

LEARN

COLLABORATE

EXPLORE

TRAIN

COGNITIVE FITNESS

LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE in the Warrior Arena

**BY LT. RICHARD GOERLING AND
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In the fall of 2013, the Hillsboro Police Department (HPD) in Oregon began a yearlong pilot project training mindfulness to police officers. Some people might be uncomfortable with that. But that's no reason to cross the street just to avoid a confrontation. There are lessons to be learned.

Mindfulness is a level of awareness and non-judgmental

attention to unfolding experiences. Cultivating mindfulness resonates with our warrior ethos and sharpens our readiness. It has its roots in meditation training to the U.S. Army Special Forces community nearly three decades ago; and the legacy of this discipline remains today. In more recent times, mindfulness training in the U.S. Marine Corps showed measurable results toward combat readiness, stress management and social reintegration post combat deployment. And a separate Marine Corps studied demonstrated that mindfulness training resulted in enhanced recovery



from stress after Marines participated in “stressful immersive training sessions.” These studies of warrior populations are further supported by three decades of research demonstrating that mindfulness training enhances health and well-being.

The human being is arguably the most complex, valuable and least understood technology that we regularly deploy in law enforcement missions. What scientists are learning about the complex interactions within these dimensions of mind-body can effectively be translated to our profession. From this translation, we can positively impact our leadership, our tactical performance and the well-being of our people. Mindfulness training, we believe, can enhance leadership at the incident command, operational leadership on the ground, and cognitive performance by the tactical officer.

At the Hillsboro Police Department, the Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training (MBRT) was a nine-week program with officers attending a two-and-a-half-hour session once each week and one six-hour retreat toward the end of the training. Researchers, led by Michael Christopher at the Pa-

Based upon recent research, we believe that mindfulness training offers the tactical community opportunities to enhance areas of critical need including:

- Sense-making, command and leadership at the Edge of Chaos;
- Cognitive performance under acute stress (tactical leadership/decision making);
- Operational management and leadership pre/post critical incident;
- Human skills such as self-awareness, empathy, conflict resolution, and team synergy;
- Recovery from the body’s stress response after an incident is concluded;
- And overall integrated wellness of the officer, the team and the organization.

cific University School of Professional Psychology, designed and this project and mapped the results. This included self-reported measurements (taken pre-, mid- and post-training) recording perceptions of administrative stress, operational stress, sleep, pain management, anger, reactivity, burnout, resilience and acting with awareness.

Published results from this study are forthcoming this fall in the *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*. This is the first study of its kind that examines the impact of

mindfulness training in policing. We expect future studies at the newly created Pacific Institute for Community and Organization Wellness—a Pacific University collaborative for training mindfulness to police officers and administrators. Ongoing MBRT courses will be offered through the Institute for Public Safety Personnel throughout the Portland Metro Area.

Based on a study conducted with Marines in training, neuroscientist Amishi Jha suggests mindfulness positively impacts working memory under acute stress. In a separate study, also involving Marines in training and under intense stress, Douglas C. Johnson suggests mindfulness training enhances psycho-biological recovery time. Previous research by Elizabeth Stanley and Amishi, based on mindfulness training provided to Marines, demonstrated that Marines returning from combat deployments exhibited greater emotional regulation and enhanced reintegration with social relationships and families. Each of these studies, combined with the Hillsboro Police study this year, provide substantial evidence that mindfulness training can impact the skill areas noted above.

These are just a few relevant areas that a mindfulness training program can begin to positively impact.

The research on mindfulness training in public safety is in its infancy, and we expect to continue to learn more about how mindfulness can benefit the health of our people, our organizations and our communities. We also expect to learn what doesn’t work well as we explore how to translate the science of mindfulness (a diverse melting of disciplines to include neuroscience, psychology, biology, medicine, economics, and sociology) to the construct of a law enforcement culture. Failure is not only an option; it is likely required, as we lead our police culture toward resiliency.

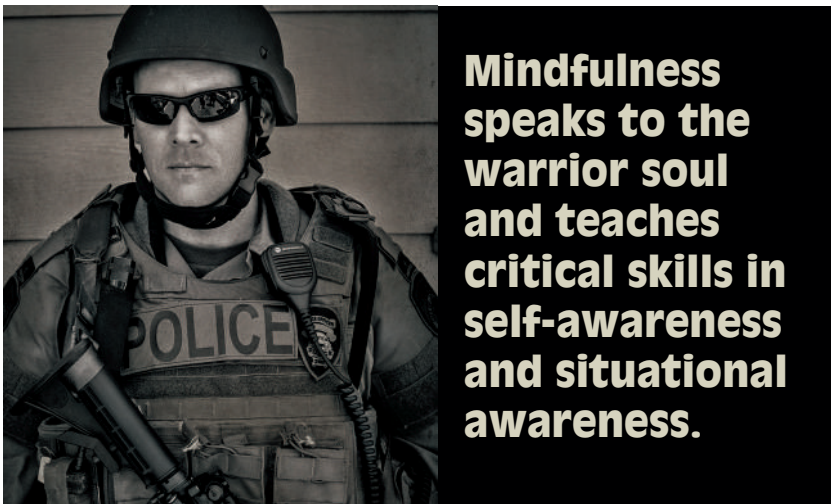
The first thing we recommend is to think of mindfulness as cognitive fitness training with the probability of a number of positive benefits beyond strengthening executive function. Here we return to our earlier theme: *Learn. Explore. Collaborate. Train.*

Learn. There’s more valuable contemporary information available to us today than any one of us could consume in a month of sequestered study. Start at your own pace and read and/or scan what’s relevant to your needs. There are recommended resources at the conclusion of this article, yet this is just the beginning. Books by professional athletes, news reporters, psychologists, actors, professors, priests, and others abound on the topic of mindfulness. As we brave this landscape to seek ways to translate mindfulness to our needs, we undoubtedly find materials that may offend our politics, religion or other platform; we encourage perseverance and tolerance here. We haven’t yet written the book exclusively relevant for the unique culture of the warrior in policing. Until then, we must wade through a lot of work to find the valuable pieces to craft a way forward as we seek to integrate cognitive fitness into our training and culture.

Explore. Try an app. Several useful smartphone applications exist that can introduce you to a mindfulness practice. Take a Yoga class. A lot of elite athletes have been doing this

for years. Yoga is, among other things, an introduction to self-awareness of the mind-body connectivity. As a plus, it will help reduce injury through building core strength and range of motion. Create a small team of your most performance driven tacticians and challenge them to explore mindfulness training through a phone app, a local yoga or meditation class, an Aikido course, or other mind-body training. This may well stimulate the development of a more structured mindfulness training program.

Collaborate. The unique factor about mindfulness training in policing is that we can't do this without external partnerships. We simply don't have the expertise nor the organizational infrastructure necessary to support an independent mindfulness training program such as the MBRT launched in Oregon.



We accomplish more through partnership. Seek collaborative partnerships with academic institutions that have expertise in mindfulness and with police organizations that have demonstrated success. In Oregon, the Hillsboro Police Department and the Bend Police Department have blazed a path with mindfulness training; others will follow. The Surrey Police Department in the United Kingdom began a mindfulness program this fall. The Pacific Institute on Community and Organizational Wellness, a partnership between Oregon law enforcement and Pacific University, was recently created and will be a helpful resource for police leaders seeking further information and training.

Identify university faculty that study and train mindfulness and network with them. Challenge historically powerful assumptions that we have little in common with academicians. Discover that what we have in common is far more powerful than our differences.

It often requires that we get outside of ourselves to find our key partners. This takes a different kind of courage than what tactical operators demonstrate on a regular basis. We encourage walking into the center of this different fear; it is there that you will prevail, too.

Train. Once you have followed the path of learning, exploring and collaborating--based on the unique needs of your organization and culture--craft a mindfulness training pilot project where you can apply creative and effective training development. The key is not to do this alone; use your network and collaborative partnerships.

It is critical to establish performance metrics and research methods for your training. Full-scale academic research isn't necessary, yet we operate in a climate that demands measures of success or failure. Understand that some failure is a key component of learning and forward momentum. And don't be surprised to find unexpected outcomes from the pilot project training.

The tactical community may be the leaders that bring mindfulness training to policing. Historically, we see SWAT leading police tactics and culture. This area is no exception and this may be a leadership opportunity to bring a new vision for an ancient technology to policing and impact the health and well-being of officers, strategic and operational leadership, and the tactical performance of both the SWAT tactician and police officer under acute stress.

The practice of paying attention, of cultivating awareness through mindfulness practice is one that strongly resonates with the ethos of the Guardian and the life path of the warrior. Teaching mindfulness to police officers follows a logical flow, culturally and scientifically. Mindfulness speaks to the warrior soul and teaches critical skills in self-awareness and situational awareness. From this foundation we can expect fitness of body, mind and heart to thrive. ✪

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