



# NLPOA

## SONOMA COUNTY CHAPTER

Volume XVIII, Issue 06.

“El Informante” E-Newsletter

June 15, 2009

Honoring Family, Education, and Community through Service  
and Mentorship since 1972. [www.nlpoa.org](http://www.nlpoa.org)

*From pages 2 and 3 of the NLPOA - Sonoma County Chapter's June 15, 2009 Newsletter*

### EDUCATION BASED DISCIPLINE

Law enforcement agencies work hard to ensure that the best candidates are selected and that they are well trained. But even the best of us can make a mistake. When the subject of discipline comes up, everyone pays closed attention because it is one of the most important and controversial topics that affects us all.

Most law enforcement officers from the rank and file up to chiefs and sheriffs want personnel to comply with the “book” or the “manual” or what ever it is called in their agency.

Both association leaders and management report that only a handful of officers cause the majority of disciplinary problems, which means the vast majority of law enforcement officers, are rarely subject to the disciplinary system. But what happens when a good officer makes a mistake and is hit with severe punishment, typically a suspension without pay?

The underlying, philosophy behind law enforcement discipline has long been the traditional “to burn them, so they learn” concept. That means punish the officer severely so he or she won’t repeat the same mistake. But the reality is a suspension harms the officer’s family as much as it does the officer. It can also turn a productive employee who has a positive attitude into a bitter one who becomes angry, unproductive and patiently waits to get revenge for what he or she feels is mistreatment by the department and management. We need to ask the obvious question. Does discipline mean punishment? And is there real value in the current punishment methodology? There are some significant differences between discipline and punishment although the two terms are often used synonymously.

“Discipline means you learn from your mistakes. Punishment means you suffer for your mistakes.” The crux of the problem is that punishment does not work if you expect to improve performance. Punishment is more focused on past misbehavior than on changing future behavior, which should be the goal of the program. There should be a rational link between what the agency plans to do (proposed discipline) and what was done (the misconduct). When you think about it, there is no rational link between officer misconduct and taking away that officer’s pay. That is why some departments are starting to rethink their punishment policies.

Some agencies are going to a new system called "Education Based Discipline" or "EBD" for short, the program seeks to prevent the negative outcome that exists with the present system, including the stigma of being ineligible for promotion and the inability to transfer. EBD is centered on the theory that people cannot be punished into excelling in life. Excellence can only be attained through learning and practice.

EBD gives an officer the option of participating behavior focused education and training, or sticking with the traditional system of suspension without pay. It is hoped the officers who choose the EBD approach will develop more competence, discipline, integrity, and better communication skills.

Perhaps, your agency should check out EBD! One of the agencies that are currently using Education Based Discipline is the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.