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LAW ENFORCEMENT K-9 UNITS:

A Valuable Asset to Today's Law Enforcement Agencies

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As a boy growing up in rural Arkansas, I was introduced to hunting by my dad at a fairly young age. I remember the thrill of the hunt, which included hearing the dog bay a squirrel in a tree. What was amazing to me was the accuracy of the dog, always stopping at the right tree to bark and alert us to where the animal was in hiding. There were many smells in the woods, and for the dog to be able to track the certain type of animal it was trained to detect was nothing short of a miracle to me. I did not understand it then, but little did I know, the career path I would choose later in life would eventually help me understand how this happens.

I became a state trooper and spent 16 years in highway interdiction as a canine handler. I had the privilege of handling three different breeds of canines, all of which were very successful in their narcotic detection efforts.

I eventually moved on to supervision and am beginning my 23rd year with the Arkansas State Police. The K-9 years were probably the most trying and rewarding years



of my career. I met some wonderful people, got some excellent training from a flamboyant "Cajun" in south Louisiana, and even travelled to California to instruct a class on interdiction. I was also subjected to some "heavy" cross examinations in court, since K-9s were something relatively new to the courts in south Arkansas at the time. I learned quickly how to document what the dog was doing, both in my reports and training records. It also helped to have a great prosecuting attorney in my corner.

Now, as supervisors and managers, it is our job to support our K-9 teams. Are there going to be mistakes made? You bet there will be. After all, neither a dog nor a

human is an infallible piece of equipment. That is why it is important as supervisors and managers to equip ourselves with as much knowledge as possible about these teams.

The Basics

Let's start with the dog's nose. There are some unique attributes that set a dog's nose apart from a human's nose:

- **A dog's sense of smell is at least 100 times better.**
- **A large percentage of the dog's brain is directly connected to its olfactory cells (smell).**
- **The dog has scent discrimination; we don't.**
- **Scent discrimination allows the dog to smell past the stronger odor and analyze the odors it was trained to detect.**

We also need to be very careful about who we select as K-9 officers. It is a very demanding duty as the officer now has a partner for which he is responsible. This entails large amounts of off-duty time dedicated to the dog. Only efficient, self-motivated individuals should be considered, since the dog will require a lot of maintenance training for the team to stay proficient.

I have seen a lot of handlers come and go. This mainly occurs because the handler didn't know what they were getting into in the first place. As managers, we should know who our potential candidates are and be able to intelligently discuss and lay out what is required of a K-9 handler of a high quality. A few things are listed below:

- **They must be a self-motivated officer.**
- **They must be in good physical condition.**
- **They should know, or be willing to learn, the laws that apply to K-9s.**
- **They should be available anytime the agency needs the unit's services.**

- **They should attend and pass a quality K-9 handler school.**
- **They must be able to constantly train and document the training scenarios.**
- **They should also take the bad with the good—whether it be tracking a suspect on a cold night or doing a narcotic demonstration at a local school.**

If you have a team in place already, make it a point to attend some training scenarios and ask the handler some questions. Find out if there are distraction odors such as food being incorporated into the scenarios. Remember that a dog is not a machine. It's acceptable for the dog to show interest in other odors, but not to alert on these odors. Training is where these and other issues should be addressed.

Training

The amount of quality training is relative to the ultimate success and performance of the K-9 team on the street. As managers, we must allow the teams to have training time on at least a bi-weekly basis (more time if possible).

Managers should also learn and understand what is taking place before the dog actually alerts on an object or automobile. Many times, due to the dog's extremely sensitive sense of smell, it will alert (scratch on an object) and then the handler fails to physically locate the narcotics. Then you get a complaint! As supervisors and managers, we must understand and be able to relay to the public that just because nothing was found, it does not mean that the dog did not smell narcotic odor.

This happens quite often when it involves the K-9 sweep of a vehicle in which someone had previously smoked marijuana. It can also occur with some frequency in rental vehicles. The previous renter could have been a drug smuggler that hauled a large amount of narcotics in the vehicle. The next renter would have no way of knowing this, and when the dog alerts on the vehicle, the dog

References:

Thomas, J L. (2010). *The K-9 Nose*. School of Law Enforcement Supervision, Retrieved from www.cji.edu/slesdesc.html

is alerting to narcotic odor, not the amount that either is, or is not present.

We must also understand the tracking aspect of the dog for those agencies that use “dual purpose” K-9 teams. When a dog tracks, it is more than likely going to begin scenting the strongest or the most recent human odor at the scene. Therefore, it is important that the scene remain as uncontaminated as possible of other human scent. This should be the job of the initial on-scene officer. This officer should also be available to the K-9 handler to brief the handler on where the suspect was last seen, and if the officer gave chase, where the officer ceased chasing, so that the K-9 can be placed on the right odor. There are many variables in play that can dictate whether a track is successful or not.

To gain a better understanding of how a properly trained canine team can be a tremendous asset to a police agency, visit the CJI website at www.cji.edu/slesdesc.html and read Sgt. Jeff Thomas’s research paper titled “The K-9 Nose.” His research covers the following:

1. The Sense of Smell
2. Anatomy and Physiology of the Nose
(Human vs. Canine)
3. The Human Body as a Scent Source
4. Selecting a Canine for Detection Work
5. Evaluating a Canine for Narcotics Detection Potential
6. Basic Detection Training

Check Out the CJI Library for More Resources on K-9 Units

Video

K9 Patrol: Unleashed

Books/Articles

K-9 Management Program, Author: Bob Wright

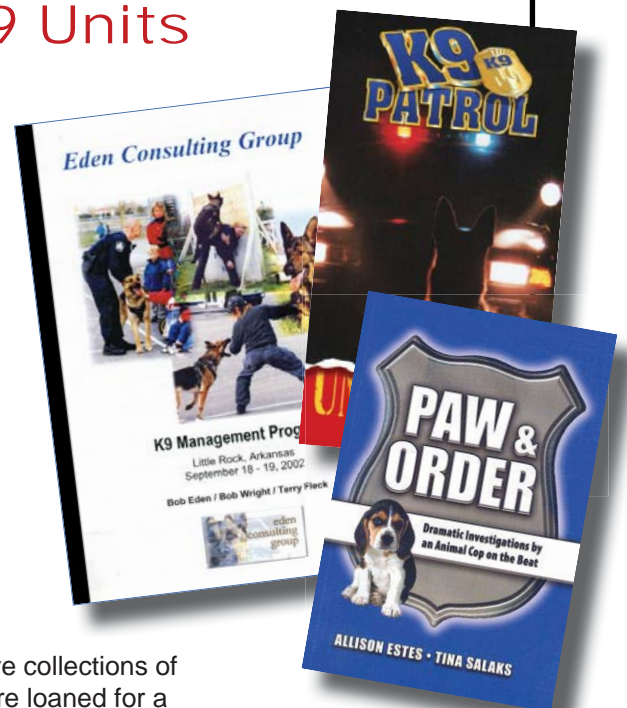
Paw & Order: Dramatic Investigations by an Animal Cop on the Beat,
Authors: Allison Estes and Tina Salaks

The Niagara Shield Drill: A S.W.A.T. / K-9 Tiered Response of ‘Less-than-Lethal Options’, Author: Matthew John Richardson.

SLES Session XII [Book]. *Thinking About Starting a K9 Program? Things to Know Before Starting your K9 Program*,
Author: Ronnie D. Blount

CJI’s Library Services features one of the most comprehensive collections of law enforcement resources in the State. Books and videos are loaned for a two-week period and can be requested and renewed by phone or email.

**For more information, contact Allison Hoffman at
(501) 570-8061 or amhoffman@cji.edu.**





CJI is Now Accepting Applications for **ARKANSAS LEADER**

Session XIX of ARKANSAS LEADER—a one-week program available *exclusively* for Sheriffs, Chiefs of Police, and other agency heads within the criminal justice system—will be held **June 13–18, 2010**, at the Criminal Justice Institute in Little Rock.

ARKANSAS LEADER has been designated a command college of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The program, which is held only once per year, emphasizes leadership, education, advancement of the law enforcement profession, development of the individual and agency, and research on criminal justice issues.

Heads of Arkansas law enforcement agencies who wish to attend should direct correspondence to Jim Clark, Director of the Criminal Justice Institute. (Mailing address: 7723 Colonel Glenn Road, Little Rock, Arkansas 72204/E-mail: JTClark@cji.edu)

Due to the demand for this course of instruction, agency heads are required to submit their correspondence prior to April 1, 2010.

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