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In May, the 10,000-officer Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department launched an exciting, innovative and potentially productive officer-relations policy that the NYPD should monitor closely and seriously consider instituting here.

It's called education-based discipline or E.B.D. The program, which is completely voluntary, was gradually implemented in April and established throughout the department at the beginning of May. According to LASD Capt. Michael J. Parker, in the short time it's been in place "a substantial number of department personnel have chosen E.B.D. over suspension days off. The LASD is the third largest police agency in the nation, after the NYPD and the Chicago PD.

Police union leaders and law enforcement brass agree that only a handful of officers incur disciplinary problems. But what happens when a good cop makes a mistake and gets smacked with serious punishment, like suspension and loss of pay or vacation time? E.B.D. is based on

Sheriff Lee Baca of the LASD (the nation's largest), who had the courage and foresight to implement the program, put it this way:

"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."

"All available research shows that punishment rarely leads to a desire to excel."

Hunt likes to use a sports analogy to illustrate the value of E.B.D.: "A coach can't punish athletes into world-class performance. Instead, effective coaches teach, educate and train. Excellence can only be attained through learning and practice. Athletes who excel usually have superior knowledge, skills and abilities

"There should be a rational link between the discipline and the alleged misconduct. When you think about it, there's no rational link between officer misconduct and taking away that officer's pay."

Officers opting for E.B.D.'s rationale-based training system will avoid becoming resentful and unmotivated and, by participating in behavior-focused education, will develop confidence, selfcontrol, integrity and better communication skills, enabling them to master the situation that got them into trouble in the first place when it recurs.

And then there's the dignity angle — so important to cops. "One of the things officers complain about when they are disciplined is the way it was done," says Hunt. "I wasn't treated with respect,' one officer told me. 'They were attacking me personally as if everything bad with the department was my fault.' It wasn't long until that officer's humiliation turned to anger and then resentment. An angry, resentful officer isn't good for a police

research demonstrating that punitive discipline of this sort creates bitterness, punishes the officer's family and does little or nothing to improve performance. In fact, it may have a negative effect on the officer's future performance.

"There are significant differences between discipline and punishment although the terms are often used interchangeably," says Ted Hunt, Ph.D., who recently retired after 32 years with the Los Angeles Police Department and is a consultant to police organizations specializing in management and other areas. "Discipline means you learn from your mistakes. Punishment means you suffer for your mistakes. The crux of the problem is that punishment doesn't work if you expect to improve performance."

taught and developed by coaches. Achievement comes from a desire to excel. All available research shows that punishment rarely leads to a desire to excel."

The E.B.D. being pioneered by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department — and being evaluated and considered by other departments across the country — gives the officer the opportunity to opt for mandatory retraining in the area where the infraction occurred as an alternative to the traditional approach of suspension without pay.

"Punishment is more focused on past misbehavior than on changing future behavior, which should be the goal of any disciplinary program," says Hunt.

department."

E.B.D. appears to have several advantages over the hidebound punitive system: It can spare the officer the stigmas of being eligible for promotion or transfer, increase the officer's feelings of self-respect, reduce department-officer conflict, and even reduce legal representation costs for both departments and unions. But most important, it could go a long way in creating an even more professional police force that treats everyone with dignity and respect — including its officers.



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