

Self evaluation techniques for police trainers

***Editor's Note:** Patrick Miller worked as a police officer and detective for the Lexington Fayette Urban County of Police from 1990 to 1998 when he left to become a trainer for the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training. Miller presently serves as the supervisor in charge of Instructional Design for the Department of Criminal Justice Training in Richmond, Kentucky. If you have an idea for an article that would benefit PoliceOne members, please do what Patrick did and [send us an E-Mail](#) outlining your idea.*

By Patrick Miller

Congratulations! You just finished teaching the block of instruction you have been working on for months. How did it go? You have a gut feeling but you would like to be sure. How can you find out? After all, there are several evaluation techniques utilized to assess training effectiveness. These range from student and peer evaluations to impartial observer critiques. However, one evaluation that can most dramatically influence your future performance is self evaluation.

Effective trainers evaluate themselves continually. However, when designing a student evaluation, we would never design an instrument where students could write whatever they wanted to about the training course. Instead we have specific areas that we want students to focus on while giving their assessment. So why do we allow "gut feelings" to be our self evaluation? Trainers should have a standardized self evaluation technique in order to consistently and semi-objectively evaluate themselves on how well they have done.

This four step evaluation process has been designed to help you as a trainer to assess your instructional performance shortly after leaving a classroom. When doing a self evaluation ask yourself four basic questions.

1. Did I teach what I needed to teach?
2. Did the students learn what they needed to learn?
3. Were the students engaged and/or did they enjoy the learning experience?
4. Did I enjoy the instructional experience?

Let's look at each one of these steps in turn and ask ourselves some clarifying questions to see if we can gauge how well we actually did.

Did I teach what I needed to teach?

All good instructors are aware that their lessons should be based on the learning objectives. So in order to evaluate yourself during this first step you need to ask whether or not you "effectively" taught the learning objectives to your students. Did you use appropriate teaching methodologies to get the learning points across? Every teaching methodology has advantages and disadvantages, however, some methodologies work better with certain objectives. For example, lecture may be appropriate if you were teaching lower level knowledge recognition to your students. On the other hand, scenario based training may be more effective when teaching students how to apply knowledge to given situations. It all depends on the performance to be trained and the students you are training.

The next question you need to ask yourself when identifying how well you taught your objectives is, "Did I spend the appropriate amount of time teaching my objectives?" Obviously you want to say yes to this every time. However, how many of us have had something come up in class (i.e., interference, distraction, unrelated discussions etc.), which caused us to either miss an objective or "rush" through it so fast that there is no way we can honestly say to ourselves that we taught the objective material effectively.

Notice that this part of the evaluation is specifically focused on you as an instructor. If you taught your class effectively, you should be able to say without hesitation that you covered all your objectives and that you did so in a manner that aided student retention. On the other hand, if you can't, you need to look at ways to cover the material more effectively in the future. This may mean changing instructional methodologies or limiting discussions. In summation, you didn't teach it, you haven't done your job.

Did the students learn what they needed to learn?

Now let's take the focus off you and focus instead on your students. You are probably asking yourself, "How can I know whether the students have learned the material? After all I am not a mind reader." Even though you can't know for certain whether your students have "learned" the material until you do a level II assessment (test), there are some things that you can pay attention to that will help you when answering this question.

One way you can gauge learning is through the observations you make during your class. Were the students' discussion points on target with where you wanted them to be or were they focused on irrelevant topic material? Did they complete the scenarios and exercises in a manner that showed they were able to comprehend the basic learning points or were they confused about what they were supposed to do? Did they ask appropriate questions to clarify learning points or were their questions irrelevant to the discussions.

Effective training classes should have a built in assessment of student understanding or "review." Reviews have unfairly become a bad word in the world of training and education. Mainly because of unethical instructors who choose to use a review to give students test questions and answers. However, reviews do not have to be unethical. True reviews should focus on the students' understanding of the objectives taught during the class. Therefore, you should review the objectives with the students periodically and at the end of every class. If you have done your job effectively, a review should run smoothly in that the students should be able to quickly and competently answer the review questions from their working memory without assistance from you or classroom training aids.

However, if you choose not to have a review, you won't be able to accurately assess your students learning. You are then forced to wait until the test to assess students learning. The question then becomes did the learning occur during your class or were the students forced to learn the material on their own.

Sometimes you will find out that you have done a spectacular job of covering the topic material in a way that is understandable for all. There are times, however, when you begin to question how much the students truly understood. When this happens, you need to look at both the students learning styles as well as the methodologies you used to teach the objectives. It may be that your students didn't learn best by the methods you chose. If this is the case, you should ask yourself: "What do I need to change to help my students learn the material in the future?"

Were the students engaged and/or did they enjoy the learning experience?

The focus of this question is again on your students and their perception of the training experience. Trainings don't always have to have games, prizes, and candy to be successful. Let's face it, not every topic that you will cover is "fun." However, adults will find the training enjoyable if it is relevant to their needs and involves them in the learning process. During this phase of the assessment you again need to utilize your observation skills to look at both verbal as well as non verbal behaviors.

In terms of verbal communication you need to ask yourself, were the students on task and involved during discussions and exercises. Were they laughing at appropriate times? Did they ask questions showing they were interested in the subject matter? Finally, did they tell you they enjoyed your class? Non-verbally, did their body behaviors show they were engaged? Did students smile at appropriate times? Were their bodies in an open posture with arms open and leaning slightly forward? Did you have good eye contact with students? If the answer to these questions is yes, you did well.

On the other hand, how many of us have seen this during the learning experience? Lack of involvement from students when asked for input; looking away; closed body behaviors with arms crossed and leaning over the desk or leaning back in the chair; occupying behaviors such as doodling, talking about non related subjects, reading something and/or getting up and leaving the room. Sometimes this is just a student's individual behavior style. They may be mad at outside circumstances, tired or being forced to be in the class for disciplinary purposes. For these reasons you can't expect a 100% approval rate. However, you can look at the behaviors of the class as a whole and come to a realistic conclusion.

It is funny how most instructors when they have to become a student for a class want to enjoy the training experience. However, when it comes time for them to teach, they utilize dry controlling methodologies that are designed to just get the class over with. If, during your assessment, you find out that the students were disconnected, bored and/or disinterested, you need to take a hard look in the mirror. Students as a whole don't come into training with an attitude of "I really want to hate this class and/or this instructor." Instead they come in with preconceived ideas that can be either fostered or changed. It is your job to change your instructional methodologies to facilitate student learning as well as gain student enjoyment.

Did I enjoy the instructional experience?

This is one of the most important questions you can ask yourself, because the answer

to this question can create significant changes in the way you train in the future. Most trainers can relate to a class where, as we left, we were thoroughly pleased with how well the class went. On the other hand, we can also relate to the experience of leaving a class thoroughly disgusted with what just transpired. Why does this occur? The answers are complicated. Sometimes, it has to do with our own negative emotions and behaviors as we enter the classroom. Other times, it is the students' negative emotions and behaviors that create the environment. However, more often than not it has to do with the learning environment itself.

When assessing this question you need to know what motivates you as an instructor. A lot of instructors say it is when their students learn new concepts that will help them after they leave the classroom. Others say that it is when they covered the material effectively. However, there is common variable that seems to have the biggest impact on how much an instructor enjoys the class. This is the students themselves. Think about it. Does student interaction and enjoyment affect how well you liked teaching the class? Most instructors say "absolutely it does." As the students become more engaged in the learning process, the instructor becomes more engaged. This cycle then perpetuates itself until the end of the training.

Only you can answer whether you enjoyed the instructional experience.

However, if you didn't, why not try something different. Ask yourself, "Did I dislike the experience because of the students' attitudes." If you answer "Yes" to this question, be honest with yourself and ask "What did I do or not do in my instructional methods that created or contributed to this attitude." Then make appropriate changes to create a more enjoyable environment for both you and your students in the future.

Objective Analysis

In conclusion, self evaluation is a very effective way to create necessary future behavioral changes. In order to truly assess yourself, you should not just rely on how you feel after leaving a course. Instead you should objectively answer these four specific questions. With the information that you provide to yourself from these questions, you will be in a much better position to make any needed changes and thus either improve your ability for the future or keep on doing an excellent job. Remember, how well you do as a law enforcement trainer affects everybody.