



The 2026 Police Trainer's Playbook

8 Critical Upgrades You Must Make to
Prepare Officers for Today's Legal Scrutiny



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Tactics and the law are inseparable.

Police officers are not judged by what their trainers hoped they would learn. They are judged by the legal standards that apply to their actions. That is why the central question for every police trainer in 2026 is straightforward: does the training you deliver match the laws your officers will be held accountable to?

Modern courts expect officers to make decisions that align with clearly established legal principles. That means every concept, every scenario, and every skill you teach must be legally defensible when an officer later applies it under real world pressure and the incident is reviewed by investigators, attorneys, or jurors. If a training idea cannot withstand that level of scrutiny, it becomes a liability no matter how effective or creative it appeared in the classroom.

This guide outlines eight critical upgrades trainers must make to ensure their instruction aligns with current case law, statutory requirements, and the legal realities officers face on the street. Each upgrade reflects a point where training and law intersect in ways that can lead to significant civil or criminal exposure if not taught correctly.

At the Savage Training Group, our mission is to help officers make decisions that are both tactically sound and legally defensible. Our in-person and on-demand courses are built on current research, real world field experience, and a deep understanding of the legal landscape that shapes modern policing.

To find a course near you or to get immediate access to on demand training, please visit savagetraininggroup.com.



Stay safe,
Scott Savage

Founder and CEO,
Savage Training Group

If Disengagement Is an Option, Then You Have to Train It

Much attention was paid to a case called *Scott v Smith* (2024). Combining that decision with the similar decision in *Drummond v Anaheim* (2003) and the “public duty doctrine”, many officers have decided that sometimes disengagement may be the best option when dealing with a non-criminal mentally ill subject who physically resists being taken on a mental health hold. Whether we like it or not, the courts have been clear that using a significant amount of force on someone who hasn't committed a crime and isn't an immediate threat will be terribly hard to justify. In 2026, officers are starting to realize that this may be a problem we can't solve, so disengaging may be the best option. Officers may know this and agree to it in principle, but how often are we training it?

Obviously, **there is a difference between knowing something, and then training the physical skills that would be involved in actually carrying out what we know.** Simply having an academic conversation about this isn't good enough because most officers have never undergone a training scenario where a role player resists and then the officers are supposed to let go and walk away. Instead, during training sessions, officers have been trained repeatedly to overcome a role player's resistance and that is exactly what they are going to continue to do in the field. Therein lies the problem: we've actually never trained to let someone

physically resist our attempt to detain them and then we let go and leave.

As a trainer, when you discuss disengagement, you are going to instantly be the proverbial messenger who gets shot. Walking away from a crisis is not what cops signed up to do, and it causes a lot of heartburn for those of us who want to solve problems instead of just limiting our own liability. Make sure to explain the difference between a legal duty to act versus a moral responsibility to do so. Also, point out how in the case of a non-criminal, disengagement may be the best option if the only alternative is using a

significant amount of force. The reason being that the laws surrounding using force on non-criminals are different than those for a criminal. If you need to brush up on that topic, please download our guide called *Is It Ever Legal To Use Force On Someone Who Hasn't Committed A Crime?*

If you agree that there may be times when breaking contact and disengaging is appropriate, it should be trained into your officers in realistic, high-fidelity scenario evolutions. That means that you'll need to set up scenarios that mimic a non-criminal who is uncooperative and give officers a chance to apply the tactic within the context of a confrontation and not just in the classroom. Without doing so, officers will continue to know one thing yet *do* another. ■

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Increase Scenario Difficulty and Realism

Often, little is required of the officer other than simply being present. At best, they may participate in a highly scripted and sterile scenario where the outcome is all but guaranteed. These types of “check-the-box” exercises don’t reflect the complexity of real-world policing, and they don’t prepare officers to succeed under pressure.

What’s missing is cognitive challenge. What’s missing is realism. What’s missing is the opportunity to truly “operationalize” what they’ve learned.

Increasing the difficulty and complexity of in-service training isn’t about making it harder for harder’s sake. The science of learning tells us that challenge, when appropriately calibrated, is essential for growth. When a task is too easy relative to the learner’s ability, the result is boredom and disengagement. When the task is too difficult, the learner becomes frustrated and may shut down entirely. Neither scenario produces learning. However, when difficulty is just right, that is hard enough to force full attention and effort, but still achievable with persistence, the learner enters what psychologists call a **flow state**. This is the zone where optimal learning happens.

Police officers don’t just need to know the law, they need to know how to apply it. Memorizing case law or statute language is important, but it’s only the first step. For example, in states like California and Illinois, the deadly force statutes state that an imminent threat is defined as a person who has the “present ability, opportunity and apparent intent to cause death or serious bodily injury.” Officers in those states should be able to recite those terms, but simply knowing what the law says

is different from being able to apply that standard in a split-second, high-stress decision involving an uncooperative suspect and an ambiguous threat. The same is true in your state. That’s why scenario-based training must go beyond rote memorization and sterile repetition. Officers need repeated exposure to dynamic, dilemma-rich environments where they can practice making sound decisions under pressure, legally, tactically, and ethically.

This is where **the value of using operator-instructors - trainers** - who are seasoned, real-world law enforcement officers, becomes clear. Academic trainers or legal experts may understand the law in theory, but only operators can translate that theory into actionable street-level decisions. They understand the context, the

ambiguity, and the emotional load officers carry during real calls. They know the difference between textbook perfection and field reality, and they’re better equipped to coach officers through that gap.

Good scenario design demands more than simply increasing the physical difficulty or placing officers under time pressure. Effective scenarios include cognitive stressors: incomplete information, conflicting priorities, ambiguous behavior, and realistic distractions. They force officers to make decisions quickly and based on incomplete information. These are the types of mental processes officers must engage in on the street, and yet many never get a chance to build those muscles in training.

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tactical movement or tool use, but proactive **sense-making and decision-making**. Afterwards, instructors like you should be asking their students, "What did you see? What did you interpret? What made you decide to act or not act?" Because it's in that reflection that learning is cemented.

This type of training also builds confidence. When officers are routinely placed in tough situations in training, and coached through them by experienced peers, they begin to trust their judgment and ability to navigate real-world ambiguity. They learn how to articulate their decisions in the language of the law and policy. That matters, because when an incident is reviewed later by supervisors, attorneys, or a jury, the officer's ability to explain why they did what they did is often just as important as what they did.

Lastly, realistic, difficult training scenarios improve organizational readiness. Those reasonable members of the public don't expect perfection

from law enforcement, but they do expect professionalism. Agencies that fail to invest in realistic, performance-based training are taking a gamble, not just with officer safety, but with public trust and legal exposure. The antidote is training that reflects the complexity of real police work, demands high-level thinking, and builds officers who can make good decisions in the worst of circumstances.

To learn more about creating compelling scenario-training for your officers, attend the **Effective Police Training** course brought to you by the Savage Training Group. The Effective Police Training course shows instructors how to create scenario-based training that is realistic, legally defensible, and designed for long-term retention. You will leave with practical tools to build better scenarios, coach more effectively, and elevate the performance of every officer you train. ■

Create a Good Soundtrack / Adopt the 'Sterile Cockpit' Rule During Critical Incidents

What officers say on body-worn camera often becomes the centerpiece of how an incident is judged by command staff, by internal affairs, by prosecutors, and ultimately by jurors. While officers may assume that their tactical actions will speak for themselves, the reality is that **words often leave the strongest impression.**

The officer's voice, captured in real time, under stress, and without a filter, becomes the *soundtrack* to the event. And that soundtrack can either support or undermine the officer's credibility.

Swearing or using aggressive language may feel natural in the middle of a chaotic use of force encounter, especially if a suspect has just violently resisted. To the officer, such language may be understood as harmless venting or part of the occupational culture. But in the sterile, calm environment of a courtroom months after the fact, it sounds quite different. What sounds like justified frustration to one officer can sound like malice, anger, or even cruelty to an uninformed juror.

This disconnect is critical. Jurors may not remember every detail of an officer's footwork or control hold, but they will remember the tone of voice, the level of professionalism, and the exact words used because they will hear them again and again in slow motion, replayed on a courtroom screen. A justified use of force can become the subject of doubt or outrage simply because the soundtrack sounded bad. The words spoken on body-worn camera can lead to disciplinary action, lost civil cases, or even criminal charges being filed not because the force was unlawful, but because the officer's language tainted how the event was

perceived. As one law enforcement attorney put it, **"The swearing, not the officer's actions, is driving the narrative in court."**

This is why officers should be trained to deliberately *curate the soundtrack* of their critical incidents.

That means choosing calm, professional, and legally defensible language even under extreme stress. Simple commands like "You are under arrest," "Don't move," and "Put the knife down" not only guide suspect behavior, but also document the officer's lawful intent in the moment.

To support this discipline, officers and trainers should consider adopting a concept borrowed from aviation: **the sterile cockpit rule.**

In commercial aviation, the most critical phases of flight are takeoff and landing, periods where pilot workload is highest and the margin for error is smallest. During these times, airline crews are strictly prohibited from engaging in any non-essential conversation. No small talk, no jokes, no distractions. All communication must be directly related to the safe operation of the aircraft. This rule exists to reduce errors, improve focus, and ensure mission success.

Policing has critical phases too: approaching a suspect, making entry, initiating a high-risk stop, confronting an armed subject. Better yet, perhaps anytime the body camera is rolling should be considered the critical phase. During these moments, unfocused communication is a liability. Officers should adopt their own version of the sterile cockpit rule, limiting all verbal communication ►

It would seem that the old adage of actions speaking louder than words may not always be the case.

during high-stress incidents to mission-essential dialogue only.

This means:

- ➔ No unnecessary chatter
- ➔ No emotional venting
- ➔ No joking or sarcasm
- ➔ No threats or tough talk
- ➔ Only clear, professional, lawful direction

By doing so, officers not only reduce the chance of distraction or miscommunication, they also protect themselves legally and professionally. Body-worn camera footage of officers calmly issuing lawful commands, coordinating tactically, and narrating their actions in a measured tone plays powerfully in court. It communicates control, discipline, and intent. That is exactly what jurors, prosecutors, and supervisors want to see and hear.

Instructors should actively coach this concept during scenario training. After-action debriefs should include **not just what the officer did, but what they said**. Officers should be asked, "If that audio was played in court, how would it sound to a civilian?" or "Would you want that phrase on the news tonight?" That kind of feedback loop builds awareness and intentionality around communication.

Ultimately, creating a good soundtrack and the sterile cockpit mindset is about elevating professionalism. It is about recognizing that in today's environment, where every word is captured, replayed, and dissected, your voice can be either your greatest liability or your strongest defense.

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Links

[%\\$: The Impact of Officer Profanity on Civilians' Perception of What Constitutes Reasonable Use of Force](#)

Change Your “Block and Silo” Training

Many agencies still rely on *block and silo* training models, where instruction is delivered in large, isolated segments. One day may be dedicated to nothing but legal updates. The next may be spent entirely on Taser drills. The day after that may focus only on defensive tactics.

While this method may seem efficient from a scheduling perspective, it fails to reflect how officers actually operate in the field, where decision-making must integrate multiple disciplines in real time.

This compartmentalized approach also leads to what training experts call *massed practice*. Officers repeat the same skill over and over in one sitting, such as going through ten back-to-back Taser scenarios, each of which predictably ends with a Taser deployment. **While this massed repetition may create short-term confidence, it does not promote long-term retention or decision-making flexibility.** In fact, it often results in a false sense of mastery.

Dr. Mario Staller, professor at the University of Applied Sciences of Police and Public Administration in North-Rhine Westphalia explained the issue with technique focused training using a sports analogy. “In the best-case scenario, it teaches the officer how to catch a football but not how to play the game.” This is why trainers should shift away from block and silo models and move toward *interleaved training*. Interleaving means mixing different types of content and skills within a single training session. Rather than teaching officers how to throw the ball all day, teach them how to play the game. That means blending legal concepts, communication, tactical movement, tool use, and emotional intelligence into realistic,

unpredictable scenarios that mirror the complexity of real policing.

Interleaved training enhances learning in two powerful ways. First, it improves *long-term retention*.

Officers must work harder to retrieve information and apply it in new contexts, which strengthens memory consolidation. Second, it promotes *adaptability*. By forcing officers to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, they become better at transferring their knowledge to novel situations. This is not just theory, it is backed by decades of cognitive science. **Interleaved training better prepares**

officers for real-world demands by encouraging them to think, not just react.

Consider what happens when we train in silos. If an officer goes through ten scenarios in a row where the Taser is always the correct solution, what are we really teaching them? We are conditioning them to look for problems that fit the tool they just trained with, rather than evaluating the situation on its own merits. In the field, that tunnel vision can lead to inappropriate or delayed responses, not because of bad intent, but because of bad training design.

Clinical law enforcement, as discussed by Force Science, is not about being perfect in a lab. It is about being effective in the messy, uncertain, rapidly evolving conditions that officers face daily. That is why we must build training that mimics those conditions. Blend first aid with tactical decision-making. Blend communication skills with force options. Blend calm calls with sudden escalations. Only then will we build officers who are ready for the full spectrum of what the job ►

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demands. To learn more about the science behind this shift, pick up the book *Make It Stick* by Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel.

If you want to transform your department's in-service training into training that reflects the science

of learning and produces results on the street, attend our *Effective Police Training* course. This course is specifically designed to help instructors like you implement interleaved, scenario-based, performance-focused instruction that truly prepares officers for the real world. ■

Require Your Students to Articulate Their Force Decisions as a Regular Part of Your Training Curriculum

One of the most overlooked yet essential skills in use-of-force training is articulation. It is not enough for an officer to make good decisions as they must also be able to clearly explain why those decisions were reasonable and lawful. That explanation must be coherent under stress, rooted in facts, and aligned with current legal standards. Yet, many training programs treat articulation as an afterthought if they address it at all.

This is a missed opportunity.

Articulation should not be reserved for courtroom preparation or internal affairs interviews. Instead, it should be built into the training curriculum as a routine and expected part of every use-of-force evolution - on the mat, on the range, and in every scenario. Officers must learn not just to perform, but to reflect on their performance and explain their reasoning.

At the conclusion of any training evolution involving use of force, students should be required to articulate:

- ➔ What they observed
- ➔ What they believed was happening and why
- ➔ What force option they selected and why. Or, if there was little time to consciously deliberate and select a force option, why that was and why they reacted the way they did.
- ➔ What they *did not observe* (pertinent negatives)

- ➔ Assuming there was actually time for deliberate planning, what risks or alternatives they considered but rejected

This kind of reflection strengthens memory and builds cognitive clarity. Research in learning

science tells us that learning is enhanced not just by taking in information, but by *retrieving* it. Having to explain something in your own words builds stronger, longer-lasting memory than passive review ever could.

As an instructor, you can increase the value of this articulation practice by stepping into different roles during debriefs. For example, you might take on the role of a defense attorney and ask, "Why didn't you just shoot the knife out of his hand?" or "Why didn't you use de-escalation techniques while he was charging you?" These types of intentionally naïve or provocative questions force the student to clarify their reasoning and provide sound, legally grounded answers. In doing so, they learn to translate tactical decisions into language that jurors, supervisors, and the public can understand.

This kind of practice also prepares officers to respond to high stakes questioning under pressure. The first time an officer has to explain their force decisions should not be in an interview room or on a witness stand. It should be during training when the stakes are low, and the goal is growth. ►

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Here are two simple examples you can incorporate into your training sessions:

1. Use-of-Force Scenario Debriefs with Attorney Role-Play

Run a scenario where the officer encounters a rapidly escalating threat. At the conclusion, debrief the incident by playing the role of a defense attorney or critical civilian reviewer. Ask questions such as:

- ➔ "Why didn't you just talk him down?"
- ➔ "Why didn't you just give him time to calm down?"
- ➔ "Why didn't you just call in a psychologist?"

Let the officer defend their decisions, and coach them to use clear, concise, and legally sound language.

2. Firearms Training: Public Safety Statement Drill

After a firearms evolution, play the part of the first arriving sergeant. Say, "I'm going to run through the public safety statement questions. Stop me when I ask something that should *not* be asked at this stage." This helps officers not only rehearse their articulation but also develop legal awareness around post-incident procedures.

One agency, the Colonie Police Department in New York, has taken this even further. They've integrated a behavioral assessment matrix into their written use-of-force policy, establishing a formal connection of when de-escalation techniques may be helpful and when they are likely to fail. Imagine your officers being able to answer a defense attorney's question about why they didn't use de-escalation by saying, "Our policy clearly outlines that it was likely to not be effective because of the thoughts, emotions and behavior being exhibited by the defendant." [That policy document is available here for reference.](#)

If you want to develop training that helps your officers make good decisions and explain them under scrutiny, this is the kind of methodology you need to adopt. Integrating articulation into every training block is not a luxury, it is a necessity in today's legal and political climate. ■

Treat Every Call As If It Could End In a Shooting

The courts have made it clear that an officer's pre-force conduct will be part of the evaluation for reasonableness. In 2025, the United States Supreme Court decided a case called **Barnes v. Felix** which, for the first time, decided that nationwide police use of force should be evaluated using the totality of the circumstances rather than the moment of threat doctrine.

One thing missing from these court cases was an explanation of just **how far back before the actual use of force the courts will look at when evaluating reasonableness**. Will they look at just a few moments before the trigger was pulled or perhaps from the moment the officer was notified of the call? How about what the officer said in briefing that morning; could that be relevant to the officer's state of mind? None of us can say for sure. If you are like me, you believe we should err on the side of caution and assume that anything is fair game. Our conduct prior to using force must always be exemplary and we must make that point clear to the officers we train. But how will our officers know when they are going to get into a shooting or some other significant use of force? In reality, any incident could result in the use of deadly force so then wouldn't that logically mean we need to treat every call as if it could end in a shooting? That doesn't mean officers have to low-crawl up to the scene on

every call, but by the same token there won't be any do-overs once a shooting happens so make sure the tactics you use on every call would survive under the microscope of a pre-force conduct analysis. Training must reflect the seriousness of this reality.

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We should also start to celebrate and incentivize the behavior we want to see from our officers. That means that officers who play chess not checkers, those who wait for their cover unit when appropriate instead of rushing into every crisis, and those who demonstrate good tactics should be celebrated.

Why? Because using **good tactics is like having liability insurance**. Also, to the extent we can control risk, good tactics are the best way to keep cops and the people they deal with safe. At the Savage Training Group we feel so strongly about this notion that we created a 16-hour training course dedicated to helping cops save lives, both the suspects and their own. In our **Practical De-Escalation and Tactical Conduct** course we don't discuss de-escalation in a silo. Instead, we discuss it in the context of actual real-world police work. De-escalation, the use of force, sound tactics, pre-force conduct and a rich understanding of use of force law are all equally important parts of this training course. [Click here to learn more.](#) ■

Rehearse Memorization Items for Clear Commands

Ensure officers understand that conflicting commands can create legal jeopardy. Refer to cases like [Calonge v San Jose \(2024\)](#) and [Gravelet-Blondin v. Shelton \(2013\)](#) which emphasize the

importance of giving clear, unequivocal commands. In *Calonge*, officers gave inconsistent directions such as “drop the gun,” “do not reach for it,” and “get on the ground” simultaneously. The court emphasized that when commands conflict, **a suspect is not considered non-compliant until an unequivocal command is issued and ignored.** In *Gravelet-Blondin v. Shelton*, a bystander (Mr. Blondin) heard conflicting orders; some officers yelled both “get back” and “stop,” while he was roughly 30–37 feet away and not posing an immediate threat. He took one or two steps and paused, per one officer’s directive, but froze when another officer ran toward him yelling “get back” relentlessly. Mr. Blondin was then tased and the court criticized the officer’s conflicting and confusing commands.

Officers should give one unambiguous command at a time (“Don’t move”) and ensure others on scene reinforce the same command to avoid mixed

signals. Learning a common mantra ahead of time greatly increases the chances of being successful in the moment of a crisis. One mantra that is easy to learn and remember is I.O.W. which stands for

Identify, Order, Warn. It is an easy memory item that when rehearsed in training, can be readily accessible for officers when in the field. The point of I.O.W. is to be a quick set of commands that officers can default to before giving more nuanced commands.

At the Savage Training Group, we teach officers to say, “Police, don’t move or force will be used against you.” This phrase is not only clear and unambiguous but also satisfies any requirement on the officer to identify himself and warn the suspect what will happen if he doesn’t comply. Once the suspect complies, the officer

can then transition into more detailed commands such as an explanation of why the suspect is being detained (“You are driving a stolen car and considered to be armed.”) and what the officer wants the suspect to do (“Step out of the car with your hands raised high above your head.”). Don’t move as opposed to show me your hands is also recommended by Force Science [in this article](#). ■

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Commit to Using Force or Get Off the X

Hesitation is not de-escalation. Failing to act when decisive force is clearly warranted is not a sign of tactical restraint, emotional intelligence, or moral superiority. In many cases, it is a dangerous misstep that can escalate the situation, expose officers and bystanders to unnecessary risk, and ultimately result in more force being required than if action had been taken sooner.

The reality is that when an officer hesitates to use force in a moment that demands it, the opportunity to resolve the situation with a lesser degree of force may vanish. That hesitation can get officers hurt, or worse. When a suspect presents an immediate threat to the officer or another person, it is not noble to wait. It is not kind to pause. It is dangerous.

If an officer finds themselves facing an imminent threat, one that clearly meets the legal standard for the use of force, but they are reluctant to act, then at minimum, they must **reposition**. They must move. They must get off the X. Standing still while the suspect continues to escalate or close the distance gives away both initiative and tactical advantage. In high-threat moments, the options are clear: **commit to using force or reposition immediately**. Freezing is not a viable option.

Part of the problem may lie in how officers are traditionally trained. In many departments, training is delivered in **silos**. One day focuses on de-escalation and communication. Months later, a completely separate block might cover defensive tactics. These skills are treated as if they exist in isolation, when in reality, officers must seamlessly transition from persuasion to force in the same encounter, sometimes in the blink of an eye.

This artificial separation of skills in training environments contributes to confusion in the field. Officers are left to believe that using force is somehow incompatible with being professional, or that switching from words to weapons means they have failed. In fact, the opposite is true. **Using**

force when it is legally and tactically appropriate is just as much a part of professional policing as using verbal skills to calm a subject. The suspect's behavior dictates the officer's response, not the other way around.

Further complicating this issue is the intense scrutiny officers face when force is used. Cultural pressures, media narratives, and organizational

fear of liability can create a hesitation mindset where using force becomes taboo, even when justified. Officers may second-guess themselves in the moment, not out of tactical confusion, but out of fear of the fallout. That hesitation is dangerous.

To combat this, agencies must take steps to reduce the hesitation gap. That means:

- ➔ **Eliminating siloed training** and replacing it with integrated, context-rich scenarios
- ➔ **Increasing scenario complexity**, especially in situations that require rapid transitions between verbal skills and use of force
- ➔ **Training sense-making and decision-making under pressure**, not just physical techniques
- ➔ **Building mastery of relevant law**, so officers understand exactly when force is authorized and justified ►

When a suspect presents an immediate threat to the officer or another person, it is not noble to wait. It is not kind to pause. It is dangerous.

➔ **Improving physical skills**, so officers are confident in their ability to control, defend, and respond decisively

When these components are present in a training program, officers learn that the use of force is not something to avoid at all costs, it is something

to apply with precision and confidence when required. The ability to switch rapidly from calm communication to decisive action is not a contradiction; it is a sign of a professional.

Commit to using force when the moment demands it or at the very least, get off the X! ■

Final Thoughts

If you've made it this far, you're likely the kind of police trainer who takes their mission seriously. You understand that in today's legal, political, and tactical environment, the old way of training simply isn't good enough. Officers need more than technique, they need judgment, confidence, and the ability to clearly explain their actions under pressure.

The eight takeaways outlined in this guide aren't just tips. They are essential upgrades for any agency that wants to reduce liability, increase readiness, and improve officer performance in the real world.

8 Key Takeaways for Police Trainers

1. Train Disengagement as a Real Option

Courts are increasingly scrutinizing the use of force against non-criminal, mentally ill subjects. If disengagement is a lawful and tactically sound option, then it must be practiced, not just discussed, in realistic training scenarios.

2. Increase Scenario Difficulty and Realism

Too much training is overly scripted and fails to prepare officers for the unpredictable complexity of the street. Build scenario evolutions that are cognitively demanding and legally challenging to improve decision-making under pressure.

3. Create a Good Soundtrack / Use the Sterile Cockpit Rule

What officers say during a critical incident can drive the courtroom narrative months later. Train officers to use calm, professional language and to limit communication during high-stress moments to mission-critical dialogue only.

4. End "Block and Silo" Training

Training that separates disciplines (like DT, legal, and tactics) fails to reflect real-world complexity. Adopt an interleaved model that blends skills, improves retention, and mirrors how officers must operate in the field.

5. Require Articulation of Force Decisions

Officers must not only make sound use-of-force decisions, but they must also be able to clearly explain them. Regularly build articulation practice into every force-related training block to prepare officers for internal, criminal, and civil review.

6. Treat Every Call as If It Could End in a Shooting

Courts are evaluating our officer's pre-force conduct. Reinforce that every call, no matter how routine, deserves sound tactics and decision-making, because any incident could become a high-liability event.

7. Rehearse Memorization Items for Clear Commands

Conflicting commands create confusion and legal risk. Train officers to default to clear, legally sound command sequences like "Police, don't move or force will be used against you" and use memory tools like I.O.W. (Identify, Order, Warn).

8. Commit to Using Force or Get Off the X

Hesitation in the face of a deadly threat is not a strategy, it's a liability. Train officers to decisively act when the law allows it or at the very least reposition. Freezing in place is not a safe or acceptable option. ■

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