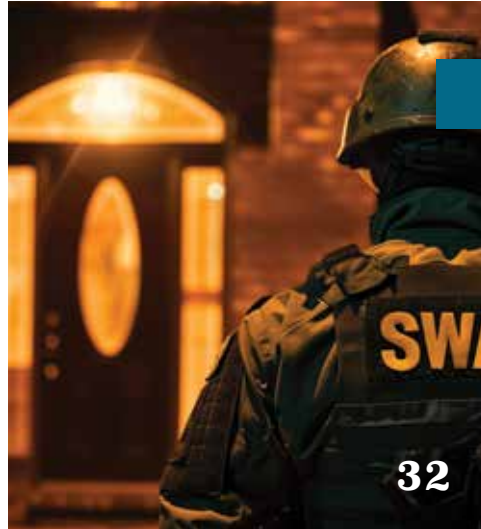
PLATINUM MINING AND WARRANT SERVICE:

LESSONS *in* STRATEGIC RISK

P. 32

Table of CONTENTS

WINTER 2026 - VOL.44 | NO.1



ABOUT THE COVER

What if the risks we accept as “part of the job” aren’t as inevitable as we think? In his article “Platinum Mining and Warrant Service: Lessons in Strategic Risk” on page 32 of this issue, Joel Schmid draws a powerful parallel between platinum mining and modern warrant service, challenging law enforcement to reexamine long-held assumptions about strategic risk, officer safety and the choices that shape life-or-death outcomes.

32



20



40

NTOA UPDATES

- 04** Director’s Message
- 06** NTOA News
- 18** Training Calendar
- 94** Submission Guidelines

FEATURES

- 20** 2025 Crisis Negotiations Conference – Chandler, AZ
By Buck Rogers
- 28** ‘Sub-Crisis’ Entries in Hostage Incidents
By Travis Norton
- 32** Platinum Mining and Warrant Service: Lessons in Strategic Risk
By Joel Schmid
- 40** Developing a Sound Training Outline
By Bruce Liebe
- 46** Growing Pains and Forward Progress: The Evolution of a Regional SWAT Team
By David Cohen
- 50** The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon in Tactical Operations: Building Elasticity to Counter Cognitive Rigidity
By Chris Eklund and Mitch Javidi





54



92



66

TO ADVERTISE —

Call 800-279-9127, ext. 111 or email Corey Luby, Advertising Manager, at ntoaadvertising@ntoa.org.

FOR MEDIA KIT —

Visit ntoa.org and click on The Tactical Edge to download the media kit.

FOLLOW US!



DEPARTMENTS

54 CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS
Why We Negotiate: *Downs v. United States*
By Marvin E. Weinrick

58 FIREARMS
Lessons Learned from Implementing an Agency-Wide Red Dot Pistol Program
By Michael Vafeados

62 LEGAL
Martin v. United States: Federal Agents and the Supremacy Clause
By Eric Daigle

66 TRAINING
Elevating Tactical Training: From Knowing the Science to Doing the Work
By Jeff Johnsgaard

74 MEMBER TESTED AND RECOMMENDED

FOCUS

84 Lessons Learned from The Debrief – Beyond the Loop: Why Everything You Know About OODA May Be Wrong
By Jon Becker

92 Tactical Readiness: Training, Neuroplasticity and Performance
By Richard H. Carmona

ELEVATING TACTICAL TRAINING:

FROM KNOWING *THE SCIENCE*

TO DOING THE WORK

BY JEFF JOHNSGAARD

This is part one of a two-part series.

Law enforcement training circles are full of terms like *spacing*, *retrieval*, *context* and *variability*. Many instructors can recite their definitions. But here's the hard question: Are these principles being applied in training or just spoken about?

Performance at the end of a training day often appears good. But as decades of cognitive and motor learning research show, performance is not the same as learning. True learning only becomes evident later, when officers can still perform days or weeks after training. Even retention isn't enough. Our real measure must be transfer: Can officers apply the skills under pressure in new, real-world situations?

This distinction is not just nitpicking. It's the difference between officers "looking good" in training and "being good" in the alley, stairwell or during a vehicle stop, when they need to adapt to situations that are never the same.

The uncomfortable truth is that many trainers fall victim to the "Illusion of Learning," a topic covered by Dr. Timothy Lee, a world leader in motor learning science, in his article "Desirable Difficulties in Training Improve Skill Retention," published in *The Tactical Edge*.¹ Both trainers and students can fall prey to the illusion of learning by seeing improved performance during or immediately after

training, but later discovering through personal experience, body camera footage or after-action reviews that operators' decisions and skills have deteriorated or failed to transfer entirely.

Documentation and durability

Even when training is effective, with what's described by Lee and adult learning science as "desirable difficulties," and even when the training is rich in context, real-world design and feedback aimed at fostering self-guided assessment and growth, the program often remains fragile. One strong instructor may carry the training, but when they retire, are promoted or move to another unit, the quality typically declines.

Durable excellence arises from documentation and institutionalization. When principles are integrated into lesson plans, instructor development and agency culture, training endures through turnover. It becomes resilient.

One low-cost way to incorporate more evidence-based principles into your training delivery is to have your subject-matter experts (SMEs) evaluate their lesson plans. Have them create a list of the key concepts and principles. Then guide them through designing priming, boosting and testing (retrieval practice) that can be embedded in the lesson plans

themselves. These primers and boosters can then be shared with other instructors teaching their blocks. This maintains the same amount of training time while adding spacing, priming and boosting to help the learning stick much longer. It also avoids problems with scheduling an instructor for a primer and booster on top of their normal teaching times.

Once that’s done, review the structure of your training day(s) or week(s). Using the lesson plans created by your SMEs, easily incorporate evidence-grounded learning concepts for better learning outcomes, such as how to initially motivate learners, establish and clarify context, foster emotional engagement by the instructor, and determine what, when and how feedback will be provided. These concepts are integrated into the written lessons themselves, and the only additional step is understanding how to implement them.

Here’s an example of how to apply spaced practice or booster training: avoid explaining, demonstrating or telling them what to review. Too often, I hear a well-meaning instructor say, “So last time we did X, Y, Z — now practice that again.” This is not the best approach. Let the students try to recall themselves how the skill went. They will feel uneasy, and we need to explain that practicing recall is essential to making the information stick. Do not let them look it up or ask. Do not tell your classmates if you know. Doing so prevents the “effortful recall” of the information, which makes learning much stronger. If there is no struggle, there is no real learning.

Understanding the science, how to apply it to each of our officers, and having that thoroughly documented are how we shift from a training program that “belongs” to one instructor to one that “belongs” to the agency. This resilience is crucial for tactical units, where performance gaps can lead to life-and-death situations.

To build this durability, agencies need three things:

1. Buy-in from leadership and trainers, creating an institutionalized attitude
2. Doers who are willing to put in the work and who are not just personalities but process-driven instructors. The work also includes strong documentation that goes far beyond well-formulated objectives and assessments. If it is not documented, it did not happen and is unlikely to be sustained in future training.
3. A replicable framework grounded in research, not just buzzwords, but principles documented in a way that others can carry forward.

Without these, even top-tier training will fall apart over time and with personnel changes. I’ve seen it firsthand at all levels, from Tier 1 Special Forces units to recruit academies with large training divisions and small departments with only one or two instructors. After staffing changes, the program fades and turns into a mere copy of a copy. The core principles are forgotten, and the method for applying the research is lost.

Smarter training, not more training

The standard objection is: “We don’t have more time, money or resources.” The good news is, you don’t need them. You just need to train smarter within the time you already have.

1. Leverage existing time with spacing and retrieval.

Begin each session with brief retrieval drills on previous material. Instead of recapping for them, have them actively recall information themselves. Break long sessions into spaced practice rather than front-loading the basics. This approach allows sleep to help consolidate skills into long-term memory and allows some “forgetting,” making retrieval necessary later. The key point is to ensure new skills are integrated into context as early as possible. This doesn’t add extra time; it enhances the effectiveness of the time already spent.

2. Document for durability.

- Review lesson plans with a research-informed eye. I have other articles on doing this, specifically, if you would like more information.
- Build principles into the structure itself, like priming, boosting, retrieval, variability and feedback that uses well-formed questioning, not pushing or telling students.
- Ensure your training can outlast any change of instructor by identifying and teaching the next generation the “why” behind the training.

3. Representative design and contextual variability — the biggest win. Representative design means the cues and decisions officers rehearse during training should align with those they will encounter in real situations. However, in law enforcement training, especially with firearms, this principle is frequently violated.

Representative design is the most powerful principle of training, and the one most often violated, which greatly decreases effective transfer to the street.

The standard objection is: “We don’t have more time, money or resources.” The good news is, you don’t need them. You just need to train smarter within the time you already have.

• Real-world cues — such as a role player being escorted suddenly tensing up and turning toward you, or a 90-degree elbow bend on a role player pulling a pistol from their back waistband — must be embedded in the locations and situations where they will be found.

• Officer repetitions must occur because they made sense out of the cues and implemented actions to negate threats or act decisively if unable.

• Lastly, there must be a degree of variability that at least matches likely real-world outcomes for each intervention or option an officer does.

Following the “Challenge Point Framework,”²² a model for thinking about motor learning, I add this variability as “contextual pressure” to have operators regulate and practice attentional focus amid increasing emotional demands. These pressures can be tailored to the individual, and skilled trainers must calibrate accordingly for each training session. I refer to this as giving each person “5 pounds on their barbell” at a time.

Here is an example from a unit I recently observed where a few small adjustments resulted in much better outcomes and long-term learning. This unit aimed to help operators recognize lethal-force situations, identify potential unsafe backgrounds and quickly adjust their position. Their three-evolution drill progression looked like this:

• **Evolution 1:** Solo operator with six numbered IPSIC targets. Instructor calls out a number. Operator searches the targets for the called number, assesses the background, and, if safe, engages with marking cartridges or moves to engage safely. The background was unsafe because the targets were placed in a “U” shape, with some angled and others in the background.

• **Evolution 2:** Pair of operators, multiple photo-realistic targets, some designated shoot/no-shoot. Engage on command as outlined in Evolution 1.

APF ARMORY

THE EDGE YOU NEED WHEN LIVES ARE ON THE LINE



LE001
10.5" SBR



LE002
16" CARBINE



CONTACT FOR DUTY-READY SOLUTIONS

8290 STATE HWY 29 N
ALEXANDRIA, MN 56308

320-852-3040

SALES@APFARMORY.COM

APFARMORY.COM

LAW ENFORCEMENT



• **Evolution 3:** Live role players emerging from cover, possible deadly threat or not.

On the surface, this progression looks to meet the objectives of the training day. However, upon closer examination, we find some potential negative impacts.

Issues observed:

- Operators searched for numbers to detect threats, using an artificial cue and incorrect cue placement.
- Engagement was initiated by the instructor’s voice, not by the environment.
- Operators performed many repetitions, but few to none of these were what the instructors would want their operators to do on the street. As a result, the repetitions were not high quality, and ultimately, a well-intentioned bad idea and a poor use of training time.

Since repetitions were understood as the goal, operators failed to perform post-engagement actions, including trigger reset and threat assessment, nor did they move to advantageous positions or communicate effectively. When they did communicate, they didn’t actually press the radio transmit button; they just spoke aloud with their hands on their firearm.

Much of the post engagement issues stemmed from the lack of variability in the threat’s response to their firing or even the timeframe for how quickly the threat ceased. Again, this is reinforcing behavior that we do not want to happen on the street, when their attention is pulled by other demands and their “muscle memory” fails them because we have allowed it in our training design.

All of this because they focused on the number of repetitions they could get, not the quality of the practice. This is what I call *training the wrong cue set*. Officers are being wired to act on information they will never see on the street, occurring in locations we would not want them attending to in the real world.

Contrast the previous training with a representative design of training:

- Role players present both threats and non-threats that evolve over time. I have used one role player and 15 operators across different locations simultaneously, which saves time.
- Non-lethal technology, preferably blank cartridges instead of marking ones. This allows for cues from the role player that are not visible to the student when wearing PPE. It is the best way I know to train operators to read the situation and make predictions about when to draw, when to fire, how much to fire and when to stop. (Note: Some of you may question the use of blanks instead of marking cartridges, and I will share my thoughts on both in more detail in part two of this article.)
- With trained role players, cues match reality; threats are genuine, and the timing of evolving threats is considered. Body language, hand movements, distance and environment now should accurately mimic real situations, taking time to cease once engagement is decisive.

The importance of decision-making in each repetition is significant, but training operators to focus on irrelevant areas of a person trains them to attend to the wrong cues.

Then, providing a visual cue to fire that is not realistic, or stating “threat,” forces them to mentally make personal adjustments to transfer this non-representative training to real-world scenarios.

During this specific training, we had no time to train our role players, but we made a few quick changes that significantly improved the quality of the training. If given more time, I would add more context, but these few suggestions had an immediate impact on the training, which, once completed, received 100 percent buy-in from both training staff and operators.

- Use only photo-realistic targets; do not use IPSIC targets with numbers to identify threats.
- Remove the center of the photo-realistic target so no operator just shoots at targets with holes and does their own scan and assessment.
- Turn off the lights and have operators use their own lights to actively search and engage what they find when they discover it — realistic engagement cues.
- Arrange operators together and ensure they focus on follow-through and post-engagement skills.
- Have representations of cover to compel an evaluation of movement before, during or after engagement.
- And the biggest win of all, have the operators do this first with live role players and provide them with all kinds of variability. Then you can take and isolate specific parts of that “whole picture” because the operator knows where that isolated piece fits within the context of the total incident.

If that is too much for some reason, you can have all the operators observe the unfolding scene acted out by the training staff. I would use a list of well-formulated questions to draw out the operators’ concepts, principles and decisions, establishing the foundation for subsequent practice.

I cannot overstate the great benefits of using live role players or another method to establish context and address potential real-life variability first. If I were going to switch to paper targets at all, it would only be after my operators had learned many patterns of variability first. This is where competence increases. Then I would go and shoot a specific part of this with live fire, framing the operators for each by telling them, “Remember when this part of the drill happened, that is the target setup now in front of you.” This live-fire application is where confidence grows.

Officers are being wired to act on information they will never see on the street, occurring in locations we would not want them attending to in the real world.

The research is clear:

- Vickers & Lewinski (2012) found that elite officers did not move faster than rookies; they moved sooner, because they recognized critical cues earlier.³

- Gary Klein’s Recognition-Primed Decision (RPD) model shows that under time pressure, decisions come from recognizing patterns, not deliberating options. Our training needs to offer as many likely patterns to operators as possible.⁴

- Representative training builds that pattern library, the “Rolodex of cue cards” that allows officers to move sooner, anticipate and dominate encounters.

- Pinder, Davids, Araújo, & Renshaw (2011) demonstrate that representative learning design is directly tied to transfer; the closer practice resembles real-world cues, the more likely skills are to transfer.⁵

I believe this is the core of game intelligence or “Game IQ” — training officers not just to shoot, but to see, anticipate, decide and act as fast as reality demands.

Barriers to change

Of course, barriers remain: vertical retirees and those whose egos cannot handle being challenged to examine what they believe; instructors who don’t know what they don’t know; agencies that focus on evaluating performance rather than on learning. But these challenges can be addressed by highlighting the difference between current performance and future transfer, documenting training procedures and demonstrating the critical consequences of poor representative design.

If your agency wants to move from understanding science to taking action, focus on representative design and document it.

Develop your unit’s:

- **Hands-on training:** Live courses where your instructors demonstrate and implement these principles in real time.

- **Consultation and lesson-plan review:** Evaluate your training to identify illusions of learning, document processes and develop lasting programs.

- **Instructor development:** Focus on teaching the artful application, not just the definitions — so every instructor becomes a process-driven “doer,” not merely a personality.

You don’t need more money or additional hours. You need research-informed training, purposeful application and institutional support for lasting impact. That’s how we develop adaptive officers who act faster, make better decisions and survive the fight.

Conclusion

The NTOA has always represented tactical excellence. To achieve this, we must ensure our training goes beyond classroom performance; it must also focus on retention, transfer and durability in real-world situations.

By embedding research-grounded principles, documenting them for institutional resilience and insisting on representative design, we prepare officers not just to perform in training but to succeed in the field. And we can do it with the time and resources you already have.

Part two of this series will dive into how to train cues for decision-making.

Endnotes

1. Lee, Timothy, “Desirable Difficulties in Training Improve Skill Retention,” *The Tactical Edge*, Summer 2022, pg 34.
2. Nicola J Hodges & Keith R Lohse (2022): An extended challenge based framework for practice design in sports coaching, *Journal of Sports Sciences*, DOI: 10.1080/02640414.2021.2015917
3. Vickers, J. N., & Lewinski, W. (2012a). Performing under pressure: Gaze Control, decision making and shooting performance of elite and rookie police officers. *Human Movement Science*, 31(1), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.humov..04>.
4. Klein, G. (2018). *Streetlights and shadows: Searching for the keys to adaptive decision making*. Skillsoft.
5. Pinder, R. A., Davids, K., Renshaw, I., & Araújo, D. (2011). Representative Learning Design and Functionality of Research and Practice in Sport. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 33, 146-155.

About the author

Det./Sgt. Jeff Johnsgaard retired after more than 20 years in law enforcement and continues to serve the profession as an instructor and consultant in officer safety, wellness, use of force, and training program development across the U.S. and internationally. He has taught for several respected organizations, including Force Science, the Reality-Based Training Association, Raptor Protection and the Executive Protection Institute, providing both end-user instruction and instructor development.

Drawing on evidence-grounded and informed principles, Johnsgaard focuses on helping officers and trainers improve performance through purposeful, well-designed training. His work supports a wide range of professionals — from recruits and field training officers to investigators and specialized units such as SWAT.

An IADLEST nationally certified instructor and Force Science advanced specialist, Johnsgaard brings decades of practical and academic experience to his work consulting with departments and academies on risk reduction, training enhancement and use-of-force review. His “Training on Purpose, By Design” is the hands-on, practical application of evidence-based science for how people can learn and improve more efficiently. (www.onpurpose.training)

You don’t need more money or additional hours. You need research-based training, purposeful application and institutional support for lasting impact.