

# Education-Based Discipline: A New Approach

## Education as an Option to Suspension

by Captain Mike Parker, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department



Sheriff Lee Baca, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department

The young deputy shifted in his seat and looked nervously from side to side in a room full of his peers. Finally, he grimaced, raised his hand and somberly asked his question to the elected leader of the nation's largest sheriff's department.

"Our Core Values include treating all people with fairness and dignity, even criminals. Yet when it comes to disciplining our own personnel, why doesn't fairness apply to us too sir? I made a mistake. We all make mistakes. I admitted my error and agreed that there should be consequences for my actions. Yet, when I was suspended without pay, my wife and children were also punished for my mistake. Isn't there a better way?"

Sheriff Lee Baca agreed. He had heard comments like these for over a decade as sheriff. He responded recently by writing to the highest ranking members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD). He said, "Effective discipline should not debilitate the affected deputy," and "ineffective discipline is when we fail to be fair."

He went on to assemble a diverse project team of LASD experts, then announced the inception of Education-Based Discipline (EBD) as an option to disciplinary suspensions. Rights are preserved while employees choose between suspension of pay or EBD. In describing the need for this dramatic change he said, "Employees are led to the muddy waters of punitive discipline and made to drink, and then they get sick. Some are sick for the moment, and for some it takes a lifetime to cure."

### What Discipline Isn't

Discipline isn't supposed to be punishment. Its purpose is to work to ensure effective operations through employees compliance with acceptable rules of conduct and performance. The vast majority of employees nationwide remain with their departments long after discipline is imposed, and for many, their perception of disciplinary fairness will be seen in their future perspective and productivity. Sheriff Baca's view is that "Our leadership values require us to believe that until a deputy leaves our service, he or she will always be our responsibility."

**Join Sheriff Baca and Mike Parker  
on Wednesday, June 24  
for a seminar on  
Education-Based Discipline!**

### What is Education-Based Discipline?

Education-Based Discipline (EBD) is an innovative alternative to traditional disciplinary suspensions. EBD reduces management-employee conflict and embitterment that results from withholding employees pay. Instead, offering optional behavior-focused education and training department-wide, enhances communication, character, competence and trust.

The *Mission* of EBD is to develop an individualized learning plan with the involvement of the employee, that emphasizes education, training, and other creative interventions thereby promoting a more comprehensive and successful outcome.

### How Discipline is Linked to Education

Guidelines help captains create an individualized EBD plan, while allowing for employee input. The EBD "Discipline and Education Guide" links behaviors with "Action Items Menus" of education options. The LIFE (Lieutenants Interactive Forum for Education) class is a decision-making course that is part of every employee's EBD plan. Other classes and action item options include the LASD Deputy Leadership Institute, Steven Covey's Seven Habits for Highly Effective Law Enforcement, and writing a paper on what was learned.

EBD is flexible, can be duplicated, and is designed to stay, just like our employees. ☺

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**The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department** (LASD) is the largest sheriff's department, third largest policing agency, the largest contract policing agency, and the second largest transit police force in the US. The LASD manages the nation's biggest county jail system (about 20,000 inmates) and largest court security operation (600 bench officers and 58 Superior Courts).

Over four million people are protected by the LASD in over 3,100 of the 4,013 square miles of Los Angeles County. This includes 40 incorporated cities, 90 unincorporated communities, nine community colleges, and over a million daily commuters of the buses and trains of the Los Angeles METRO and six-county Metrolink trains. The LASD includes over 10,000 budgeted sworn and 8,000 civilian personnel, as well as over 830 reserve deputies, 420 youth explorers, and 3,800 civilian volunteers. Leroy D. Baca was elected Sheriff of Los Angeles County in 1998. ([www.lasd.org](http://www.lasd.org))