

Building an Elite, High Performing Team- What It Takes.

Part 1 of a 2 Part Series

By *Eddie Molina*

It is no mystery that teamwork gets more done than individuals working alone. But how well that team performs is a far more complicated matter. A team can be considered successful if each person fulfills their individual obligation that go towards to the overall mission. The degree of success, however, can vary greatly. Leaders of every organization want to meet goals, but all of them would agree it would be optimal to far exceed a minimum standard.



But how does a team go from ok to great, or from average to high performing, especially in a law enforcement environment? It surely doesn't happen by accident. During my active duty training in the Army, I was fortunate enough to work and train with military special operations personnel: Army Rangers, Special Forces (Green Berets) and Navy SEALs. I've learned that there are factors to the team dynamic that any organization or department can learn and benefit from.

To build a high functioning, high performing team, the leaders and members must understand and master some of the main components of an elite team.

1. **Communication.** High performing team members communicate with each other in every sense of the word. They are able to use and read body language, hand signals, and in some situations, read each other's minds. For example, if a team member is at the head of the group during a raid mission, he or she can communicate a variety of messages by just using one hand. Messages like 'the room is clear', or 'sweep the left' or 'create a perimeter defense' can all be communicated with a single hand motion. The list is endless and every message can be tailored to your team and department's needs. Teams will develop their own 'operational dictionary' and add to it as needed.
2. **Tactical Proficiency.** Each member is highly proficient at their individual assignments. For example, each member of a military special operations unit are typically quick and accurate shooters and can use a variety of weapons. Another example- in a correctional setting each member is proficient in the use of handcuffs, cell extractions and the proper employment of a restraint chair. Like communication, tactical proficiency can be improved over time with proper training.
3. **Motivated and Ambitious.** Each member that is on a team, *wants* to be on that team and *wants* to work. If you have to force someone to be on a team, then it will likely not

succeed to an elite level. High performing team members need little guidance and minimal supervision and are motivated to learn, work and train. This is an important element to a high functioning team because team members must constantly be looking for ways to improve their operations and efficiency.

4. **Selflessness and Trust.** Elite team members always, and I mean *always*, put their fellow team members needs before their own- the true definition of a team player. This boils down to something as simple as allowing your team members to eat before you do or to jump in front of a bullet to save your team member's life. Trust is also essential to any elite team and will improve over time as well. For example, if the team leader regularly makes wise decisions and then, out of nowhere, makes a questionable decision, its members will follow the decision because they have developed trust. The team assumes the team leader is making a decision based off information the member's may not know yet. When your team is willing to die for one another or follow orders blindly, you know you've reached a milestone in creating an elite team.

Some of the other components worth mentioning that will help develop an elite team are confidence, intelligence and a great attitude. All of these components will be improved with time and training. As the team progresses it will become sharper, faster and more efficient at accomplishing missions. No two teams are equal and as with anything else, it will have its weaknesses. For instance, you may not have enough highly motivated individuals or the tactical skills may be lacking. But the attempt at creating an elite team may inspire others to reach into a part of themselves they didn't know existed.

This elite team concept can be translated to any law enforcement agency. If you are interested in building an elite team in your own department (aside from what already exists, i.e. SWOT teams), start by gathering individuals that are interested. As long as you have individuals that want to learn, train and improve then you have the groundwork to build a special team. Then start thinking about routine challenges that your department regularly faces and how that can be improved.

Finally, check out part 2 of this article on the next issue of NJ Blue Now on *How to Deliver and Execute a Proper Operations Order* to a team, specifically using a law enforcement objective. This will help you fully understand the steps needed to build an elite team.

About the writer: Eddie Molina voluntarily writes articles to keep the law enforcement, first responder and military community informed. He also supports the End of Watch with Bootsy and Sal Podcast. For more information go to www.eddiemolina.com

Building an Elite, High Performing Team- What It Takes. Pt. 2

Delivering the Perfect Operations Order to Your Team

Part 2 of a 2 Part Series

By Eddie Molina

During the last issue of NJ Blue Now Magazine I wrote about some of the components that make a high performing, elite team. To refresh your memory, we looked at how communication, ambition, individual performance and selfless service play a role in building and sustaining an effective team.

These qualities are very important and with time, training and practice, teams can go from basic and functional to high performing and highly efficient. But how do you take qualified individuals and transform them into a team?



In a word- training. Training will help you identify what areas are weak and how to improve those weaknesses.

It is also equally important to conduct training properly. If you are in charge of a unit, simply having your subordinates get together to train on something is not enough. There are things that you as the leader can do to

maximize the training value.

And it all begins with a clear, concise operations order that you deliver to your team. I will provide you with a step by step process of what you need to do. This briefing system is largely based off the military briefing system. It is designed to help your unit get the most out of any training session as well as to ensure you go over every detail that will help you complete the mission successfully.

The first step is to gather your team together in a briefing room that is clear of distractions and outside noise. You want to ensure that all their attention is paid towards what you want them to hear. Then ensure that everyone has a pen or pencil and something to write on. You don't want to field any questions during the briefing. Rather, have them jot any notes they want to bring up after your brief. By doing so, you are controlling the briefing by not allowing any discussions to spin out of control or off topic. Additionally, there is a high probability that many of the questions your team members may want to ask will be answered at some point during your brief.

This briefing instruction is a modified military operations order that is suitable and practical for any law enforcement application.

Once your team is ready for a briefing, start with...

Paragraph I: The Situation. This is a short, simplified statement of what is going that will inform your team of what to expect.

Paragraph II: The Mission. This section of the briefing is a who/ what/ where/ when and why answer to address the situation. This too is a simple sentence or two answering those questions.

Paragraph III: The Execution. This is the 'meat & potatoes' of your brief. It will answer the question of 'how' your team is going to address the situation and complete the mission successfully. It is detailed in nature and includes sub-paragraphs to ensure every detail covered, explored and explained.

Sub-Paragraph I: Team Breakdown. Explain who and where your team members will be dispatched at the start of the mission

Sub-Paragraph II: Equipment Breakdown. Explain what equipment is necessary to successfully accomplish the mission. Advise what equipment is essential and what is simple

Sub-Paragraph III: Operational Description. This is the detailed plan of who will do what and most importantly- how.

- Phase Breakdown- In some operations it may be important to break down the mission into specific, defined parts, or phases. Depending on the mission your team may need to know that you cannot start a specific objective until different objective is complete. Therefore, you may have to break an operation down into phases
- Coordinating Instructions- This is information *every* team member must know and execute
- Specified Tasks- Explain what *should* be completed during the operation, if necessary
- Essential Tasks- Explain what *must* be done in order to achieve mission success. A failure to complete an essential task will result in mission failure

Sub-Paragraph IV: Courses of Action. It is important to brief what every course of action may end up occurring to help team members fully understand what the mission is and how the mission may not go as planned. This will help better prepare for it.

Most Dangerous Course of Action- Brief statement if *everything* goes wrong and its consequences.

Most Likely Course of Action- Brief statement of what you believe is likely going to happen.

Most Desirable Course of Action- Brief statement explaining the best case scenario and everything went as planned.

Support/ Communication

Support units- Explain who will be part of plan and their role and location that is not directly assigned to the team

Reserve units- Explain who will be reserve elements, their location and why you may call for them, aka standby units

Communication- Explain any unique code words, hand signals or other communication means that is of relevance to the mission

This completes the briefing portion of any mission. Note that some elements of this brief may not apply to your departments training mission. It is designed to help you ensure you took every possibility into consideration and incorporated it into your plan.

If you plan on conducting training then next step is to allow your team some time to discuss their individual roles and how they plan to execute. As the leader, make sure you allot some time to conduct the brief as well as some time to allow your team to go over the plan.

Then you execute the mission as planned. You should expect and anticipate change and a deviation to the plan. If there is one thing I learned from the battlefield, it's that things rarely go exactly as planned.

Once the training mission is complete, it is equally important to sit down and debrief. This will give everyone an opportunity to discuss what went well, went wrong and what standard operating procedures the team must create to help complete mission more effectively in the future.

As each training mission is conducted, your team will reduce common mistakes, improve their communication skills and increase unit morale. There will be a remarkable increase in team skills and organization after just a few training missions.

Although there is an element of creativity involved, try filling out the Operations Brief example provided using a common law enforcement objective. Once you feel you covered everything, go ahead and give the brief to your team. It will be a learning experience for everyone but it will build a foundation for future training missions.

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